

CONTENTS

COMPELLING CULTURES: REPRESENTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COHESION IN MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

1	Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi	Preface — Culture/cohesion/compulsion: Museological artifice and its dilemmas
9	Anna Edmundson, Kylie Message and Ursula Frederick	Introduction — Compelling cultures: Representing cultural diversity and cohesion in multicultural Australia
17	Ien Ang	Provocation — Beyond multiculturalism: A journey to nowhere?
23	Kylie Message	Culture, citizenship and Australian multiculturalism: The contest over identity formation at the National Museum of Australia
49	Andrea Witcomb	Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity: Can museums move beyond pluralism?
67	Mary Hutchison	Dimensions for a folding exhibition: Exhibiting diversity in theory and practice in the <i>Migration Memories</i> exhibitions
93	Anna Edmundson	But where are you really from?: The 'crisis' of multiculturalism examined through the work of four Asian-Australian artists
115	Howard Morphy	Acting in a community: Art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia
133	Susan Lowish	Writing/righting a history of Australian Aboriginal art
153	Ursula Frederick and Sue O'Connor	Wandjina, graffiti and heritage: The power and politics of enduring imagery

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interpreting the past and the ways in which relations between museums and communities are constructed.

Preface

Culture/cohesion/compulsion: Museological artifice and its dilemmas

Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi

The building of the nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values...It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows.

— Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 1961

Currently, two contending models for understanding culture and cultural property are being played out in academic writing, and these models are utilised widely to organise museum displays, to debate social issues in the media and even to establish government policies. One model is dependent on neo-liberal notions of diversity, hybridity and migratory and transitory identity; and the other, which might be termed a 'nativist' model, emphasises social cohesion and the permanence and persistence of individual and group identity. Judging from the repetitious nature of the debates, these two models of multiculturalism present mutually exclusive alternatives. Few people are aware of the oscillations between them: being wedded to one renders the other invisible. What is unclear, in being wedded to one to the exclusion of the other, is that the positions are co-constructed and mutually defining, each existing primarily in relation to its other—a romance of unknown siblings.

To take a case in point, well known beyond Australasia, a leading cultural anthropologist, Nicholas Thomas, endorses a nativist position, precisely for its political effectiveness in promoting cultural pride and civil rights. Arguing that the same anthropological theories are heard differently when they are used by First World or by Third and Fourth World peoples, Thomas describes the success of two travelling exhibitions of Maori culture. The exhibitions' 'radical aesthetic decontextualization' excludes European influences of all kinds, yet the theoretical interest of this self-presentation lies precisely in its reproduction of anthropological systematisations.¹ Thomas is sympathetic to the transformation of such discourses to suit native positions; nativist consciousness, he argues, cannot be deemed undesirable merely because it is ahistorical and uncritically reproduces colonialist stereotypes. Colonialist stereotypes and essential differences have different *meanings* at different times and for different audiences. By promoting the legitimacy of Aboriginal culture at a time when it was not widely respected by the dominant population, the exhibition *Te Maori* involved

‘mobilisation’: it capitalised on white society’s idea of the primitive—that is, primitivism—and created for the Maori a degree of prestige and power that did not exist before the 1980s.²

In other words, in nativist discourse, essentialism plays a progressive role in forming a self-determined (or at least self-named) national identity that can be appreciated only in the *performative* realm. *Meaning* is always, necessarily, determined by context. In New Zealand today, more than two decades after the *Te Maori* exhibition, the Federal Government has adopted a bicultural model of national identity that recognises a certain synthetic Maori identity alongside that of settlers. This federal fabrication of the nation-state’s indigenous heritage is presented to Maori as their own construction—but the representation is problematic. Meaning is indeed always determined by context—and strategic essentialism in the hands of the government becomes a disciplining instrument. To brand Maori presence today as unified and homogenous continues to impose settler perspectives of otherness that originated in the colonial era—European settler perspectives that erase, collapse or override palpable distinctions among native social and cultural communities. At stake for Maori, as for Australian Aboriginal groups, has been the maintenance of land and property rights (and maintenance and transmissibility of esoteric knowledge) in ways that might be effectively ‘heard’ by settler governmental powers. In New Zealand, at stake for the official governmental construction of a ‘bicultural model’ of national identity based on coherence and unity, longevity and persistence is control of Maori peoples in their own name.

Similar conditions have persisted elsewhere—for example, in the cooption of indigenous forms of self-representation in Central and South America during the Spanish vice-regal era. The *castas* paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries exemplify the way that colonists at the upper end of the social echelon reconfigured real cultural and ethnic diversities by picturing the daily lives of people of lower social status who differed from one another (and from their European and elite creole viewers) in terms of their shades of skin colour, costumes and domestic settings. The continuing thread from vice-regal Spain to contemporary New Zealand is the discounting of indigenous forms of self-representation in favour of a mega-category of ‘otherness’ within which differences are classified according to European taxonomies and epistemological underpinnings.³

The problems entailed in the bicultural paradigm at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa is perhaps most clearly apparent in its treatment of non-Maori ‘others’—Scottish settlers wearing kilts, Italian settlers eating pasta, and so on—wherein national cultural stereotypes mirror the representation of Maori identity as a homogeneous culture with recognisable traits and traditions. Meanwhile, in the same museum, short shrift is given to mixed ethnic identities:

a small display is devoted to Pacific Islanders who have intermarried either before or after arriving in New Zealand. Asian immigrants—settlers of recent origin—are not represented at all, and issues of cultural hybridity are skirted. Clearly, this is biculturalism based on the nativist model that originated as the critical inversion of a Eurocentric understanding of cultural identity.

The lack of hybrid models of multiculturalism that typifies museums and popular culture in Australasia prevails against the historical backdrop of colonialist miscegenation policies, according to which the ‘native blood’ of ‘savages’ could be bred out of the population through intermarriage. Even without such a colonial policy, the idea of genetic survival translates differently in countries where Indigenous people have not been alienated from their lands and where people are trying to hold onto their cultural heritage—often by revitalising traditions effaced by colonial policies of assimilation in ways that fit the contemporary world. When the state-funded Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa features a documentary film about a red-haired, blue-eyed individual of Maori descent getting in touch with her Maori roots, however, much more is involved than acknowledgment of Indigenous ancestry and self-determination in contemporary society. There is also explicit erasure of an individual’s multicultural heritage. The same erasures exist elsewhere: in Australia, in the United States, in many formerly colonised parts of the world. Wherever Indigenous peoples are trying to advance their rights, the complexities of cultural heritage tend to be reduced to struggles between the nation-state and Indigenous groups seeking sovereignty.⁴

Neither the nativist model of ‘strategic essentialism’ nor the neo-liberal model of cultural hybridity works, however, to create what Homi Bhabha calls an ‘interstitial space’ that actively accommodates nativist resistance without romanticising or otherwise appropriating it. It is time to make visible the broader conceptual framework in which the debates about cultural identities and cultural properties are conducted. A compromise is not likely between what are broadly perceived as mutually exclusive models, as the Te Papa Tongarewa example suggests. Is there a way beyond the current impasse in cultural theory or are we doomed to keep orbiting around European ideas of art, culture and ethnicity forever?⁵ A great deal has been written recently about the shortcomings of creating Indigenous works of fine art in the Western arena, especially in Australia where contemporary Indigenous arts are framed within the Western perspective of high art without granting agency to Indigenous forms of cultural production in any other sense.⁶ It is not possible to move beyond such oppositional claims made in current debates about cultural property without considering the politics of knowledge production in mainstream scholarship. The categories and concepts used in arguments about ownership of intellectual property, including perceptions of the past, are inadequate to the task of revising ethnocentric

accounts of history if they conceive of cultural artefacts within a Western, patriarchal conceptual framework.

The two contending models of culture hold up poorly under close critical examination of the data, raising what we see as an underlying problem—indeed, the dilemma—of representational ‘adequacy’ itself, especially evident in museum displays of cultural artefacts. The underlying problem with which this volume’s essays implicitly and explicitly contend is the presumption that museums are representational artefacts to be critiqued on the basis of their presumed adequacies and inadequacies. Our aim here is to shift these discursive modalities to more fundamental epistemological and ethical levels.

So we would like to consider the fundamental problem of the artifice of museums and museology: the aims, functions, dilemmas and conundrums that have been an essential part of the institution’s nature. We use the term ‘artifice’ as referring, simultaneously, to two contradictory notions: 1) as fabrication or production in the most general sense; and 2) as falseness or deception. Objects or artefacts in museums—as well as museums themselves as artefacts or examples of artifice and artistry—are by nature inherently and essentially ambivalent for this reason. The implication here is that, as with social institutions more generally, museums function above all to manage ambivalence by masking it as cultural determinism. Or rather—and herein lies the paradox—as examples themselves of artifice, museums function so as to appear as if they are managing ambivalence, by disciplining visitors to see and understand in particular ways.

Museums commonly envision or stage a past from which we might wish to be descended (that is, that elicits a desire for descent), so as to understand our present as the product and effect of its supposed (and ‘re-presented’) past. In so doing, they include futures imagined as bringing to fulfilment the past we are envisioning. In other words, a past from which we might wish to be descended existing from the perspective of a future toward which we might wish to be headed—a future imagined as bringing to fulfilment the past we are envisioning as having in fact produced our present. The incorporation of projected futures is on occasion quite explicit, as in the Museum of the City of Shanghai, where, juxtaposed with a gigantic, finely detailed wooden model of present-day Shanghai, on the top floor of a six-storey building whose lower floors contain an extensive photo archive and documents of the older city, is an Imax Theatre with an imaginary fly-through of the city to come: the Shanghai of Tomorrow. The past, in this case quite explicitly, operates as future anterior of what the city shall have been for what it is in the process of becoming.

For a very long time, it has been a largely unquestioned assumption in cultural studies that museums are by nature representational artefacts; that in their forms and in the arrangement of their contents they mirror at a smaller or fragmentary scale the societies within which they are located, faithfully replicating or

reconstructing social or cultural histories that at the same time—and this is crucial—are presumed to actually pre-exist their ‘re-presentation’. This idea—that a museum, a collection or an archive is (or should be) an epitome or synecdoche of a fuller and pre-existing state of things (a microcosm of a pre-existing macrocosm)—has nevertheless long been deeply problematic, and is challenged not only by recent developments in art, technology and science, but equally by the spread of museums to societies and cultures outside the European world, where local and Indigenous ideas about the nature and functions of objects or artefacts, as well as ideas about production or fabrication and artistry itself, are often very different to those assumed as natural or universal within the dominant Western traditions in philosophy, science, art and religion.

It is commonly assumed that museums stage or contain artefacts whose significance appears to lie elsewhere: in absent times or places, in the hidden or lost ‘intentions’ of their producers or in a past that is the projective summation of its fragments and relics preserved here and now in museum space. Claims for the repatriation of cultural property are commonly grounded in such presumptions, projecting an originaire ‘fullness’ of what currently remains only in pieces: relics that we are called on to restore, preserve, perpetuate and disseminate. It is made to seem that justice demands this. We assume that the chief function of historical or cultural museums has been to make literally and materially present the effects of causes that lie elsewhere. What is at stake is an ontological distinction separating formation and signification, ‘form’ and ‘content’, signification and its ‘ex-expression’ or ‘re-presentation’.

This is built into the semiotic structure of our languages and forms of social behaviour and discourse: we instinctively speak of the impact of certain events as having implications for the next stage of an individual or collective journey or struggle towards some form of enlightenment or social justice. It’s difficult to extricate ourselves from conflating or confusing teleology and effect. We are trained to make the visible legible, to read the ‘spirit’, ‘soul’ or physiognomy of things and events. Time is presumed (and not only by Hegel or pre-Columbian art historians such as George Kubler) to have a real ‘shape’ and things are believed to ‘have’ or ‘contain’ meanings that might be made explicit or revealed by careful reading and analysis.⁷ As archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians or museum personnel, we spend years or even lifetimes disciplining ourselves in the practice of a certain divination, a kind of augury in interpreting events as bearing traces not only of their past but of some likely future. Art-historical chronology is mis-perceived as a secular teleology.

Museums in early modern times and today are part of a network of institutions designed explicitly to illuminate, illustrate and promote supposedly important ‘truths’ about individuals, peoples, nations, genders, classes, races, species, times and places, as well as about historical events and objects, natural or artificial—in

short, about precisely those things that they are complicit in fabricating, factualising or naturalising in the first place. These include the modernist constructions of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, periodicity, and so on. That is, constructions staged as separate from their expressions, as local 'manifestations' of a 'pan-human' artistry. These phantasms have for more than two centuries been key instruments of power and control in the massive enterprises of nationalism and imperial and global capitalisation.

Museology, art history, art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, archaeology, connoisseurship, curatorship, preservation, conservation, commodification and art making are genres in the theatres of nationalism and globalisation. Common to them is the enterprise of the modern corporate state in managing ambiguity, in defining and prescribing disciplined and predictable linkages between citizen-subjects and their object-worlds. This causal linkage of psychology and physiognomy is essentially connected to the necessity of delineating and articulating the individual citizen-consumer as the locus on and upon which, and for whom, meaning and purpose are constructed and inscribed. The citizen-consumer is thus both the product of and, through his or her use of the museum, productive of this experiential world—the core modernist fiction being that each person embodies a *genius loci*, a spirit of the place delineated by its own being.

It seems cogent to ask here 'What exactly lies beneath the ideologies of the museum, which became prominent in modern times?' Clearly, we are constrained by this very notion of seeing knowledge production in terms of spatial imagery. So, instead of imagining a 'place' free of the metaphors structurally built into language, it might be more useful to reconsider the assumption or belief that 'content' or meaning could exist independently and/or before its formal or material expression or 're-presentation'.

The idea of a museum as an instrument for envisioning a past and/or its conceivable alternatives invariably raises the fundamental conundrum of representation. Considered as a historical artefact and as an epistemological technology, the museum today is a social phenomenon reminiscent of a classic optical illusion, perpetually oscillating between one or another protocol of relating together objects and the subjects that seem to haunt them, subjects and the objects that appear to represent them: a double and doubly compounded fiction. Artefacts or artworks that themselves for more than two centuries have had a similarly anamorphic character, alternating between the two sides of the coin of modern fetishism: the aesthetic artefact ('art') and the commodity.

The objects of our museological attention—works of art or artefacts of material culture—also oscillate between being read as historical documents and as magically timeless aesthetic entities or specimens of fine art; between specimens in a class of like objects whose significance is a function of their place in time

and space and unique, mysterious and irreducible aesthetic entities. What sustains and perpetuates this system of anamorphoses is the global marketplace in commodities and its allomorph, identity politics. Studies of museology, art history or visual or material culture do not operate effectively in isolation from each other, since all of these are fundamentally invested in the maintenance of this phantasmic dualism.

The dilemma of artifice is that it is by nature multivalent, capable of signifying in multiple ways. To fail to see the connection between museology as we currently have it and the truly deadly identity politics exemplified in the bicultural stagecraft and dramaturgy of Te Papa Tongarewa and elsewhere is also consistent with believing in the modernist mythology of commodification wherein you 'are' essentially connected to your possessions or property, and that, in addition (but also as a consequence), the drive to acquire more and better stuff is fantasised and marketed as moving you closer and closer to your ideal 'real' self—the horizon that of course we never succeed in actually occupying. So, to end with a question: to what extent are the museological phantasms of Te Papa Tongarewa different in kind or in degree from modern museological praxis in general? The dilemma of the museum is more than merely technological, epistemological or a matter of degree. It is at its core an ethical problem of what we want museums (and ourselves) to be, how we wish to govern ourselves and others and how and in what manner we wish to exercise and submit to power. Our most general provocation, then, is to insist that these questions need to be addressed together rather than in abstract (and thus in politically expedient) isolation from each other, for ultimately they are the same question.

The central question is how to loosen the Gordian knot of identification ideologies and illusions of egalitarian status and of commensurability. Above all, we have pointed to the contradictions inherent in both multiculturalist models currently in use because, on the one hand, equalising the content of cultures perceived to be homogenous, independent historical trajectories cannot solve the underlying problem of a racial/ist theory of collective identity. And the hybrid model is not compelling to those who identify with their traditional cultural memories and places. The diaspora model of cultural identity is emphatically rejected by First World peoples whose collective identities are tied to ancestral territories, cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems and ethnic identities. The ethical question can be addressed only by taking into account the position of those (subjects) who receive/perceive their effects: the relationship between the museum and those it addresses always involves relations of power. Museums have traditionally been hierarchically structured; traditionally, the purpose of public museums has been to create citizens for the modern nation-state, perceived as being culturally unified. Currently, the 'new museum' wants to empower communities to represent themselves. How, then, are institutionalised structures of governing/being governed reconfigured? Once communities are recognised

as legitimate partners in the museum—however they define themselves—they seek control over their own cultural productions.⁸ Imagine a model of identity that recognises that individuals and groups can have several identities simultaneously. Such a model of identity as multiple, diverse and incommensurable questions the lingering essentialist assumptions in current museum display practices, social issues debated in the media and existing governmental policies, that each individual or collective identity has to be singular.

ENDNOTES

¹ Thomas, Nicholas 1994, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, travel and government*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 184.

² On the relationship of the civil rights movement with museum display, see Simpson, Moira 1996, 'Cultural reflections', *Making Representations: Museums in the postcolonial era*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 7–13; and Simpson, Moira 2006, 'Revealing and concealing: museums, objects, and the transmission of knowledge in Aboriginal Australia', in Janet Marstine (ed.), *New Museum Theory and Practice*, Blackwell, London, pp. 152–77. On the history of the Maori cultural renaissance and Maori civil rights, see Maaka, Roger and Fleras, Augie 2005, *The Politics of Indigeneity: Challenging the state in Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, New Zealand.

³ These originated in classicising cultural geographies often printed with illustrations since the sixteenth century. See Hodgen, Margaret T. 1964, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia; and, most recently, Leitch, Stephanie 2009, 'Burgkmair's *Peoples of Africa and India* (1508) and the origins of ethnography in print', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 91, no. 2 (June), pp. 134–59. Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva, Duke of Linares, commissioned the earliest sets of paintings representing different racial mixtures in the Spanish colony to send to the Spanish king and his court, who were already familiar with the European version of the cultural geography genre. See Ilona Katzew Casta (2004, *Painting: Images of race in eighteenth-century Mexico*, Yale University Press, London and New Haven), who suggests that Linares conceived the idea specifically from a cultural geography by Athanasius Kircher (*China Monumentis*, 1667), which had been bequeathed by Siguenza Gongora to the library of the Jesuit College of San Pedro y san Pablo in Mexico City, to which the viceroy had access.

⁴ In New Zealand, the bicultural model is criticised as an institutional accommodation of diversity that does not adequately address the possibility of Maori models of self-determining autonomy. Bi-nationalism, in contrast, entails constitutional changes and genuine power sharing. For an excellent history of the issues, see Maaka and Fleras, 'Sovereignty lost, Tino Rangatiratanga reclaimed, self-determination secured, partnership forged', in *The Politics of Indigeneity*, pp. 97–155, which also includes the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples' definition of Indigeneity (p. 29 ff), which is paraphrased above.

⁵ As asked by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London).

⁶ Morphy, Howard 2008, *Becoming Art: Exploring cross-cultural categories*, University of NSW Press, Sydney.

⁷ As famously posited by George Kubler (1962, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the history of things*, Yale University Press, New Haven). While sequences of objects might hold up locally when certain conditions are met, to establish such threads as the universal principle explaining artistic development is unwarranted, though Kubler's thesis remains very popular within certain circles of the discipline of art history.

⁸ While the administrative structure of Te Papa Tongarewa includes Maori administrators and advisors, as the museum's curator of art, Jonathan Mane Wheoke (who is Maori himself), told us, the structure is cumbersome: the separate departments of the museum operate like individual 'silos' (Personal communication, 30 September 2008). The innovative installation of the art collection is undermined by a lack of funding for the display, in stark contrast with the \$6 million interactive digital exhibition of New Zealand, complete with Google map, touch-screen ephemeral displays and amusement park rides. This museum prides itself on its shopping mall/infotainment mode of educating viewers.

Introduction

Compelling cultures: Representing cultural diversity and cohesion in multicultural Australia

Anna Edmundson, Kylie Message and Ursula Frederick

Figure 2.1 Rejecting sanitised culture



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick and Katie Hayne

In a 2001 address to the NSW History Council, cultural historian Ien Ang called for a new national narrative for twenty-first century Australia, one that encompassed and enabled 'citizens from of all walks of life—not just the so-called "mainstream"'—to have a greater sense of ownership of and belonging within the nation. She posed a series of important questions to the forum:

How can we recognise diversity as integral and intrinsic to the nation's history, and not just as a decorative afterthought? How can we develop a more diverse, shared, as well as open and living sense of heritage, something that all groups and communities contribute to, including those whose stories and voices are generally marginalised from the canonical national history?¹

Although the questions raised by Ang are as vital today as they were at the start of the century, they have, for the most part, gone unanswered. Indeed, the first decade of the twenty-first century has been marked increasingly by debate and anxiety over the ways that migration, multiculturalism and citizenship have been characterised in Australia and globally. This issue of *Humanities Research* recognises these concerns as being more pressing than ever, and engages with recent debates in Australian public culture on how best to represent and mediate cultural diversity in a multicultural society. As editors of the volume, we sought contributions from authors who would provide insight into the ways in which concepts of social unity and cultural diversity are constructed, manipulated and disseminated in Australian public culture, and we challenged them to critically engage with the interplays between government policy and the arts and heritage sectors. We invited art historians Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi to provide a preface to frame the volume's concerns within a wider international context. And, in recognition that her comments provided the initial impetus for the development of this issue, we asked Ang for an opening commentary—a 'provocation'—on the state of affairs at the tail end of this first decade of the twenty-first century.

All of the articles in this volume demonstrate the complexity and unique historicity of Australian cultural diversity. Also of particular significance is the apparent worldwide retreat from 'multiculturalism' as the government policy of choice for managing cultural diversity in complex Western democracies. As such, articles in the first half of *Compelling Cultures* take current government policy and practice as a framework to examine significant changes that cultural diversity doctrines have undergone in the early twenty-first century, and consider some of the ways in which public heritage institutions such as museums have responded to changing government ideas and initiatives. These articles provide a scholarly appraisal of the current value and limitations of 'multiculturalism' within the domain of public culture and national heritage.

Any examination of multicultural Australia must also consider the unique political and cultural concerns of the Indigenous population, and articles in the second half of the volume examine diversity and cultural cohesion through the lens of Indigenous art. All of the articles substantiate Howard Morphy's premise that art is a way of acting in the world and serves as a significant arena for contact and mediation within Indigenous communities and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous agents. While ontological differences between Western and non-Western art traditions might at first appear irreconcilable, the articles in this volume demonstrate that even seemingly incompatible or contradictory differences can be mediated. Ultimately, all the articles argue that museums, the arts and other forms of public culture can enrich understandings of diversity and social cohesion as well as provide a riposte to the current lack of direction that is apparent in Australian multicultural policy.

We go to press with news of the passing of Jerzy (George) Zubrzycki, who was widely regarded as ‘the pioneer of multiculturalism in Australia’. James Jupp, Director of the Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies at The Australian National University, recalls that despite preferring the term ‘cultural pluralism’ to ‘multiculturalism’, Zubrzycki

gave definition and direction to the policies of the Fraser and Hawke governments and was critical of the revisionism of the Howard regime. Nevertheless he was appointed to Howard’s 1999 agenda committee, which retained the term ‘multiculturalism’ and reaffirmed existing policy towards diversity and integration.²

Zubrzycki’s research demonstrated the importance of culture and diversity to strong citizenship, and we acknowledge the significance of his contribution.

About the articles

The volume opens with a preface by Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi entitled ‘Culture/cohesion/compulsion: museological artifice and its dilemmas’. The authors examine the representation of cultural diversity within public culture and museums in terms of a continuing dialectic between two contending models. The first model is dependent on neo-liberal notions of diversity, hybridity and migratory and transitory identity, while the second, which they call a ‘nativist’ model, emphasises social cohesion and the permanence and persistence of individual and group identity. The ubiquity of this binary is reiterated in different guises in several articles within this volume. Farago and Preziosi’s preface offers a theoretical overview for *Compelling Cultures*, which is consistent with but also expands on some of the issues raised by other contributors to the volume. It speaks to international and regional debates that have had a significant impact on debates about museums and public culture in Australia and thus contributes new ways of thinking about the current dilemmas experienced by scholars and professionals working in a field that is, as Farago and Preziosi note, itself undergoing metamorphosis.

Following Farago and Preziosi, Ang’s provocation, ‘Beyond multiculturalism: a journey to nowhere?’, contends that the current lack of confidence in multiculturalism has implications for the range of experiences that are available to Australians in the public sphere. Incorporating her response to the most recently opened exhibition at the National Museum of Australia (NMA), Ang comments that exhibitions such as *Australian Journeys* attest to the centrality of ideas of cultural flow and cosmopolitanism that are gaining ground within mainstream Australian culture. Although she supports the general focus on transnationalism, Ang critiques *Australian Journeys* for failing to differentiate between the seeming permeability of border flows implied in transnational journeys and the very real border restrictions that accompany government

immigration policies. Although its curators do not regard *Australian Journeys* as a migration exhibition per se, migration appears as a central theme in its wider examination of the movement (journeys) of goods and people in and out of Australia since 1778.

The NMA figures as an important case study for articles in the first half of this volume, and each of the authors invokes various elements of the debates attracted by the NMA in relation to its representation of diversity leading up to and after the 2003 review.³ As Ang, Witcomb, Hutchison and Message all note, the NMA has developed and supported migration-focused exhibitions (such as *Horizons* and *Migration Memories*) that have contributed to the narrative of migration history in Australia. We recognise that while corporate and planning documents demonstrate the aims and even intended purpose of museums and exhibitions, they cannot speak for the internal processes, conflicts and negotiations occurring throughout the development process—all of which impact on the final form and experience offered by any exhibition. Unfortunately, however, NMA staff members were unable to contribute a case study of the development of the *Australian Journeys* Gallery to this volume. In lieu of this, we would direct readers to the *Collections and Gallery Development Plan 2004–2008* and the *Australian Journeys* and *Creating A Country* exhibition briefs, available on the museum's website.⁴

Ang's commentary is followed by a series of refereed articles, the first of which presents an overview of the social, political and cultural landscape in which multicultural policy and the NMA were conceptualised. The article by Kylie Message, 'Culture, citizenship and Australian multiculturalism: the contest over identity formation at the National Museum of Australia', begins by arguing that the respective institutions of citizenship and museums came into especially direct dialogue in 2001 when the NMA opened as a feature of the Centenary of Federation celebrations. Message situates the NMA within wider debates about the relationship between museums and citizenship that have centred on the re-evaluation of ideas of power and authority and the dissemination of these ideas into the public sphere. She frames the development of the NMA within wider changing ideas about citizenship and multiculturalism in Australia and argues that, in its final guise, the NMA aspired to be self-consciously postmodern, post-colonial and pluralist in its approach to representing Australian experience.

As Message and other contributors to *Compelling Cultures* comment, museums in the twenty-first century have increasingly positioned themselves as agents of social inclusion and cohesion, as well as venues for alternative histories, public debate and minority representation. At the same time, however, Australia's museums and galleries are highly dependent on government funding for their survival. In some cases, this may lead to a conflict of interest between an institution's fealty to government and its commitment to represent the concerns

of minority communities and foster honest public debate. The complexity of how museums operate is captured by former NMA Director Dawn Casey who, in 2006, stated: 'One cannot talk about [museum] content in isolation when there are also visitors, governments...and governing bodies to consider.'⁵ The museum, then, is a space produced at the intersection of political policy, government funding, public opinion and institutional and curatorial intent.

In 'Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity: can museums move beyond pluralism?', Andrea Witcomb further examines the complexity of the relationship between government hegemony (political discourse) and museum exhibition narratives (public discourse). Her analysis of the 2003 review of the NMA focuses on its critique of the Australian migration history exhibition, *Horizons*. She situates *Horizons* within a survey that presents a longer genealogy of Australian migration museums and exhibitions in order to highlight and contextualise an emerging association between migration and cultural diversity, whereby, since the introduction of multiculturalism in the 1970s, migration has come to be privileged as the primary means of representing cultural diversity in Australia. Witcomb argues that the recent conservative climate in Australia has led to an intense questioning of what constitutes Australian identity, a questioning in which models of community defined by notions of cultural diversity have had little political traction. She concludes her discussion by exploring alternative access models that might be developed and calls, in the final instance, for new models for exhibiting diversity, which challenge the discourse of pluralism to move beyond rhetoric.

Mary Hutchison's article, 'Dimensions for a folding exhibition: exhibiting diversity in theory and practice in the *Migration Memories* exhibitions', provides a valuable companion piece to Witcomb's article. Hutchison provides an exegesis for the *Migration Memories* research project, which explored alternative approaches to 'exhibiting migration'. The article explores representations of cultural diversity within the genre of Australian migration exhibitions and discusses the specific approach taken in the *Migration Memories* project, which consciously attempted to circumvent prior models of migration exhibitions that have tended to be characterised by either the 'celebration of diversity model' advocated by multicultural policy or the 'consensus model' of social cohesion policy, which, according to Hutchison, requires an individualisation of difference. Using the *Migration Memories* project as an example, Hutchison suggests reframing diversity as an interaction between different social-historical positions and experiences. This reconfiguration of the representation of diversity might be achieved through interventions in the practice of exhibition making that consist, on the one hand, of privileging the personal, historical and local as distinct but connected points of view, and aiming, on the other hand, to create an approach to exhibition development and interpretative devices that is based on agency, collaboration and imagination.

In her article, 'But where are you really from? The "crisis" of identity examined through the work of four Asian-Australian artists', Anna Edmundson provides a brief history of cultural diversity doctrines in Australia from monoculturalism to multiculturalism. Using the work of artists Liu Xiao Xian, Hou Leong, Owen Leong and Kate Benyon as key reference points, she examines some of the failings of current models of multiculturalism to secure a place for non-Anglo and non-Indigenous Australians within the national imaginary. She argues that the material reality of an increasingly culturally diverse population will need to be mediated by government in ways more sophisticated than a retreat from multiculturalism in favour of assimilation discourses or the nostalgic longing for a more culturally homogenous past.

Edmundson's argument reiterates those raised by Ang: that issues of representing cultural diversity within a wider national meta-narrative are increasingly complex as Australian society itself is becoming more complex. The Australian population is more culturally heterogeneous and more global in outlook than ever before, and these changes have brought more complexity to civic issues such as national identity, history and heritage. Adequately representing multicultural diversity while simultaneously producing a coherent meta-narrative to represent the Australian community writ large continues to be one of the great difficulties of nation-focused museum and gallery productions. At the same time, new museums globally have been marked by an increasing commitment to strengthening dialogues and improving relationships with Indigenous communities. This could mean representing Indigenous perspectives of Australian history that are oppositional to older, 'heroic' narratives of Australian settler society or incorporate different 'ways of seeing' history.

In his article, 'Acting in a community: art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia', Howard Morphy demonstrates the role played by art in the construction of community as a shared sense of identity and common purpose, and explores how art can enable people to create and maintain ties within a community to resolve important political and social issues and to act effectively in their engagement with the outside world. He focuses on two complementary examples of active art-producing communities and begins by outlining some of the ways that the Yolngu people of north-eastern Arnhem Land have used art to mediate the impact of European colonisation since the 1930s. He then turns to an examination of the role of the Sydney-based arts organisation Boomalli, established in 1987, in developing a networked community of Indigenous artists across south-eastern Australia. Morphy notes that while Yolngu appear as a community in the sense of being people who live together, Boomalli appears as a community in another sense of the word, as being a dispersed set of people who share interests in common. He concludes by arguing more generally that the arena of public culture—arts exhibitions and awards, cultural institutions and their audiences—provides a framework that enables local communities and

communities defined by shared interests to influence the national agenda and change the face of the nation. Art both enables the creation of local identities and contributes to the building of a cohesive nation by enabling people to communicate to different audiences, and thereby helps create a national discourse.

In her article, 'Writing/righting a history of Australian Aboriginal art', Susan Lowish approaches the subject of Aboriginal art not from the position of social cohesion, as does Morphy, but by highlighting a particular history of exclusion. The article questions the absence of an Aboriginal art history within the wider field of Australian art history and Lowish contends that the perceived 'difference' of Aboriginal art to 'Western art' has been a major stumbling block to the creation of an adequate history of Aboriginal art. The article examines art-historical and anthropological approaches and Lowish claims that while the debates between 'old' and 'new' art history and the lingering disciplinary distinctions between art history and anthropology might contribute to an understanding of the shortcomings and potentialities of 'Aboriginal art history', they do not constitute an adequate platform from which it is possible to delve into the past while maintaining a perspective firmly focused on the future potential of writing about Aboriginal art. This platform can be established only once agreements pertaining to collaboration and consultation have been reached between academics and artists—a move that will also require the renegotiation of normative academic boundaries and an increasing acceptance of interdisciplinary ways of conducting as well as writing research.

While many scholars continue to argue that there is no easy means of rapprochement between Indigenous and Western fields of art production, Aboriginal artists themselves have had little difficulty adopting ideas, styles and techniques to create new artworks. As Ursula Frederick and Sue O'Connor argue, the adoption of new media does not diminish the cultural efficacy of the image. Their article, 'Wandjina, graffiti and heritage: the power and politics of enduring imagery', documents a case study from Perth, Western Australia, in which a graffiti artist began to incorporate Wandjina images derived from Kimberley rock art into his/her contemporary and urban-based graffiti images. The case study demonstrates the complexities of cultural difference and how easily members from one cultural group can transgress the social rules of another without being aware of the implications of their actions. It also, however, puts paid to the idea that cultural differences are necessarily difficult or even impossible to reconcile. There is something to be learned from the fact that the graffiti artist at the centre of the debate responded promptly to Indigenous elders' requests for consultation, when a punitive state law did not stop the artist from doing graffiti in the first place. This 'grassroots' act of negotiation was conducted and concluded by community representatives without government intervention. It raises questions about whose power and authority is heard within communities and how respect can be earned through consultation and

negotiation rather than coercion. Moreover, as the contributors to this volume all suggest, the influence of community and cultural legitimacy is as valid as the implications of legislation and civic authority in the mediation of cultural diversity and cohesion.

ENDNOTES

¹ Ang, Ien 2001, Intertwining histories: heritage and diversity, NSW History Council Lecture, Government House, Sydney, 24 September 2001. Reproduced in full in *Australian Humanities Review*, issue 24, December 2001, viewed 1 May 2009, <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-December-2001/home.html>>

² James Jupp quoted in 'Professor Jerzy (George) Zubrzycki remembered', *ANU On Campus Magazine*, 3 June 2009. For more on Zubrzycki's role, see Message, this volume.

³ Carroll, John et al. 2003, *Review of the National Museum of Australia, Its Exhibitions and Public Programs: A report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. See also the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* (viewed 4 November 2008, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/nmoaa1980297/>).

⁴ See *Australian Journeys*, National Museum of Australia web site, viewed 22 May 2009, <http://www.nma.gov.au/shared/libraries/attachments/corporate_documents/gallery_development_brief/files/19717/NMA_Exhibition_Brief__Australian_Journeys_and_Creating_a_Country.pdf> and *Collections and Development Plan 2004–2008*, viewed 22 May 2009, <http://www.nma.gov.au/shared/libraries/attachments/corporate_documents/collections_gallery_development_2004/files/5116/NMA_Coll_Gallery_Dev_Plan_2004-2008.pdf>

⁵ Casey, Dawn 2006, 'Reflections of a national museum director', in Marilyn Lake (ed.), *Memory, Monuments and Museums*, Melbourne University Press in association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Carlton, Victoria, pp. 110–23, at p. 112.

Provocation

Beyond multiculturalism: A journey to nowhere?

Ian Ang

If there is such a thing as a 'crisis of multiculturalism' today, what does that crisis consist of? And how can it be resolved? Can there be a renewed 'multiculturalism' for the twenty-first century and, if so, what will this mean for museums?

Many have blamed the corrosion of Australia's proud multicultural credentials, which were especially strong in the 1980s and early 1990s, on former Prime Minister John Howard, who made the 'M' word virtually unspeakable when he came to power in 1996. Indeed, for Howard, multiculturalism was an unwelcome and objectionable assault on time-honoured notions of Australian national identity, which for him should have remained firmly rooted in traditional Anglo-Australian history and values. Australia might have become more culturally diverse as a result of many decades of mass immigration, but this should not, from Howard's perspective, detract from the overriding significance of a homogeneous Australian cultural nationalism as the guarantor of national unity and civic loyalty. Multiculturalism, in this regard, was a divisive ideology that encouraged migrants to maintain their cultural separateness rather than integrating into the Australian mainstream. Its emphasis on difference and diversity flew in the face of the desire for cohesive and unified nationhood.

The Howard Government's distaste for multiculturalism was clearly at work, as widely commented on (including in several essays in this issue), in the infamous row about the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 2001. The NMA quickly became embroiled in Howard's culture war and, in the aftermath of the 2003 review of the museum's exhibitions and public programs, one of the significant casualties was *Horizons*, the permanent exhibition dedicated to the history of immigration and multiculturalism in Australia. Narrating 'the peopling of Australia since 1788', *Horizons* told the story through a kaleidoscopic range of objects such as a traditional Castellorizian costume worn by a Greek migrant, an English settler's toy farmyard set, crockery from a convict housewife's kitchen and an Italian barber's shaving tools—the familiar stories of migrants and their rather quaint objects of diasporic memory. The exhibition also, however, evoked the darker side of the story of Australian immigration, represented most notoriously by the White Australia Policy, which pointed to the intrinsically *political* nature of the nation's history of settlement since the arrival of the British: the attempt to create an exclusively white nation-state by keeping undesirable

non-whites out (and by 'whitewashing' the blacks within). This history also implicitly referred to the radically transformative nature of multiculturalism as a new policy framework that emerged in the 1970s: the transition from 'white Australia' to 'multicultural Australia' (where racial, ethnic and cultural diversity was held as normative) was indeed a momentous one, or at least it was represented as such.

Howard's review committee recommended the scrapping of *Horizons* because its 'black-armband' view of immigration history did not sufficiently contribute to a coherent narrative of national progress. It was recently replaced by a new permanent exhibition, *Australian Journeys*. I shall return to this new exhibition, but first, let me go back to this much-maligned idea of multiculturalism. Now that Howard has gone, what should we make of it? Is it dead? Or can it be resurrected now that we have a Labor government, whose attitudes to cultural diversity and to ethnic minority rights might be expected to be more sympathetic? We shouldn't be too optimistic. To date, there is no reference whatsoever to 'multiculturalism' on the Australian Labor Party's official web site; there is a distinct lack of new thinking and leadership in this area. Yes, the government has affirmed its conviction that 'religious and cultural diversity is a permanent and valuable feature of Australian society' and it recently has established an Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, whose composition is said to 'reflect that diversity'.¹

The articulated role of this council is, however, hardly a departure from the kinds of emphases the Howard Government introduced. In the words of Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship: 'The new council will advise the government on practical approaches to promoting social cohesion, the engagement of migrants in Australian society, overcoming racism and intolerance and communicating to the public on this complex social policy area.'² The overall aim—social cohesion—remains the same. What is different—and this is welcome—seems to be a recognition that racism and intolerance are problems that need to be addressed and, perhaps most importantly, the explicit admission that this social policy area is 'complex'.

So where does this leave us? I have to say that I am not surprised. The world over, 'multiculturalism' has now lost its power to appeal to our imagination. This isn't because what it stands for is no longer important, but because the conditions in which it has to make its impact have become, well, so much more complex. As a practical policy of social inclusion and diversity management, it is still of immense importance at a local level—in neighbourhoods, schools, health care, and so on—where the need to respond to diverse constituencies is simply unavoidable. As the fragmenting and disorienting effects of globalisation deepen, however—signposted by dramatic events such as the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 and, most recently, the global financial crisis—longings for

national unity and integration (however imaginary) have become more emphatic even as there is a universal admission that our world is irrevocably one of global interdependence and interconnectedness, where the transnational mobility of people is set to increase despite the intensification of border control regimes and the like.

In this context, it is impossible for us to return to the 'multiculturalism' of the early 1990s, a seemingly more unencumbered time when the celebration of multicultural diversity could be posed as an unambiguous sign of national progress, a thorough repudiation of the nation's white assimilationist past. Today, however, Australia as a nation is vastly more de facto multicultural than 15 years ago, but at the same time the nation's diversity is also more multi-layered, more internally contradictory, more brittle and dynamic, more entangled within webs of transnational links and tensions. Migrants today come from a vastly greater range of countries and they come for many more different purposes. Many of them do not settle permanently but come and go as they pursue opportunities elsewhere or as their visas expire. Ethnicity, which was supposed to signify the collective difference of migrants in the era of high multiculturalism, is no longer what it used to be; migrant identities are now much more mutable, differentiated and individualised. This dynamic, hyper-diverse reality can no longer be captured by the singular term 'multiculturalism' with its rather static connotation of coexisting but mutually exclusive cultural communities. What can replace it?

The NMA's new permanent exhibition, *Australian Journeys*, simply evades this question. Unlike *Horizons*, it doesn't feature the themes of inclusion and exclusion that are associated with Australia's history of immigration and multiculturalism. Instead, the emphasis in the new gallery is on cosmopolitanism: on Australia's interconnections with the world. As the NMA web site puts it, 'Australian Journeys explores the personal stories of migrants, travellers and traders and how their objects have connected places in Australia with places abroad.' It features 'journeys of people to and from Australia and the social, political and economic impacts of those journeys'.

A great deal of the exhibit is dedicated to nineteenth-century voyages of European explorers, including Captain James Cook, and details the experiences of people who travelled to and from the Australian colonies in the nineteenth century. We are given a global view of the history of tea: 'By 1770 a sip of tea connected an English family to the spice ports of Java, the sugar plantations of the West Indies and the tea gardens and potteries of China.' We are also, however, served with more familiar stories of migrants from different corners of the world such as Italy, Ireland, Morocco, Vietnam, Latvia and Germany throughout the twentieth century. One particularly poignant story features a group of Indonesian independence activists who brought their *gamelan digul* to Melbourne during

World War II. We are casually told, in the accompanying written narrative, that these Indonesians were subjected to the infamous White Australia Policy dictation test after the war, and subsequently deported. This story of exclusion sits side by side with more uplifting stories such as cricketing journeys to and from Australia, successful trade ventures such as the Kuta Lines surfwear company, whose designs were inspired by Balinese textiles, and the trip of two Wik sculptures, *Wallaby* and *Shark*, to America in 1988, organised by curator Peter Sutton of the South Australian Museum. These exemplify 'the stories of sportsmen and women, artists and scientists working on the world stage in the twenty-first century'.

This is a gallery fit for twenty-first-century consciousness: the idea that no nation is an island, but is shaped fundamentally by continuing flows in and out of people and whatever they bring with them on their journeys. The outlook is transnational: visitors are encouraged to see that Australia's history is thoroughly entangled with that of other parts of the world, that its boundaries have always been porous—and all the better for it!

I must say that I felt strangely deflated after seeing *Australian Journeys*. Yes, I believe that in this globalised age it is important for a national museum of Australia to represent the nation's irrevocably hybrid make-up and to promote a cosmopolitan vision of and for the nation. Here, however, we are presented with such an eclectic array of stories, objects and images that what we are left with is the dominant impression of a cheerful, kaleidoscopic pluralism in which substantive differences are flattened out. By merging migrants, traders and travellers into a singular category of people and objects on the move, the peculiarity of Australia's immigration history—in social, geographical and political terms—disappears from view. The result is a depoliticised representation of cultural diversity, shaped by a virtually unhindered mobility in which Australia's cosmopolitan connections seem limitless and unproblematic.

As much as I didn't like *Horizons* because it presented the history of immigration into this country in an overly didactic way, relying too unreflexively on the values and approaches of 1990s multiculturalist orthodoxy, with *Journeys*, we can see the pendulum swinging too much to the other side. The very inclusive globality of *Journeys*, encompassing as it does people flows of all kinds and in all directions without distinction, results in a downplaying of the very real role of barriers, borders and biases in the active restriction of movements into Australia—the isolated and decontextualised story of the Indonesian *gamelan* troupe's expulsion notwithstanding. The expansive focus of *Journeys* on flows in and out of the nation magically dissolves the tension between unity and diversity, which was so central to the problematic concern of multiculturalism, and which multiculturalism itself sought unsuccessfully to overcome.

With *Journeys*, then, the NMA's solution to the crisis of multiculturalism has been one of turning the Australian nation prematurely transnational and boundlessly cosmopolitan. Within the space of the nation, however, the experience of difference as difficulty as well as creativity, and the complexities of multicultural coexistence that go hand in hand with the story of immigration-led nation-building, remain sources of storytelling that deserve to be represented, not for reasons of 'political correctness' but for the simple reason that it is crucial for our national self-understanding, for an enhanced conversation about how Australians—in all their complex, fluid and unequal diversity—live together, and with the world. The NMA knows this, of course, and in the past years it has staged several exhibitions in its *Nation Focus Gallery* that feature 'migrant' topics, such as *Migration Memories* in 2007, *Selling an American Dream: Australia's Greek café* in 2008 (about the role of Greek Australians in introducing Americanised eating and popular cultural habits in Australia) and, most recently, an exhibition celebrating more than 40 years of Turkish migration to Australia (2009). These are all worthy initiatives, yet the very fact that they are *temporary* exhibitions implicitly sends the message that these are not stories of general national significance; instead, they tend to address special groups and communities. Once again, then, multicultural issues are relegated to the margins of minority interest, strictly separated from the mainstream. In institutionalising this bifurcation, the NMA perpetuates a dualism that was at the base of the crisis of multiculturalism in the first place.

ENDNOTES

¹ Australian Labor Party 2008, Multicultural experts to further Australia's strength in diversity, Media statement, 17 December 2008.

² Ibid.

Culture, citizenship and Australian multiculturalism

The contest over identity formation at the National Museum of Australia

Kylie Message

Figure 4.1 The National Museum of Australia, Canberra (exterior detail).



Photograph courtesy of Kylie Message.

Introduction

Much has been written about the historical allegiance of citizenship and national museums and, although they continue to share the discourse of government, concepts of citizenship have undergone a serious re-evaluation in recent years. This process of revision has also been paralleled in the changing ideas about museum practice that have come to be associated with the new museology.¹ Traditional nineteenth and twentieth-century museums promoted normative approaches to nation-building ideologies and an institution of citizenship that

sought to achieve civic and social reform of the urban masses that were defined in opposition to non-Western and Indigenous peoples (who appeared to be defined by and reduced to ethnographic representations of their 'vanishing' cultures). In contrast, the globally savvy 'new' museums of the twenty-first century are increasingly being identified by their aspiration to contribute to the meta-narratives of civic unity and a common notion of public good by adopting advocacy roles, accepting ideas about the rights associated with 'cultural citizenship' and supporting or developing strategic partnerships with local areas and source communities—Indigenous and migrant. Actually, many new museums (especially those that are national or government funded) endeavour to challenge the idea that culture and politics have a dichotomous relationship. In addition to their aim to preserve culture, they provide a place where culture and identity can be performed, generated and recognised as dynamic and political.

Such museums tend to exist within societies that are pragmatically multicultural, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Contextualised by policy ideals that encourage migrants to retain and express their original cultural identity for the enrichment of their adopted home, new museums are quick to recognise that this distinction can itself be a product of the social construction of migrants as 'people of culture'. The assumed 'otherness' of migrants and Indigenous people is what makes them culturally visible and, while this 'visibility' works to reinforce the invisibility of the dominant culture, it also narrows the citizenship options available to groups defined in opposition to the majority.² As such, new museums often seek to represent the complexity and debate about terms such as 'cultural citizenship' and some also take on board Ruth Phillips' caution to avoid 'transmitting a falsely harmonious representation of conflicts not yet resolved in the world outside the museum'.³ While new museums invite us to recognise the continuing function of national government as a social (as well as political) act that affects people's lives in very personal ways, they also insist on the role of museums as technologies that can generate new forms of social interaction and a dynamic form of cultural politics. We can understand these changes to mean that the focus for many national museums in contemporary—postcolonial and multicultural—societies has shifted towards grappling with how to more equitably balance their service to diverse multicultural and Indigenous communities with their traditional commitment to government policy positions and civic reformism.⁴

My purpose in this essay is to bring the debates about museums, citizenship and multiculturalism that occurred from the 1970s to the present day in Australia into a shared frame. Without seeking to contend that there was an explicit alignment between the transformations that occurred in each of these fields (or even that the debates were interconnected, although evidence suggests this was the case), I examine the role that public cultural representations of Australian-ness have played over this period. My discussion focuses on the National Museum

of Australia (NMA). The National Museum was conceptualised in 1975, created by an act of Parliament in 1980, opened in 2001, and was subject to a government-commissioned review of its exhibitions and public programs in 2003.⁵ It was chosen as the venue for 'Australian Citizenship Day' ceremonies in 2008, and this year started opening new permanent exhibitions redesigned in response to the 2003 review. The museum's key dates parallel the development and transformation of multiculturalism in Australia. First mentioned by the Australian Government (by the Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby) in 1973, multiculturalism was presented in 1978 as a long-term government strategy to develop social institutions that would respond to an increasingly pluralist society.⁶ A series of discussion papers and policies pertaining to multiculturalism were published from the 1970s, including: *Multiculturalism for All Australians: Our developing nationhood* (1982), *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (1989) and *A New Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* and *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards inclusiveness* (1999). *Multicultural Australia: United in diversity* was published in 2003, and this policy remains current today.⁷ As the changes in policy indicate, a contraction of political interest in multiculturalism has occurred during this period and national agendas have been transformed in line with the contemporary global appetite for the 'soft' notions of social cohesion and harmony.

Tensions associated with the changing definitions, understandings and experiences of citizenship, museums and multiculturalism were forced to the front of the stage in 2001, when the nation marked its constitutional centenary and when the NMA opened in March as a feature of the centenary celebrations. The festive tone of the centenary was diluted, however, by events that followed later that year, including the 'Tampa affair' in August, the 11 September terrorist attacks, and the 'children overboard' incident in October.⁸ A federal election—which resulted in the re-election of the Howard-led Coalition Government—was held in November. We can understand that it was for reasons associated with fear and expediency as well as enthusiasm that an intensified interest in national unity came to characterise the political spectrum at this time. Although the subsequent 2003 review of the new National Museum's exhibitions and programs was tied to the emergent History Wars, the attack on the museum must also be contextualised against a backdrop of the rise of the New Right (and the radicalisation of the Liberal Party) during the 1990s, which elevated 'political correctness' to a term of abuse and made anything seen as elite-driven or interest group-driven a target.⁹ In some ways, the assault on academic history and multiculturalism had as much to do with the general attack on the perceived process of policy and decision making as it did with the issues themselves.

The overarching aim of this essay is to explore what agency or authority new museums such as the NMA might have in promoting, normalising or challenging

shifting policy positions pertaining to multiculturalism and citizenship. I argue, in the final instance, that government-funded institutions, especially cultural ones, provide a vital opportunity for public policies and community attitudes to intersect and even become mutually informing—a position proposed by the 1982 discussion paper *Multiculturalism for All Australians*:

The dynamic character of multiculturalism naturally calls for changes, not only in attitudes but also in our institutions. This will not be easy and, according to an Australian expert on ethnic relations, 'it is not possible to change attitudes and minimise prejudice if the structural conditions which encourage them are maintained'.¹⁰

Australian citizenship

Citizenship has traditionally been understood to refer to a legal-formal contract between an individual and the state, in which individuals are granted rights to political agency and legal support for being socially and morally responsible. It has often been perceived as a core component of national cultural homogenisation. Notwithstanding the prior rights conveyed by British subjecthood, the formal legal starting point for understanding citizenship in this country is the Australian Constitution (1901), even though citizenship is largely omitted from its terms. 'Citizenship concerned the drafters [of the Act] acutely and they made a conscious effort to exclude the term from Australia's foundational legal document' in order to maintain the authority to exclude non-British people—notably, Indigenous Australians, Chinese and people from non-Anglo-Celtic parts of the Commonwealth (Indians and Hong Kong Chinese), who shared the status of being 'subjects of the Queen'.¹¹ It was not until 1948 that Australian citizenship was first legally defined by the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* (Cth), which later became the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* (Cth). Despite amendments being made to the legislation over time (including the insertion of a new preamble in 1993 and the 2007 Australian citizenship law reforms), Mark Nolan and Kim Rubenstein have argued that citizenship continues to be used today as a device of immigration control and exclusion.¹² The events and collateral anxieties of 2001 certainly caused a surge of opinion and debate about citizenship to flood the public cultural sphere. Discussion coalesced on issues of national security, the treatment and rights of refugees and asylum-seekers and the 'obligations' (rather than the 'rights') associated with the privilege of Australian citizenship more generally. The reframing of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* into the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* occurred in the wake of these discussions, and the changes made to this legislation have provided a further opportunity and reason to scrutinise the way in which we define and understand citizenship in a contemporary Australian context.¹³ One instance of this re-evaluation was the 2008 Australia 2020 Summit, at which participants debated 'the future of Australian governance: Renewed democracy, a more open government (including

the role of the media), the structure of the Federation and the rights and responsibilities of citizens'. Just a month earlier, a panel of public advocates and intellectuals gathered in Canberra to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the 1948 act and to debate the topic: 'Australian citizenship: is it really worth having?'¹⁴

Constitutional law experts, including Rubenstein cited above, used this anniversary and other key dates (for example, the fiftieth anniversary of Australian citizenship) to call for a re-evaluation of definitions pertaining to citizenship in the Australian Constitution on the basis that the 'failure to engage properly in informed debate about citizenship' has been a key reason for the existence of stark differences between the formal legal status of citizenship (and inconsistencies therein) and the broader sense of the civic value of membership in the Australian community.¹⁵ This insistence on the plurality and diversity of citizenship registers changing understandings of citizenship in public (if not government) cultures globally. It acknowledges that discourses on citizenship are increasingly influenced by growing recognition that the contested norms of conduct and citizenship are themselves impacted by power relations, by the improved understanding that citizenship is more than a legal instrument, and by the subsequent acknowledgment that its cultures and practices are fluid and diverse.

Universal and cosmopolitan human rights initiatives have also contributed significantly to the change in focus from civic to political and social rights, as has the renewed attention to culture (represented as identity, gender, sexuality and race), values and habits as potentially unifying and motivating concepts. This is particularly evident in the United Kingdom, where concepts of social capital and community cohesion—both of which are understood to emerge from communities that demonstrate a shared vision and sense of belonging—have been presented in policy initiatives as features central to the reconfiguration of a healthy civil sphere.¹⁶ As a consequence, singular meanings of citizenship in liberal Western democracies around the globe, including the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, have been challenged by claims for the acknowledgment of difference in and by mainstream cultures, and by calls for recognition of cultural rights that are based on claims of ownership of, access to, and the right to profit from information and cultural patrimony, the protection of intellectual property, and the development and expression of cultural identities via education, custom, language and religion, the protection of heritage, and demands that cultural rights are an important way in which to create equity between different cultural groups in postcolonial multicultural societies.¹⁷ The debate about changing concepts and definitions of citizenship in these particular countries has been echoed by their deliberation about whether to ratify the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (which was adopted by the

United Nations on 13 September 2007 after 143 member states voted in favour, 11 abstained and four—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States—voted against the text).¹⁸ The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (adopted unanimously at the thirty-first UNESCO General Conference in November 2006) has also influenced these changes insofar as it addresses the implications of globalisation (notably, expansion of debates about the influence of cultural pluralism on social fragmentation) on the territorial, sovereign state.

This essay is contextualised by these events and by the work of citizenship scholars such as Joke Hermes and Peter Dahlgren, who argue that ‘changing sociocultural realities underscore the limitations of strictly legal-formal notions of citizenship; not least, for example, in the face of the social problematics in post-colonial multicultural societies’.¹⁹ Following the interest that Hermes, Dahlgren and other scholars have in examining the relationship between culture and citizenship, I present a survey of instances that demonstrates the role that culture (as a government tool *and* site of contestation) plays in developing and exercising diverse understandings about what it means to hold membership in the Australian national community.²⁰ To come to terms with the purpose and potential of citizenship in a contemporary Australian context, I argue, it is necessary to move away from the narrow legal definition of citizenship and instead focus our attention on the particular practices, cultures and politics of citizenship that play out in everyday spaces—as well as through the museums, policies and institutions that create or challenge dominant cultural imaginaries.²¹

Identity formation at the National Museum of Australia

Contemporary critical engagements with citizenship and museums have centred on the re-evaluation of ideas about power, authority and the dissemination of these ideas into the public sphere—a process that was exemplified by statements that the new National Museum of Australia was to be self-consciously postmodern, postcolonial and pluralist in outlook (Figure 4.1).²² Reflections about the recent history of the NMA demonstrate the urgency through which the exchanges between politics, culture and society were characterised at the close of the twentieth century as a time when, to quote former NMA director Dawn Casey, the issue of ‘Australian-ness’ was ‘being debated possibly more vigorously than in any other period of the nation’s history’. According to Casey, ‘We [the NMA] accept from the outset that there will be disagreements about the way we examine historic[al] processes or about our very choice of themes and stories and issues’.²³ This statement reflects the recommendations in *Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, the document that first called for the development of a national museum. Chaired by Peter Piggott (and subsequently referred to as the *Piggott Report*), the report recommended that not only should the museum

'extend the front-lines of knowledge', it 'should enable curious spectators to visit those front-lines and understand how some of the battles to extend knowledge are fought'.²⁴ It is my contention that in the institution's aspiration to engage with the History Wars (that escalated from about 1993), and in its aim to heighten awareness of the contribution that ordinary members of the national community make to conceptions of identity and citizenship (as symbolic ideas and everyday lived reality), the NMA has sought to create 'a more widely shared and more widely available form of "the political" as moments of engagement, of "public connection"'.²⁵ The representation of 'the political' preferred by the NMA is one that is centrally tied to ideas about culture, and linked therefore to a supposedly more inclusive, civics-based notion of citizenship.²⁶

My interest in this essay is not to sift back through the well-known series of actions, recriminations, responses or the wider social implications that followed from the museum's opening and culminated in the 2003 *Review of the National Museum of Australia, Its Exhibitions and Public Programs: A report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia* (henceforth referred to as the *NMA Review*).²⁷ Instead, I want to highlight two particular aspects of the process through which the NMA was conceptualised and then presented to the public that have continued to inform understandings about the social role and purpose of the museum.²⁸ My first point of focus is the intellectual framework or approach that was adopted for the new museum. Seeking to represent identity as unfinished and contested, contingent and continuously negotiated, national identity was represented as a work in progress to which museum audiences were encouraged to contribute. The contributions of audiences and constituents were enabled on the basis that the museum would function as a public forum that aimed to 'speak with many voices, listen and respond to all, and promote debate and discussion about questions of diversity and identity'.²⁹

The second notable aspect is the decision to present the museum as an active agent in the emergent History Wars. As indicated by recommendations made by the *Piggott Report*, the intention for the museum to adopt the role of provocateur was indicated before it opened. These intentions were clearly aligned with an implicit attempt to question old certainties (especially those relating to the history of Indigenous people).³⁰ As early as 1998, Casey publicly commented: 'It is never easy for a publicly funded cultural institution to become involved in controversy, but that is probably inevitable if we are to do our job honestly.'³¹ We can understand that the museum, rather than adopting the position of distanced observer or neutral reflection, sought to provoke and challenge long-held ideas about identity and question what citizenship meant in this country. Casey's desire for the museum to enact a program of social change and political intervention was motivated, in part at least, by the less controversial aim that the institution should incorporate and demonstrate to the Australian

public a self-reflexivity about the general historical complicity of museums in the colonial enterprise.

On the one hand, it is possible to understand the museum's provocative purview to be an affectation associated with the emergent discipline of new museology through which it was designed and articulated (American 'new museologist' Elaine Heumann Gurian was involved in the museum's development phase during the 1990s). Its aim, however, to be politically aware, responsive to contemporary events and to represent the changing place of Indigenous Australians within Australian society was based on the initial concept of the national museum (as recommended by the *Piggott Report*), which outlined a bicultural museum that should concentrate on 'Aboriginal man in Australia; European man in Australia; and the Australian environment and its interaction with the two-named themes'.³² Early exhibitions such as *Landmarks: People, land and political change* (exhibited in 1993 at Old Parliament House, Canberra) presented the reconciliation project as a way to bring these themes into dialogue in order to make the museum appear contemporary and relevant.³³ The exhibition sought to improve the public's understanding of the reconciliation project, which had been formed largely through the media's coverage of events including Indigenous responses to the 1988 Bicentenary of the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney (problematically promoted as the 'celebration of the nation'), as well as the 1992 Mabo ruling.³⁴

Although commentators sometimes contend that the level of public interest in reconciliation was indicated by the great numbers of signatures (more than one million) that were collected in thousands of 'sorry books' and by the more than 260 local reconciliation groups that were established to mark the inaugural National Sorry Day held on 26 May 1998, the majority of Australians did not sign sorry books or go on reconciliation marches.³⁵ For his part, the Prime Minister, John Howard, steadfastly refused to lead or have any part in offering a formal national apology for past mistreatment of Aboriginal people, arguing that Australians should not be asked to 'accept responsibility for the acts of earlier generations, sanctioned by the law of the times'.³⁶ Further, the Liberal-National Coalition's electoral success at the 1996 federal election was due as much to Howard's 'tough stance' as it was to his ability to tap into and reflect residual attitudes among the 'majority' of Australians—'the battlers' targeted by his 'For all of us' campaign slogan.³⁷ Even despite its varying levels of support, however, the reconciliation project was front of stage in the mainstream media and popular imagination in the period leading up to the NMA's opening and the new museum, widely promoted as offering a 'public forum', was a logical site to host debates of national significance. The debate about reconciliation increasingly became associated with the museum when rumours

started to circulate that the word 'sorry' was written in the Braille transcript that skirted the building's postmodern exterior.³⁸

The Prime Minister famously responded to the new NMA building by labelling it 'very un-museum-like' at its launch in March 2001.³⁹ His suspicion of apologies and postmodern museums was soon allied to claims laid by conservative commentator Keith Windschuttle that the museum's selection and representation of a biased 'people's history' overlooked the contribution of settlers and great Australians to the national project and misrepresented colonial events. Windschuttle derided the museum's commitment to pluralism on the basis that it gave 'equal time for every identifiable sexual and ethnic group'.⁴⁰ His interpretation gained further traction when one of the NMA's own board members, David Barnett—a former press secretary to Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Howard's official biographer—accused the NMA of presenting a version of Australian history that was 'claptrap' and influenced by 'Marxist rubbish'.⁴¹ Barnett contended that the exhibitions portrayed a revisionist 'black-armband' view of Australian history that was politically partisan in that it championed 'unfortunates' such as workers and stolen children and ignored the contributions of 'founding fathers and prime ministers'.⁴² Of Label 0826-70, Barnett said: 'Heather Rose. Another unfortunate. The way to get a place in the Museum is to have something terrible befall you.'⁴³ Despite the slowly growing public support for a national apology to be made to members of the Stolen Generations, Barnett took particular offence at the museum's Stolen Generations exhibit, denigrating it as a 'victim episode'.⁴⁴

Barnett's complaint about the NMA's depiction of 'biased' accounts of Aboriginal experience and its concentration on the extraordinary achievements and stories of ordinary Australians (at what he considered to be the expense of notable Australians) stood in stark contrast with comments made by Al Grassby 30 years earlier.⁴⁵ In a 1973 conference presentation called 'A multi-cultural society for the future', Grassby asked:

How often do our television screens reflect anything like the variety of migrant groups encountered in a real-life stroll through our city streets, or particularly our near-city suburbs? The image we manage to convey of ourselves still seems to range from the bushwhacker to the sportsman to the slick city businessman. Where is the Maltese process worker, the Finnish carpenter, the Italian concrete layer, the Yugoslav miner, or—dare I say it—the Indian scientist?⁴⁶

Grassby's comments about the poverty of representation offered by Australian television were picked up by the *Galbally Report* in 1978, which lay the groundwork for the establishment of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).⁴⁷ The multicultural policies developed in the ensuing 30 years also led to the transformation of public culture in Australia. Initiatives such as 'Harmony Day',

the establishment of migration museums in Adelaide and Melbourne, the development of cultural diversity policies by state museums and the leading professional organisation, Museums Australia, as well as the establishment of the Australia Council policy on Australian arts and cultural diversity demonstrate that a significant cultural change has occurred, as do the many community development projects funded by local and state governments.⁴⁸ The NMA was also founded and designed during the early days of multicultural policy development. Refining the general approach outlined by the 1975 *Piggott Report*, the 1982 *Report of the Interim Council: Plan for the development of the Museum of Australia* envisaged that:

The Museum will emphasise that Australian society comprises people of many different origins...pay special attention to events in the peopling of Australia...highlight the effects of cultural diversity...[and explore] how the concept of assimilation of new immigrants is being re-examined and re-shaped by pluralistic philosophies and practices.⁴⁹

The report tasked the museum with enlarging perceptions of Australian nationhood and with providing a space that would invite public scrutiny of the policies emerging in the post-White Australia Policy era. It sought a museum that would enable consideration of the impact of such policies on the everyday experience of ordinary Australians. This was less a revisionist approach to history telling than one that sought to represent those people (Grassby's Maltese process worker, Finnish carpenter and Italian concrete layer, but also the diversity of Indigenous Australians) who had been previously excluded from the national register. It also recognised the role that museums had in measuring and reflecting (as well as influencing) public opinion.

From multiculturalism *for all Australians* to *Australian multiculturalism*

Multiculturalism was initially developed as a program of immigrant settlement and welfare support that aimed to assist migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds to become Australian without jettisoning their previous cultural heritage. In 1977, the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council defined multiculturalism according to principles of national cohesion, recognition of cultural identity and promotion of social equality.⁵⁰ Advocates of multiculturalism represented Australia as being made up of people of diverse cultures that should be given equal status within the Australian mainstream, where Australian citizenship became the glue that bound these different groups into a national unity.⁵¹ This ideal was represented in *Multiculturalism for All Australians: Our developing nationhood*, which was produced by the Office of Multicultural Affairs in 1982 and chaired by professor of sociology and leading government advisor on multicultural issues Jerzy Zubrzycki (who was also a member of the Museum of

Australia Interim Council responsible for the 1982 *Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia*). At this time, Zubrzycki commented:

The concepts involved in the legal status of citizenship are related to those of multiculturalism through the notion of Australian identity: the question of what it means to be an Australian in our multicultural society. An additional link is provided by the ideal of mutual commitment between citizen and nation—an ideal that is common to both citizenship and a cohesive multicultural society.⁵²

Citizenship, the NMA and multiculturalism can each be represented as belonging to the fields of policy (political positioning), ideology (philosophical belief) and/or pragmatic or everyday experience (cultures of citizenship). Each institution or concept responds to, reflects and is implemented by one or more of these fields (which they can at times also seek to extend or challenge). Multiculturalism, for instance, can be readily understood as having three primary usages. The first is related to the field of policy, where it is used to direct the relationships and institutional arrangements between diverse cultural groups that affect access to resources, privileges and participation in decision making. The second usage, not always distinguished from the first, is related to ideology, where multiculturalism exists 'as a term for the philosophical basis for a culturally diverse society, i.e. the belief that certain institutional arrangements ought to exist'.⁵³ A third usage reflects the pragmatic multiculturalism of everyday life in Australia, as indicated by the goals asserted by the 1982 *Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia* and by other evidence, including market research commissioned in 2002 by SBS Television, which found that, 'in practice, most Australians, from whatever background, live and breathe cultural diversity, actively engaging with goods and activities from many different cultures'.⁵⁴ It is important to acknowledge that the third field of pragmatic or everyday experience provides more than just a context for the first two fields. Recognition of the lived reality and ubiquity of multiculturalism counteracts arguments that insist that multiculturalism is solely a political idea and public policy regime, and allows greater recognition that claims asserting that multiculturalism is a 'top-down' project and 'the work of a small clique' ignore the reality of considerable demand from within the immigrant communities for improved services and status.⁵⁵

Although citizenship, the NMA and multiculturalism can all relate equally well to each of the three areas just outlined, I have focused this study on the NMA because of its commitment to representing the everyday and non-constant experiences, benefits and challenges associated with citizenship in multicultural Australia. As a government instrument that invites participation by 'ordinary' Australians, it has the potential to inform or intervene in the further development of multicultural policy by providing representation of public sentiment about

citizenship procedures and legislation. This intention was evident in the 1993 *Landmarks* exhibition, in which contested public opinion and debate about each of the three national landmarks was represented. A further example that demonstrated the museum's potential to provide a significant space for political advocacy (if not recognition or protest) was the agreement by the Yolngu people from Yirrkala, north-eastern Arnhem Land, to work with anthropologist Howard Morphy to develop a *yingapungapu* sand sculpture and performance as part of the NMA's opening ceremony. According to Morphy, Yolngu leaders 'saw an exhibition in Canberra as a means of continuing to demonstrate to a national audience their native title rights over the coastal waters of Blue Mud Bay'.⁵⁶ The potential the Yolgnu saw for the museum to play a role in their struggle for land rights was reiterated by their subsequent preference for the hearing into their claim to be held at the NMA (as a site they now felt a symbolic connection with) rather than at the High Court of Australia.⁵⁷ This example demonstrates that more than just offering a public space or forum, the museum provides an official platform for people to occupy in order to represent their interests to government. It also demonstrates a challenge to the authority of the traditional notion of citizenship as a legal instrument represented exclusively by the legal apparatus (the High Court). This relationship indicates that the 'national' museum is valued by Yolgnu for its ties to government and that this connection is understood to demonstrate governmental legitimization of the representation being made—at least symbolically. The cultural politics that motivated the decision to include the *yingapungapu* sculpture and performance in the NMA shows that the museum was identified as a site of productive albeit contested understandings of national identity and history by players who had traditionally been excluded by Commonwealth Government policies. Furthermore, in continuing to promote the legitimacy of cultural forms and practices of citizenship, the museum might increasingly become what Morphy calls a 'site of persuasion' to counteract its traditional role as an exhibitionary complex or surface of government.⁵⁸

The intersection between the importance of the nascent NMA as a symbolic national space and the multicultural policies emerging at the time were apparent in the 1982 *Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia* as well as in the *National Consultations on Multiculturalism and Citizenship* report published that same year. Also chaired by Zubrzycki, the *National Consultations* presented multiculturalism as a 'live issue'. The report focuses on the pragmatically multicultural nature of Australia. To indicate (liberal) public sentiment in Australia in the early 1980s, the document cites an editorial feature from the *Melbourne Age* newspaper, which says:

[Multiculturalism] is not a dangerous new 'ism' to be foisted on an unsuspecting nation. It is not a radical plot to change the nature of

Australian society. It is not a devious attempt to open the immigration floodgates...It is essentially a recognition of reality and an enlightened attempt to respond positively to the changes in a growing community.⁵⁹

Like the *National Consultations on Multiculturalism and Citizenship* report, the 1982 *Multiculturalism for All Australians* discussion paper, as well as the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* stressed the productive contribution that pluralism made to contemporary society. They advanced a social justice-cum-citizenship model of multiculturalism and argued that multiculturalism should not be limited to issues affecting minority groups alone. On the basis that they also recognised the currency of culture and diversity in the figuration of citizenship and national ideals, these strategies sought to have multiculturalism officially inscribed as a right of citizenship.⁶⁰ Although there is no space in this essay to outline the transformation in policy positions that occurred from this point, there was a notable change in position after Howard's conservative government was elected in 1996.⁶¹ Symptomatic of the Liberal-National Coalition Government's attempt to regulate the citizenship contract between the individual and the state by reaffirming the productive connections between national identity and civic obligation, 'cultural' forms of citizenship and more liberal understandings of contributions made to an inclusive national community were no longer in political favour. Similarly, it was not long before the Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Indigenous Affairs was renamed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, from which any sense of culture, let alone 'multiculturalism', was removed and in which distinctions between the formal legal status of citizenship and the more inclusive civics-based notion of citizenship were reinscribed.

Unlike earlier policies that had centralised the language and concepts of multiculturalism and promoted the idea (reflected strongly in the NMA's opening exhibitions) that Australian nationhood was 'developing', the national agendas of 1999–2003 relocated Australian-ness as a central signifier and marginalised multiculturalism. Apparent in the shift of terminology that moved to embrace the phrase '*Australian multiculturalism*', these policies stressed the adjective, presented Australian national identity as a *fait accompli* (exemplified by the great nation-building age of the 1890s) and asserted the critical roles of social cohesion and allegiance and responsibility to Australia over pluralism, which, particularly in the post 9/11 era, was identified as a source of social fragmentation. Designed ostensibly to 'update' the previous (1999) national strategy and to draw attention to building fears about social fragmentation, the 2003 *Multicultural Australia: United in diversity* policy called for the public to understand that strategies of social cohesion and tolerance were tied to issues of national security and social integration, claiming: 'Australians now see themselves as directly

threatened by terrorism. In this context, community harmony and social cohesion are pivotal.⁶²

According to sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz, the Australian Government's continuing support for the Harmony Day campaign (established in 1999) was closely aligned with the recentralisation of a singular and unifying notion of Australian-ness within multicultural policy.⁶³ While Harmony Day was initially developed as a program that would privilege 'mainstream' groups and stress inter-group harmony, it has since been refined to balance out the post-9/11 'alert but not alarmed' advertisements developed as part of the Commonwealth Government's national security public information campaign.⁶⁴ Schools, Scout groups and other civil organisations are identified as the primary target of Harmony Day, which effectively makes them (rather than governments) responsible for bringing cultural and ethnic groups into dialogue with 'mainstream Australia' in shared public spaces. Acknowledging the role that cultural difference was perceived to play in the 2005 Cronulla riots,⁶⁵ however, recent Harmony Day events further contracted in focus. Continuing to reflect government suspicions about inclusive multiculturalism, they reassert more traditional notions of citizenship that are based on tolerance and civic obligation, where shared but essentially 'Australian' values are reaffirmed.⁶⁶ Consequently, Harmony Day publicity promotes a firmly depoliticised understanding of culture that evokes colourful concepts of food, fashionistas and festivals (which echoes the 2003 *NMA Review*'s promotion of culture as an enrichment or add-on to the more fundamental Australian norms and familiar images of nation—see next section). Tied to its anti-racism and obligation-based agenda, Harmony Day promotes the social capital and community cohesion arising from civic activity and community participation as a salve to the social fragmentation (read racism) that is perceived to have resulted from earlier policies of multiculturalism and immigration.⁶⁷

Concern about the perceived ramifications of cultural fragmentation came to a head in 2006 when the Federal Government proposed the introduction of a compulsory citizenship test to assess English-language proficiency and Australian civics knowledge and to require those applying for Australian citizenship to endorse Australian values. In November that year, Andrew Robb, then Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, told a conference that some Australians worried that the term 'multicultural' had been transformed by interest groups into a philosophy that put 'allegiances to original culture ahead of national loyalty, a philosophy which fosters separate development, a federation of ethnic cultures, not one community'.⁶⁸ Elite 'interest group'-driven politics was as much the target of Robb's conservative critique as the pluralist policies that were seen to endorse these views.⁶⁹ He went on to add: 'A community of separate cultures fosters a rights mentality,

rather than a responsibilities mentality. It is divisive. It works against quick and effective integration.⁷⁰ These statements were preceded by Robb's introduction to the discussion paper on citizenship testing released in September, in which he encouraged new Australian citizens to adopt a singular national identity and represented this as the best way to achieve a sustainable national unity: 'Australian Citizenship is the single most unifying force in our culturally diverse nation. It lies at the heart of our national identity—giving us a strong sense of who we are and our place in the world.'⁷¹

Ultimately, although *Multicultural Australia* promoted the collectivist ideal of 'unity in diversity' (as a phrase that echoed equivalent policies in the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United States),⁷² it aimed to create a federated union that was inclusive of difference but only insofar as citizens demonstrated commitment to the 'framework of a uniting set of *Australian values*'.⁷³ Exemplified equally well by Harmony Day and the recommendations proposed by the 2003 *NMA Review*, this shift is evidenced by the multitude of local 'multicultural' festival-style events that promote national social priorities (cohesive national identity) and align multiculturalism with strategies for economic growth. Rather than being tied to community development as described by the principles proposed by *Multiculturalism for All Australians* in 1982, social cohesion as prescribed in 2003 by then Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Gary Hardgrave, promotes a 'unified' (singular) version of national identity in which national unity becomes 'our strongest source of national security'.⁷⁴ Critiquing a similar policy shift occurring in Britain at the same time, Jon Burnett contends that community cohesion has become a 'euphemism for integration; and integration a euphemism for assimilation...while assimilation suggests a form of "hyper-inclusion" of certain forms of diversity, it also tells us equally about the forms of diversity that will not be recognised or accepted'.⁷⁵

The *NMA Review*

In the context of the politics and anxieties generated by attempts to regain control of a nation-building program that was ostensibly 'Australian', it was unsurprising that the 2003 *NMA Review* appeared at a loss when it came to actually prescribing or explaining how the museum might adopt its key recommendation to reframe national identity (and thus revisit its methodological pluralism). The review states that '[a] museum must...give some sense of the diversity of views, customs, and beliefs that occupy the shared cultural space that is modern Australia', and yet cautions against 'presenting an assembly of ill-coordinated fragments'.⁷⁶ Consistent also with Howard's commitment to avoiding using the term 'multiculturalism' at all is the *NMA Review's* sympathetic evasion of the term. Of the 86 pages of the document, reference to migrants or immigration is made 13 times, while reference to multicultural/ism is made just once—a mention of the museum's Multicultural Collection.⁷⁷ Given that the

2003 *NMA Review* was widely seen as an attempt on the part of a conservative government to force an end to pluralist models of representation in favour of a more unifying historical master narrative, it was to the surprise of many that the review expressed cautious admiration for the Gallery of First Australians (although this response might equally have been due to a perception that the separate gallery distinguished Indigenous peoples as 'people of culture' in opposition to the majority, who were defined through their relationship with the nation).⁷⁸ On the other hand, the review members were dismayed by the pluralistic and multicultural approach to representing 'nation' that occurred in other parts of the museum.

The Gallery of First Australians was designed as a large dedicated space that would recognise and enable Indigenous Australians to present their own accounts of historical events and experience in their own voices. The distinct space suggested a riposte to the exclusionist and assimilationist policies, mistreatment and marginalisation of Aboriginal people that had tended to characterise relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The Gallery of First Australians could, however, have been perceived as uncontroversial by the *NMA Review* because the political rights discourse it embodied was not substantively carried through into the *Horizons* and *Nation* exhibitions, which were dedicated to representing Australian history since settlement.⁷⁹ The only exception to this was the rotating theatre, *Circa*, which contextualised Indigenous claims for restitution against the dominant nation-building mythologies of the post-contact period. Demonstrating the growing public taste for reconciliation, *Circa* showed Indigenous and non-Indigenous people interacting in a shared public sphere and talking about what it meant to be Australian at the turn of the century. The *NMA Review* singled out *Circa* for the most vehement criticism. It complained about its 'content and lack of coherence'⁸⁰ and proceeded to offer a series of suggestions to improve it. In a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, historian and former NMA employee Ann McGrath observed that the *NMA Review* represented an attempt to reintroduce into the national imaginary themes of 'great white bloke history' constituted primarily by 'Captain Cook and cricket caps'.⁸¹

In line with the conservative ideologies about tolerance and the underlying economic discourse of comparative advantage and nation-building that was favoured by the 2003 *Multicultural Australia* policy,⁸² the *NMA Review* called for strategies of representation that would re-centre recognisably Anglo-Celtic 'Australian' values such as mateship and the ability to extend a fair go to others, and sought to distil the museum's existing attention to pluralist and inclusive approaches to representation. It ultimately recommended that greater attention be paid to the economic contribution made by migrants and nation-building activities such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme to demonstrate the positive

influence that migration to Australia had had on the great numbers employed by the project.⁸³ Similarly, it recommended that the museum deploy cultural diversity as a form of cultural add-on or enrichment: 'The Panel considers that more could be done to address the concern that the NMA should represent the impact of migrant cultures on Australian ways and customs—from food, to architecture, to café streetscapes, and to footballers hugging in public.'⁸⁴ The attempted depoliticisation and stereotyping of culture strongly reflected the contemporary global backlash against multiculturalism that was sweeping the Western world after 9/11. It is also symbolic of how, in contrast with previous approaches that have seen 'mainstreaming multiculturalism' as a valuable project in economic and social terms, 'any support for multiculturalism on social grounds is now qualified, and conditional on its subordination to "mainstream" Australian culture' that is represented (in the recommendations put forward by the *NMA Review* at least) by a certain national homogeneity.⁸⁵

Re-evaluating Australian citizenship

Rather than 'languishing with the historians, the academics and the cultural warriors',⁸⁶ vernacular understandings and modes of expressing the idea of belonging to the nation have also continued to develop in recent years, regardless of (or perhaps resulting from) increasingly constrictive policy frameworks. This means that although the 2005 Cronulla riots and the assertions of jingoistic parades of Aussie pride that have been a feature of subsequent Australia Days might be taken to evidence the contraction of an inclusive and pluralist public sphere, they can also, conversely, be understood to demonstrate that traditional understandings of citizenship as a normative legal instrument (divorced from everyday life) are being challenged within the public sphere, and to the extent that everyday Australians of different ethnic, racial, religious, sexual and class identifications actively vie over questions about what it means to hold membership of a national community in a postcolonial multicultural society. Responding to the increased levels of public interest in the process of identity formation, and recognising their role as social agents, museums across the country have also increasingly aimed to promote positive and increasingly liberal symbols of cohesive community-based models of citizenship in which, in addition to complying with the basic citizenship duties of voting and reading the newspaper, individuals have the capacity to generate a healthy civic sphere through a range of activities, including voluntary contributions to welfare causes and participation in local clubs, associations, organisations or interest groups.⁸⁷

Rather than providing evidence of a decline of confidence in 'nation' as an effective socioeconomic and political unit, and rather than leading to questions about the continuing role and relevance of central government institutions such as national museums as sites where the nation has traditionally told its story, the conflict over identity that is represented by the *NMA Review* and the Cronulla

riots demonstrates that any pairing of contemporary museums or museum-like activities or events with democracy now requires a consideration of citizenship as a changing concept in itself.⁸⁸ This is vital because citizenship is the essence of a representative democracy that is accountable and responsive to its people and because, despite their association with governments, museums can represent a diverse Australian community that is defined by pluralistic backgrounds, interests and positions. It is also important because in counterpoint to a decade ago, when informal pluralism was one of the defining features of Australian identity, it is 'harder today to be an Australian—an Aussie in a cultural, emotive, gut-instinct sort of way'.⁸⁹ Responding to the Cronulla riots in an article written for the *Sydney Herald Sun*, cultural historian and novelist Hsu-Ming Teo identifies the tensions that continue to result from discrepancies in the way citizenship is defined, on the one hand, as a formal legal notion, and practised, on the other, as a form of national belonging in the realm of pragmatic everyday life. She puts her finger on the challenge when she notes: 'Being Australian is more than formal citizenship; it is feeling like an Aussie as well...A decade ago there were many ways of being Australian.'⁹⁰

Conclusion

I will be arguing the necessity of a robust politics of culture, a politics that is able to negotiate local and global differences. In this way, I am voicing a strategic optimism based on long-term possibility rather than a sanguine assessment of the current state of the nation. By moving in the direction of civic pluralism, we will be making a new social contract.⁹¹

Although Mary Kalantzis argues in this passage for a 'post-national' citizenship for Australia that is based on a pluralist ideology, it is my contention that contestation over the 'national' has itself yielded new and complex understandings of citizenship in official and everyday contexts (even if the complexity has not yet been fully recognised in citizenship legislation). I want to conclude by reiterating my argument that the NMA was not drawn into the History Wars by whim or accident but that the curators and exhibition developers were led by the 1975 *Piggott Report*, by transformations in public policy and by the transformations that museological practice was undergoing at the time to actively stake a position as a key player from the outset. Although no-one could have fully anticipated the events that followed the museum's opening in 2001, Dawn Casey's comments about the need for national museums to involve themselves in public debate might, with the value of hindsight, appear to function more as a statement of intent than a mere coincidence or prescience. Not only did the NMA seek to enact the role of socio-political agent and provocateur, it succeeded, albeit at great cost to many people involved, and with widely contested outcomes. Of greater interest is the seriousness with which

the 'robust politics of culture' proffered by the museum was taken by proponents of the conservative ideology promoted by the government of the day. This means that the government and its representatives (exemplified of course by Prime Minister Howard) had a keen understanding that the NMA's provocation, its demotic approach to representation and its alignment with notions of cultural citizenship were more than rhetorical, and that the traditional utility of culture (where culture is an instrument of government) was being threatened if not explicitly inverted.

It is also interesting to note that the reiteration of instructive ties between national museums and legal formations of citizenship have continued to be reinscribed beyond the NMA's opening and review. Most recently, for example, Australian Citizenship Day (17 September 2008) was celebrated at the NMA with a special ceremony. Having conferred 17 people with Australian citizenship, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, declared, 'Australian Citizenship Day is an opportunity for all Australians to think about the changes that shaped our nation, and to reflect on the role we play in building Australia and our future.'⁹² This 'cultural turn' was consistent with the official and emotional apology to the Stolen Generations made by the newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, in February that year. While there is much that can be said about the apology, for the purposes of this article, we can observe first the Prime Minister's pre-emptive strike against those who would interpret his words as part of a 'black-armband view of history' and, second, note that it was a discourse of pluralism that framed the apology that also functioned as a rallying call to the nation to, in the words of Rudd,

turn this page together: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Government and Opposition, Commonwealth and State, and write this new chapter in our nation's story together. First Australians, First Fleeters, and those who first took the Oath of Allegiance just a few weeks ago. Let's grasp this opportunity to craft a new future for this great land: Australia.⁹³

The speech reiterates comments made in the 2000 report *Australian Citizenship for a New Century*, which eschewed any notion of common national values or shared culture in favour of public acceptance of diversity and abstract civic values. According to the Australian Citizenship Council, it is diverse values that underpin citizenship, and these together define and unite Australians.⁹⁴

In the final instance, should we understand Senator Evans' actions as being a concession to the significant role of the cultural politics that have played out at the National Museum, or as an attempt to recoup the alignment of cultural nationalism and more instrumental understandings of Australian citizenship? I think that both this example and the earlier discussion about the Yolgnu community's use of the museum work to show that while the NMA can be

viewed as a technology that plays a part in constituting legal formations of citizenship (hence being the choice of location for the 2008 Australian Citizenship Day ceremony), its performance cannot be fully understood without a consideration of how it is shaped by the exercise of heterogeneous and everyday forms of agency (exemplified by the *yingapungapu* sand sculpture and performance). This means that the museum continues to be centrally implicated in the processes of identity formation in Australia—as intended by comments made by the *Piggott Report* and reaffirmed two decades later by the institution's inaugural director, Dawn Casey.

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ENDNOTES

¹ New museological responses are often critical of instrumental relationships between national museums and civics and citizenship education as represented, for example, in reports such as Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008, *From Curriculum to Community—The impact of civics and citizenship education. Report of the National Civics and Citizenship Education Forum*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra. See Coombes, Annie E. 2004, 'Museums and the formation of national and cultural identities', in Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies: An anthology of contexts*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Mass., pp. 231–46; Bennett, Tony 1995, *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, politics*, Routledge, London and New York; Message, Kylie 2006, *New Museums and the Making of Culture*, Berg, Oxford and New York; Ang, Ien 2005, 'The predicament of diversity: multiculturalism in practice at the art museum', *Ethnicities*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 305–20.

² Of this process, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo comments that 'the more power one has, the less culture one enjoys, and the more culture one has, the less power one wields'. Rosaldo, Renato 1989, *Culture and Truth: The remaking of social analysis*, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 202.

³ Phillips, Ruth 2003, 'Community collaboration in exhibitions: introduction', in L. Peers and A. K. Brown (eds), *Museums and Source Communities*, Routledge, New York, pp. 157–70, at p. 166.

⁴ These questions have also motivated several of my other research projects, including studies of Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand and my current investigation into the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. See Message, Kylie 2007, 'Museums and the utility of culture: the politics of liberal democracy and cultural well-being', *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 235–56; and Message, Kylie 2009, 'Multiplying sites of sovereignty through community and constituent services at the National Museum of the American Indian?', *Museum and Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 50–67.

⁵ See Piggott, Peter H. et al. 1975, *Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra; Carroll, John et al. 2003, *Review of the National Museum of Australia, Its Exhibitions and Public Programs: A report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. See also the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* (viewed 4 November 2008, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/nmoaa1980297/>).

- ⁶ Grassby, Albert J. 1973, *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra. Galbally, Frank et al. 1978, *Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra.
- ⁷ Australian Ethnic Affairs Council 1977, *Australia as a Multicultural Society: Submission to the Australian Population and Immigration Council on the Green Paper Immigration Policies and Australia's Population*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra; Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs 1982, *Multiculturalism for All Australians: Our developing nationhood*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra; Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia...Sharing our future*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra; Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 1999, *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra; National Multicultural Advisory Council 1999, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards inclusiveness*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra; Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2003, *Multicultural Australia: United in diversity. Updating the 1999 New Agenda for Multicultural Australia: Strategic directions for 2003–2006*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra.
- ⁸ For further information on the *Tampa's* rescue of 438 primarily Afghan refugees from a distressed fishing vessel in international waters and the subsequent events, and the 'children overboard' affair, which occurred shortly after, and in the lead-up to the federal election, see Burke, Jason, Brace, Matthew and Jordan, Sandra 2001, 'All Australia can offer is guano island', *The Observer*, 2 September 2001; Megalogenis, George 2006, 'They sank the boat, Howard says', *The Australian*, 27 February 2006; Commonwealth of Australia 2002, *Select Committee for an Inquiry into a Certain Maritime Incident*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- ⁹ The backlash against political correctness was indicated by an address delivered by John Howard soon after his 1996 election win in which he stated 'we are not a Government beholden to political correctness'. Howard, John 1996, The Sir Thomas Playford Memorial Lecture, 5 July, in McKenna, Mark 1997, *Different perspectives on black armband history*, Research Paper 5 1997–98, Politics and Public Administration Group, Parliament of Australia, Canberra.
- ¹⁰ Lewins, F. quoted in Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Australians*, p. 13.
- ¹¹ Rubenstein, Kim 2000, 'Citizenship and the centenary—inclusion and exclusion in 20th century Australia', *Melbourne University Law Review*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 576–608, at p. 580. See also Rubenstein, Kim 1997, 'Citizenship and the Constitutional Convention debates: a mere legal inference', *Federal Law Review*, vol. 25, pp. 296–316, at p. 307.
- ¹² Rubenstein, 'Citizenship and the centenary', p. 587. For information about the 2007 Australian citizenship law reforms, see Nolan, Mark and Rubenstein, Kim 2009, 'Citizenship and identity in diverse societies', *Humanities Research*, vol. XV, no. 1, pp. 29–44, at pp. 36–8.
- ¹³ Nolan and Rubenstein, 'Citizenship and identity in diverse societies'.
- ¹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia 2008, *Australia 2020 Summit Final Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. The Manning Clark House Weekend of Ideas 2008, Manning Clark House, Canberra, 29–30 March 2008.
- ¹⁵ Rubenstein cites a 2000 report by the Australian Citizenship Council as providing evidence of this tension. The report says: 'We must recognise the difference between citizenship in the legal sense and citizenship in the broader sense. That is why throughout this report, when the terms "citizen" and "citizenship" are used with a small "c" they describe citizenship in the broader sense of civic value of our society, relevant to all the people who live here. Not simply those who, under the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* [Cth], have the legal status of Citizens.' Rubenstein, 'Citizenship and the centenary', pp. 578–9, 587 n. 65. See also Australian Citizenship Council 2000, *Australian Citizenship for a New Century: A Report by the Australian Citizenship Council*, Australian Citizenship Council, Canberra.
- ¹⁶ Civil Renewal Unit 2004, *Firm Foundations: The government's framework for community capacity building*, Civil Renewal Unit, Home Office (Crown copyright), London, p. 7. Message, Kylie 2009, 'New directions for civil renewal in Britain: social capital and culture for all?', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 257–78.
- ¹⁷ Delanty, Gerard 2007, 'European citizenship: a critical assessment', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 63–72, at p. 68.
- ¹⁸ The Australian Government recently indicated that it would rescind its position and endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Australian Associated Press (AAP) 2009, 'Labor to support UN indigenous rights declaration', *The Australian*, 26 March 2009.

¹⁹ Hermes, Joke and Dahlgren, Peter 2006, 'Cultural studies and citizenship', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 259–63, at p. 259.

²⁰ For other relevant work, see Rosaldo, Renato 1994, 'Cultural citizenship in San Jose, California', *PoLAR*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 57–63; Ong, Aihwa et al. 1996, 'Cultural citizenship as subject-making: immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States [and comments and reply]', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 37, no. 5, pp. 737–62; Young, Marion 2000, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; Miller, Toby 2001, 'Introducing...cultural citizenship', *Social Text*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 1–5; Isin, Engin I. and Turner, Bryan S. 2007, 'Investigating citizenship: an agenda for citizenship studies', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 5–17; Kymlicka, Will and Norman, Wayne 1994, 'Return of the citizen: a survey of recent work on citizenship theory', *Ethics*, vol. 104, no. 2, pp. 352–81; Stevenson, Nick 2006, 'European cosmopolitan solidarity: questions of citizenship, difference and post-materialism', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 485–500.

²¹ I agree with Andrew C. Theophanous's estimation that the key challenge for postcolonial multicultural societies is how to 'pursue an idea of citizenship which incorporates one concept of social justice and human rights, in a society which has a diversity of cultural backgrounds and different metaphysical and religious views of the world'. I do not have space in this essay to examine the tensions that exist between the assertion of 'special' group rights (for example, for Indigenous sovereignty) and liberal notions of citizenship based on equality of all. Theophanous, Andrew C. 1994, *Understanding Social Justice: An Australian perspective*, Elikia Books, Carlton, Victoria, p. 122.

²² The pluralist approach was evident in early exhibitions developed by the NMA (even before the new building opened on Acton Peninsula). To celebrate 1995 as UNESCO International Year of Tolerance, the museum developed an exhibition entitled *Tolerance* (shown at Old Parliament House) that used items from the museum's migrant heritage collection. See the exhibition's companion volume: Zubrzycki, Jerzy 1995, *White Australians: Tolerance and intolerance in race relations*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra. In 2002, Dawn Casey defended the NMA's pluralism on the basis that 'the world's newest museums...take a...many-stranded approach to national history'. She goes on to argue: 'We accept that there are few absolute truths in history. We admit many voices to the debate.' Casey, Dawn 2002, 'Modern museum is meant to startle those who visit', *The Canberra Times*, 14 March 2002.

²³ Casey, Dawn 2001, 'The National Museum of Australia', in Darryl McIntyre and Kirsten Wehner (eds), *National Museums: Negotiating histories*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, pp. 3–11, at p. 9. In a keynote speech presented to the annual Museums Australia conference in 1999, Casey said: 'The date of opening for the National Museum coincides with the celebration of a pivotal event in Australian history. Many Australians will come together to explore our collective cultural achievement through celebrating, examining and debating the 100 years since our passage into nationhood. I have no doubt that many in 2001 will also be debating the newly opened National Museum of Australia.' Casey, Dawn 1999, The development of the National Museum of Australia: a museum for the 21st century, Keynote speech at Museums Australia conference, Albury, May 1999.

²⁴ Piggott, *Museums in Australia 1975*, p. 6.

²⁵ Hermes and Dahlgren, 'Cultural studies and citizenship', p. 261. In tracing the development of the History Wars in Australia, Macintyre and Clark argued that after he was elected to office in 1996, John Howard 'took up the prosecution of the History Wars [and political correctness] with a vengeance', adopting the 'black-armband' epithet employed by Geoffrey Blainey in his 1993 Latham Lecture. Macintyre, Stuart and Clark, Anna 2003, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, pp. 132–3, 220–1. Blainey, Geoffrey 1993, 'Drawing up a balance sheet of our history', *Quadrant*, vol. 37, nos 7–8, pp. 10–15.

²⁶ For further discussion about cultural citizenship, see Couldry, Nick 2006, 'Culture and citizenship: the missing link?', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 321–39; and Dahlgren, Peter 2006, 'Doing citizenship: the cultural origins of civic agency in the public sphere', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 267–86.

²⁷ Carroll, *Review of the National Museum of Australia*. See also Message, Kylie and Healy, Chris 2004, 'A symptomatic museum: the new, the NMA and the culture wars', *Borderlands e-journal*, vol. 3, no. 3, viewed 19 January 2009, <http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol3no3_2004/messagehealy_symptom.htm>; and Healy, Chris and Witcomb, Andrea (eds) 2006, *South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture*, Monash University E-Press and Sydney University Press, Melbourne and Sydney.

²⁸ For a curatorial account of the new *Circa* and the recently opened *Australian Journeys* exhibition, which replaces *Horizons* and was designed vis-a-vis the *NMA Review*'s recommendations, see Schamberger, Karen, Sear, Martha and Wehner, Kirsten et al. 2008, 'Living in a material world: object

biography and transnational lives', in Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Transnational Ties: Australian ties in the world*, ANU E Press, Canberra, pp. 275–97; and Morton, Craddock 2008, 'The National Museum of Australia: have we got the museum we deserve?', *ReCollections: Journal of the National Museum of Australia*, vol. 3, no. 2, viewed 19 January 2009, <http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_3_no_2/notes_and_comments/the_national_museum_of_australia/>

²⁹ Casey, 'The National Museum of Australia', p. 6.

³⁰ Piggott, *Museums in Australia 1975*, p. 71 (section 12.8).

³¹ Casey, 'The National Museum of Australia', p. 9.

³² Piggott, *Museums in Australia 1975*, p. 4 (section 2.11).

³³ According to the catalogue, the exhibition attempted to examine land ownership through the lens of Australia's political history, and focused on three recent 'landmarks'—the end of the White Australia Policy in 1973, the Franklin Dam dispute of 1983 and the Mabo High Court decision in 1992—'that have challenged traditional assumptions about these issues'. National Museum of Australia 1993, *Landmarks: People, land and political change*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

³⁴ *Mabo vs Queensland (No. 2)* was a court case in which the High Court of Australia recognised native title and in so doing overturned the claims of *terra nullius* that had been used to defend British colonisation. The *Native Title Act* was enacted the next year (1993) and, in a 'citizenship promotion' speech in 1994, then Prime Minister, Paul Keating, said that pluralism 'will guarantee an Australia which is not only culturally rich but socially cohesive and harmonious. Just as importantly, it will mean an Australia which counts among its primary values the capacity to find practical ways to mediate differences—not just ethnic or cultural differences but the differences between men and women, between urban and rural Australians, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians...The catchword is not uniformity, but difference. It is not conformity, but creativity. It is not exclusive, but inclusive. Not closed to the world, but open to it.' Keating cited in Kalantzis, Mary 2000, 'Multicultural citizenship', in Wayne Hudson and John Kane (eds), *Rethinking Australian Citizenship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 99–111, at p. 105. Also see *Mabo vs Queensland (No. 2)* [1992], HCA 23; [1992], 175 CLR 1 (3 June 1992).

³⁵ Sorry Day was established one year after the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families was tabled in Parliament, on 26 May 1997. For details, see Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. For analysis of the opinion polls published in relation to Indigenous affairs in Australia (including the 1991 establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation), see Goot, Murray and Rowse, Tim 2007, *Divided Nation? Indigenous affairs and the imagined public*, Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, Victoria.

³⁶ Quoted in Galligan, Brian and Roberts, Winsome 2003, Australian multiculturalism: its rise and demise, Paper presented to Australian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 29 September – 1 October 2003. The intersection between the NMA and reconciliation has continued to be apparent. In their submission to the *NMA Review*, for example, the Lane Cove Residents for Reconciliation wrote in support of the NMA and its recognition of reconciliation as 'the defining issue of our nation'. See Lane Cove Residents for Reconciliation submission (25 March 2003) to the *NMA Review*. A full list of submissions is available at <http://www.nma.gov.au/about_us/nma_corporate_documents/exhibitions_and_public_programs_review/submissions/> (viewed 19 January 2009).

³⁷ Hage, Ghassan 2003, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, New South Wales. Gale, Peter 2001, 'Representations of reconciliation: bridges, symbols and substance', in Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope (eds), *Reconciliation, Multiculturalism, Identities: Difficult dialogues, sensible solutions*, Common Ground Publishing, Altona, Victoria, pp. 123–34.

³⁸ Devine, Miranda 2006, 'Disclosed at last, the embedded messages that adorn museum', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 April 2006.

³⁹ Prime Minister Howard's address at the opening of the NMA, 11 March 2001, in McIntyre, Darryl 2006, 'The National Museum of Australia and public discourse: the role of public policies in the nation's cultural debates', *Museum International*, vol. 58, no. 4, pp. 13–20, at p. 13.

⁴⁰ Windschuttle, Keith 2001, 'How not to run a museum: people's history at the postmodern museum', *Quadrant*, vol. 45, no. 9, pp. 11–19, at p. 16.

⁴¹ In McCarthy, Greg 2004, 'Postmodern discontent and the National Museum of Australia', *Borderlands e-journal*, vol. 3, no. 3, viewed 19 January 2009,

<http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no3_2004/mccarthy_discontent.htm> Barnett's political persuasion was described in one newspaper article as 'far-right'. Mitchell, Alex 1999, 'More boys in the jobs', *Sun Herald*, 24 January 1999.

⁴² Morgan, Joyce 2001, 'Howard's man: "These people are not my heroes"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2001. Morgan obtained the notes through freedom of information. See also Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars*, p. 193.

⁴³ Message and Healy, 'A symptomatic museum'.

⁴⁴ In Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars*, p. 192.

⁴⁵ Grassby, *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Galbally, *Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services*.

⁴⁸ On the flipside, however, in 2003, Andrew Jakubowicz argued that 'the key institutions over which government has control do not represent the diversity of Australian society at all—the monocultural Cabinet (0/17), the monocultural High Court (0/7) and the monocultural ABC (0/7 government appointees) are the ones at the tip of the iceberg. Public representation on government advisory boards no longer has to reflect cultural diversity, where most participants are selected for their willingness to accept government cultural priorities.' Jakubowicz, Andrew 2003, Auditing multiculturalism: the Australian empire a generation after Galbally, Address to the Annual Conference of the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia, Melbourne, December 2003. See also Australia Council for the Arts 1996, *Arts for a Multicultural Australia: Policy principles 1996–99*, Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney; Australia Council for the Arts 1998, *Arts for a Multicultural Australia, 1998*, Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney; National Museum of Australia 2005, *Cultural Diversity Policy*, POL-C-027, National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Museums Australia 2000, *Museums Australia Incorporated Cultural Diversity Policy*, Museums Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Zubrzycki, Jerzy 2003, 'The place of ethnic heritage collections in the National Museum of Australia', 10 March 2003, Submission to the *Review of the National Museum of Australia, Its Exhibitions and Public Programs: A report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia*. A full list of submissions is available at <http://www.nma.gov.au/about_us/nma_corporate_documents/exhibitions_and_public_programs_review/submissions/> (viewed 19 January 2009). Also see the source document: Museum of Australia Interim Council 1982, *Report of the Interim Council: Plan for the development of the Museum of Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 40 (pars 1–35).

⁵⁰ Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, *Australia as a Multicultural Society*.

⁵¹ Galbally, *Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services*, para. 9.6. Kalantzis, 'Multicultural citizenship', pp. 99–111.

⁵² Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs 1982, *National Consultations on Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, p. 1. See also Office of Multicultural Affairs, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*.

⁵³ Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Australians*, p. 2. See also Theophanous, *Understanding Social Justice*, pp. 122–47.

⁵⁴ Ang, Ien, Brand, Jeffrey E., Noble, Greg and Wilding, Derek 2002, *Living Diversity: Australia's multicultural future*, *Special Broadcasting Service*, Special Broadcasting Services Corporation, Artarmon, New South Wales.

⁵⁵ The claims are by Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts and are discussed in Jupp, James 2008, 'A pragmatic response to a novel situation: Australian multiculturalism', in Geoffrey Brahm Levey (ed.), *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, pp. 225–41, at p. 235. See also Galligan, Brian and Roberts, Winsome 2008, 'Multiculturalism, national identity, and pluralist democracy: the Australian variant', in Brahm Levey, *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism*, pp. 209–24.

⁵⁶ Morphy, Howard 2006, 'Sites of persuasion: *Yingapungapu* at the National Museum of Australia', in Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szewaja and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public cultures/global transformations*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, pp. 469–99, at p. 482.

⁵⁷ Howard Morphy, personal correspondence with author, 2008.

⁵⁸ Morphy, 'Sites of persuasion'. See also Bennett, Tony 2006, 'Exhibition, difference, and the logic of culture', in Karp et al., *Museum Frictions*, pp. 46–69.

⁵⁹ Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, *National Consultations on Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Office of Multicultural Affairs, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*. Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Australians*.

⁶¹ Although the policy change in Australia seemed to respond directly to a renewed 'threat' of cultural difference associated with events including 9/11 and with other local incidents affecting Australia and Australians, it is important to note that political consensus on multiculturalism had really been shattered much earlier. In 1986, Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope responded to budget cuts by a Labor Government by publishing an article called 'The end of multiculturalism? (The view from Wollongong)' (1986, *Ethnos* [Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales], no. 54, pp. 4–5).

⁶² Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Multicultural Australia*, p. 7.

⁶³ Jakubowicz, 'Auditing multiculturalism', p. 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 9. See also <<http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/>> (viewed 14 February 2008).

⁶⁵ For details about the series of racially motivated mob confrontations that originated in and around Cronulla in December 2005, see Hage, Ghassan 2006, 'The doubts down under', *Catalyst: Journal of the British Commission for Racial Equality*, vol. 3, 17 May, viewed 14 February 2008, <<http://83.137.212.42/siteArchive/catalystmagazine/magazineissues.html>>

⁶⁶ Harmony Day is managed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as part of the Diverse Australia Program. It is celebrated on 21 March each year and coincides with the United Nation's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. See <<http://www.harmony.gov.au>> (viewed 4 March 2009).

⁶⁷ In 1982, *Multiculturalism for All Australians* expressed concern that 'questions have been raised' about whether the 'degree of tolerance, and even encouragement of diversity' that is represented in the discussion paper 'threaten national unity and social cohesion'. The text argues against this on the basis that 'Australia is strong enough to accept diversity'; however, it is precisely the same argument that comes to be used by critics of multiculturalism in later years, from the 'one nation and one future' rhetoric of Howard's 1988 One Australia policy through to government responses to 9/11. Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Australians*, p. 11. Markus, Andrew 2001, *Race: John Howard and the remaking of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, pp. 85–9.

⁶⁸ In Heywood, Lachlan 2006, 'National identity in spotlight', *The Courier-Mail*, 28 November 2006.

⁶⁹ The anti-elitist position characterised by suspicion about cosmopolitanism and political correctness links back to Howard's attempts to mobilise ordinary Australians as 'battlers'. See Flint, David 2003, *Twilight of the Elites*, Freedom Publishing, North Melbourne, Victoria.

⁷⁰ Heywood, 'National identity in spotlight'.

⁷¹ Citizenship Task Force 2006, 'Australian citizenship: much more than a ceremony', in *Consideration of the merits of introducing a formal citizenship test*, September, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Discussion Paper, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 5.

⁷² In his capacity as Chancellor of the Exchequer, just before being named British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown proclaimed the failure of multiculturalism in terms that were reaffirmed by the Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron, who remarked evocatively that '[t]he doctrine of multiculturalism has undermined our nation's sense of cohesiveness because it emphasizes what divides us rather than what brings us together'. The terms of this backlash echo the sentiments expressed by sociologist Nathan Glazer and others who have claimed that multiculturalism has failed and that the United States is fragmenting along ethnic divisions. Glazer, Nathan 1997, *We are all Multiculturalists Now*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; Cameron, David 2007, 'No one will be left behind in a Tory Britain', *The Observer*, 28 January 2007; Johnston, Philip 2007, 'Brown's manifesto for Britishness', *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 2007. See also Message, 'New directions', pp. 257–78.

⁷³ My emphasis. Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Multicultural Australia*, pp. 2, 6.

⁷⁴ Hardgrave outlines the services of his government to recent migrants, which include distribution of the 'values-focused publications of *What it Means to be An Australian Citizen*' and a program in which 'migrants are taught about our national symbols, our laws, the significance of important days like ANZAC Day, our political system and even our national heroes'. Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Australians*, pp. 14–16, 13. Hardgrave, Gary 2003, 'Twenty-five years of multiculturalism', National Press Club Address by the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, 23 July 2003, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Burnett, Jon 2007, 'Britain's "civilizing project": community cohesion and core values', *Policy and Politics*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 353–57, at p. 355. In their 1986 article, Castles et al. express similar concerns to the government's use of the term 'mainstreaming', which, despite its 'idealistic ring', might also mean 'that special services and institutions, designed to meet the particular needs of non-English speaking background people, are no longer required'. Their concern is that mainstreaming might become a fourth phase in Australia's immigrant policies: assimilation, integration, multiculturalism 'and now mainstreaming'. Castles et al., 'The end of multiculturalism?', p. 5.

⁷⁶ Carroll, *Review of the National Museum of Australia*, p. 7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

⁷⁸ Although it must be noted that: 1) Indigenous people's stories were included in the *Nation: Symbols of Australia* Gallery; and 2) that the Gallery of First Australians did represent the political struggles fought by Indigenous peoples in Australia, historically and in a contemporary context. See Note 2.

⁷⁹ For analysis of *Horizons* and discussion about the representation of migration in the NMA and other Australian museums, see Andrea Witcomb, this volume.

⁸⁰ Carroll, *Review of the National Museum of Australia*, pp. 17–20.

⁸¹ McGrath, Ann 2003, 'Diversity lost in boy's own history', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 2003. It is of further interest that objects relating to Captain Cook (including a magnifying glass in a silver case and other navigational instruments) and cricket (a baggy green cap and bat belonging to captain Greg Chappell in the 1980s and a cap and gloves worn by wicket-keeper Rod Marsh in the 1980s) feature in the new *Australian Journeys* exhibition, which opened in early 2009.

⁸² Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Multicultural Australia*.

⁸³ Carroll, *Review of the National Museum of Australia*, p. 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

⁸⁵ Nolan, David and Radywyl, Natalia 2004, 'Pluralising identity, mainstreaming identities: SBS as a technology of citizenship', *Southern Review*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 40–65, at p. 58.

⁸⁶ Rudd, Kevin 2008, 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples', House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 February.

⁸⁷ Social cohesion has been used for expedient purposes in public policy (particularly in the United Kingdom, where museum funding is often tied to evidence that they can contribute to reduced crime rates, teenage pregnancies, urban regeneration and the like). Social cohesion is, however, also important as a way of representing the impact that the recognition and exercise of diversity at the local level can have on national understandings of identity and lead to changes in the way that Australia's cultural institutions and policies represent 'community' and give greater agency to members of such. For information about a range of community-based models of citizenship that have been produced by or in association with museums, and for discussion about how these function within larger federal and state infrastructures of policy and funding, see Message, 'New directions'; Howard Morphy, this volume; and Mary Hutchison, this volume.

⁸⁸ Yúdice, George 2003, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of culture in the global era*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003.

⁸⁹ Teo, Hsu-Ming 2006, 'These days it's harder to be different', *Sydney Herald Sun*, 7 December 2006.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Kalantzis, 'Multicultural citizenship', p. 100.

⁹² Evans, Chris 2008, Adding to the Australian family on Citizenship Day 2008, Media release, 17 September 2008, viewed 9 December 2008, <<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08087.htm>>

⁹³ Rudd, 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples'.

⁹⁴ Australian Citizenship Council, *Australian Citizenship for a New Century*. The Rudd Labor Government has reinstated 'multicultural affairs', albeit as a parliamentary secretarial rather than a ministerial responsibility. It remains to be seen whether the rhetoric of pluralism present in the Prime Minister's speech will translate into policy outcomes or if the Labor Government will continue to deploy the policy put in place by the previous conservative government.

Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity

Can museums move beyond pluralism?

Andrea Witcomb

The politics surrounding the representation of notions of community in Australian museums and heritage sites has long centred on tensions around the representation of migration history. For, at the heart of differing models of migration history are different understandings of national identity and citizenship. That this is so in Australia should not be surprising. After all, we are a settler culture, born of the British Empire in the first instance and of global twentieth-century history with its patterns of war and massive population movements.

These tensions, have, however, come under increasing pressure, partly as a result of the general turn towards conservatism under the Howard Government (1996–2007) and partly as a part of a more generalised response to the threats posed by terrorism in the post 9/11 period. The trend was quite clear in Howard's attempt to change the way Australians thought about migration in relation to national identity by successfully changing the dominant discourse on Australian culture from one based on an understanding of Australian society as multicultural and premised on social and cultural diversity to one in which that very diversity was subsumed under a singular, Anglo-Celtic understanding of what it was to be Australian. The tone of this turn could easily be seen in an address he gave to the National Press Club in 2006, when he said:

We expect all who come here to make an overriding commitment to Australia, its laws and its democratic values. We expect them to master the common language of English and we will help them to do so.

We want them to learn about our history and heritage. And we expect each unique individual who joins our national journey to enrich it with their loyalty and their patriotism.¹

Central to this approach was the notion that Australian national identity was based not on a multicultural mosaic fashioned by our various waves of migration but on the centrality of an Anglo-Celtic heritage, which Howard associated with 'the old Australia':

Australia's ethnic diversity is one of the enduring strengths of our nation. Yet our celebration of diversity must not be at the expense of the common

values that bind us together as one people—respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, a commitment to the rule of law, the equality of men and women and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need. Nor should it be at the expense of ongoing pride in what are commonly regarded as the values, traditions and accomplishments of the old Australia. A sense of shared values is our social cement.²

Howard's attempt to change the way Australians thought about the relationship between migration, cultural diversity and national identity had already resulted in a review of the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 2003, which criticised that institution for its pluralist approach to the representation of identity. Clearly, understanding the history of the representation of migration in Australian museums is thus not only a window into how we have understood and applied the concept of cultural diversity; it is an opportunity to understand the limits of cultural diversity as a conceptual frame for the relations between heritage and community or between identity and nation. While our government has changed, the relentless questioning of pluralism encountered by those who wanted to pursue a cultural diversity agenda within museums during Howard's government has left us with a problem. How can we represent difference—indeed, argue for its importance—while also recognising the increasing need for social cohesion as a strategy for overcoming terrorism? Is it possible to represent cohesion or work towards achieving it as a social reality without succumbing to the consensual historical narrative favoured by the previous conservative government?

What I want to do, then, is to trace a brief summary of how migration became the main gateway to the representation of cultural diversity in Australia, describe the main forms that this representation took and open up a space for discussion by proposing that the recent conservative climate in Australia has led to an intense questioning of what constitutes Australian identity, a questioning in which models of community defined by notions of cultural diversity have had little space. The consequences of this for the question of who has access to their heritage in public spaces are serious. In order to explore these issues, I will focus on the critique of the NMA's *Horizons Gallery* as well as on the nature of contemporary debate in Australia more widely. I want to end by exploring what other models we might be able to develop to represent relations between heritage and community, which take us beyond pluralism but do not return us to a consensus model of history, in which singularity is privileged over plurality and unity over difference.

The association between migration and national identity was one of the platforms for uniting what used to be six separate colonies into a Federation called Australia. As a number of historians have commented, one of the reasons behind

Federation was a desire to maintain Australia as a white country or, more specifically, a British outpost. Of central importance was the concept of the 'crimson thread of kinship' used by Henry Parkes, the Premier of New South Wales, to overcome the difficulties of arguing at one and the same time for being a nationalist and pro-Empire.³ Equally important was the emergence of a trade union movement that feared the threat posed by the cheap labour provided by mainly Asian labourers.⁴ Hence, one of the first acts of the new Federal Parliament was the *1901 Immigration Act*. This excluded anyone who did not pass a dictation test in a European language dictated by the officer.⁵ Originally designed to keep out those of Asian origin, it was also quite successful in making it difficult for southern and eastern European people to migrate. Shortly after, in 1903, the *Naturalisation Act* denied non-European immigrants the right to citizenship, forcing many of them to return home. Together, these formed the basis of what came to be known as the White Australia Policy.

Increasing condemnation of the White Australia Policy by the international community in the period immediately after World War II, together with the post-war recognition that Australia needed to increase its population for both defence and development purposes, led to a change of migration policy at the national level by the Chiefly Government. Slowly, the country began to accept migrants from places other than Britain under individual arrangements made between the Australian Government and the governments of the countries concerned.⁶ The dictation test was removed from the statute book in 1958 and, eventually, the White Australia Policy was formally abandoned, by Prime Minister Harold Holt, in 1966. The resulting increase in non-British migration was initially controlled at an ideological level by an assimilation policy in which all migrants had to adapt to Australian ways of life, learn English and keep their ethnic identity within the home. By 1973, however, the Whitlam Government introduced a new concept known as multiculturalism, which 'endorsed diversity rather than singularity as the fabric of nationalism',⁷ although it also maintained the idea that the nation was owed one's overall allegiance.

The introduction of multiculturalism as a formal policy was such a radical reinterpretation of Australian society and culture that it required a massive public campaign to re-educate the Anglo majority and those who identified as ethnic to value cultural difference—a point that was recognised by the *Galbally Report* in 1978. Furthermore, as Ian McShane notes, the advent of multiculturalism as a policy happened to coincide with the development of social history and, within that, of migration history as an area of interest for historians.⁸ Not surprisingly, governments and museums saw an opportunity. The development of social history as an area for museum collections and exhibitions was also the moment at which museums began to express an interest in forging

links with migrant communities and governments began to see museums as significant agents in their campaign to change public attitudes.

The pivotal point here was the 1978 *Galbally Report*, which was a review of post-arrival programs and services.⁹ Commissioned by the Fraser Government, the report argued that more support was needed to enable ethnic communities and cultural agencies to undertake the work of cultural maintenance and preservation. By 1981, the *Edwards Report* into South Australian museums was arguing for 'the need to develop multiculturalism through community education'.¹⁰ One of the outcomes was the establishment of the SA Migration Museum, which became a pioneer in the representation of cultural diversity. Its work became a model for other museums wanting to work with migrant communities and foster acceptance of cultural diversity as central to Australian identity.

Given this educational impulse, it is not surprising that the initial suite of exhibitions was largely celebratory in nature and advanced an understanding of multiculturalism as a melting pot—what Viv Szekeres refers to as the 'liberal tradition' in migration exhibitions¹¹ and McShane calls the 'enrichment narrative'.¹² Exhibitions in this tradition did this largely by focusing on external markers of ethnicity and interpreting these as adding to the vibrancy of Australian culture. Thus, migrants were, and still are, depicted as revolutionising our food, introducing the cappuccino, improving our sense of style and adding a sense of cosmopolitanism to an otherwise bland Anglo culture. An example was a 1999 exhibition in which Szekeres was herself involved, *Chops and Changes*, the introductory text of which read:

Welcome to our multicultural market packed with foods, people, places and history. We called this exhibition *Chops and Changes* because we wanted to make the point that the Australian diet is no longer dominated by the English-style lamb chop.¹³

In line with the desire to convince the broader Australian population of the benefits of multiculturalism, many of the early exhibitions were also propaganda agencies for government by becoming a venue through which they could disseminate information about migration programs and the need for them—an aim the Department of Immigration supported through substantial sponsorship of museum programs. Exhibitions from this angle largely resulted in a depiction of cultural diversity from a conservative position in which, as Szekeres described it, Australia distributed 'largesse...Migrants are very lucky to be allowed in, especially since they were all so miserable and struggling in their own countries. Migrants should fit in as quickly as possible.'¹⁴

All in all, these celebratory exhibitions became what we now describe as 'suitcase narrative exhibitions', dealing with such questions as why did the migrants

come, with what and what did they contribute to Australia? As McShane comments, the suitcase narrative is also largely devoted to post-World War II migration and there is, in fact, not much analysis of nineteenth-century migration and its contribution to cultural diversity.¹⁵ When nineteenth-century migration is represented, it is often within maritime museums, where it becomes an opportunity to recreate the interior of the ships, focusing largely on the privations of the passage. The majority of these deal with British migration, although a few displays are beginning to point to the fact that other cultural groups also migrated to Australia at this time. For example, at the Melbourne Immigration Museum, a recreation of the interior of an iron steamship from the late nineteenth century includes extracts from German diaries read out in German.

Nevertheless, the general tendency to focus on post-war migration, while excusable in terms of the impact of that migration period and the sheer numbers involved—about 5.7 million people—does tend to obscure from the field of analysis larger questions such as the impact of colonisation, empire, trade and population policy. The result is that few exhibitions come from what Szekeres calls a ‘radical perspective’, one that questions the social, economic and political structures behind migration patterns and experiences. It also, as McShane¹⁶ points out, makes it easy for the public to assume the existence of a monolithic Australia before this period, making the aim of representing Australia as a multicultural society practically impossible, as migrants are by default categorised as ‘the other’ even if this other is a benign or even a positive force for change. The idea that there is another Australia, which is the normal one, is maintained. From this position, it is almost impossible to critique policies of assimilation and integration or indeed to take a close look at the ways in which migration policy has been aligned with policies on population and cultural identity. These problems become quite clear if we conduct a quick review of some of the major exhibitions dealing with the theme of migration in the past 10 to 15 years.

The Australian National Maritime Museum’s opening exhibition for its *Passengers Gallery* in 1991 used the familiar trope of the passage itself to open up the topic of migrating and the multicultural nature of Australian society. While the use of the trope in itself is not surprising in a maritime museum, the interpretative approach taken is an example of what McShane¹⁷ calls the redemptive or rebirth narrative in which migrants come to a better place and can start again. It is always a positive story that puts Australia in a good light, enacting a deeply held mythology that Australians are fair-minded people who give everyone a ‘fair go’. The theme was particularly strong in the displays that dealt with post-war migration, as revealed by this label, reproduced in the opening catalogue:

The Migrants

It was the consciousness of inhabiting an underpopulated island, oceans away from familiar cultures, that prompted Anglo-Saxon Australia to open its shores to new waves of migrants. They arrived here in their millions, and the majority came by sea.

For many migrants, this was the opportunity to leave behind persecution or the disruption of war in a variety of 'old countries'. For others, there was the promise of better economic opportunities. Often the belongings they carried were few and simple. In this exhibition they make a poignant commentary on the courage it takes to voyage so far to an unknown land.¹⁸

The liberal tradition that uses the standard recipe of 'add ethnics and stir', otherwise known as the melting pot or the enriching narrative, is captured by exhibitions that focus on the notion of contribution to Australian society. These are the exhibitions in which cultural diversity comes out as ethnic folklore, riotous colour, fantastic food and 'foreign' religious customs. Such exhibitions serve a double function: they help to maintain, document and preserve ethnic heritages and give ethnic communities a sense of their public value. At the same time, they reinforce the distance between mainstream Australia and ethnic groups. While some of these exhibitions are curated in-house within the social history departments of Australia's large museums or in specialised migration museums, many also come about through the community gallery movement in which small spaces within mainstream museums are 'given' over to communities for the purposes of self-representation within the overall educational aim of 'teaching' cultural diversity. A recent example from 2007 is the *Beyond the Postcard Image* exhibition, which celebrated the Rodriguan and Mauritian communities in Victoria. The blurb for the exhibition read:

Beyond the Postcard Image

Victoria's Rodriguans and Mauritians

People from Mauritius and Rodrigues—two small and exotic but relatively unknown Indian Ocean islands—have established themselves as a strong and vibrant community in Victoria.

This new exhibition reveals that beyond the picture-postcard tropical island heritage, the Mauritian and Rodriguan community is innately diverse—in religious, folkloric and culinary traditions.

Another example comes from the Museum of the Riverina's exhibition *From all Four Corners: Stories of migration to Wagga Wagga*, which was developed as part of a multicultural festival in Wagga Wagga for the winter of 2007. The exhibition continues to have an afterlife as an online resource. *From all Four Corners*

continues the enriching tradition by embedding all of its stories of migration within a celebratory narrative in which the newcomers make good by becoming 'valued community members' and contributing to a multicultural mosaic. Their achievements are described by the standard approach to valuing their ethnic differences around food, customs and religion while also pointing out their successful integration in terms of work and family life. Thus, an introductory label on the web version of the exhibition explains that the migrants represented in the exhibition

have survived. They have married, had children, gone to school, studied, bought homes, found employment, set up businesses, formed clubs, established a social life, shared their customs, traditions and cooking, practised their religion, and became valued community members.¹⁹

This exhibition does, however, overcome some of the limitations identified by McShane in the enriching narrative. In particular, the definition of who is a migrant is quite broad, ranging from a nineteenth-century soldier settler to a recent arrival from Sierra Leone. Its limitation, from the point of view of a 'critical' perspective on migration, is that it remains within the frame of multiculturalism as a mosaic by focusing on individual ethnicities rather than on the kind of cross-cultural contact that really produces multicultural societies. Thus, in an attempt to keep the exhibition continuing, the exhibition site asks viewers from Wagga Wagga to share their migrant stories by answering such questions as 'What was life like in your country of origin? How did you come to Australia? Where is home to you?'²⁰ Such questions, while doing a good job in terms of catering to the social inclusion agenda, do little to foster social cohesion because they do not allow a space for representing contact across cultures and groups.

While it is easy to point to the simplified, celebratory narratives that a focus on multiculturalism has generated, there are also a significant number of exhibitions that offer more. There are examples of exhibitions that blend an enrichment narrative with a more nuanced look at the history of cultural diversity in Australia and its relationship to various governmental policies on migration. Quite a few of these exhibitions made attempts to counter the dominant narrative of pre-World War II Australia as monocultural, engaged in a critique of migration policy, and explored the structural reasons for migration.

A very early example that managed to introduce some reflective moments was one of the opening exhibitions at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. Social history was a new development at this museum and very much part of its redevelopment in time for the Bicentenary in 1988. As part of the Social History Department's exhibitions, one gallery was devoted to the theme of 'Australian communities'. In this context, the gallery dealt with post-settlement Indigenous history and issues of cultural diversity. This made it one of the earliest attempts

to negotiate the place of Indigenous communities within the rubric of cultural diversity—something that was of obvious political sensitivity. The interesting thing is that this gallery looked at Australian history from the perspective of migration, arguing that there had always been an element of cultural diversity to Australian society. Thus, settlers were called migrants, Irish and Anglo settlers were pointed to as well as the Chinese, Italians, Greeks and Germans. A critical element was introduced with a critique of the White Australia Policy and assimilation—which one would expect from an agency of government promoting multiculturalism. Emphasis was also placed on discussing assisted-passage schemes as well as those that took refugees. As such, those from a British background were also represented as migrants and part of Australia's ethnic mix. This was important as it represented an important point of departure from the previous celebratory model in which ethnicity was not something that marked the dominant Anglo-Celtic majority. Here, perhaps for the first time, there was a sense in which the community was defined by cultural diversity. In other words, cultural diversity was the starting point rather than something that was added like icing on the top. The need to teach cultural diversity, however, was still keenly felt, particularly in relations with Asian groups, as the following quotation from a pamphlet accompanying the exhibition revealed:

Regrettably, well-entrenched negative attitudes towards Asians, left over from the 1800s and World War II, still exist. Despite the rich contribution of Asian immigrants, some parts of the Australian community continue to express resentment and hostility towards them.²¹

Another particularly impressive exhibition was *Sweet and Sour: Experiences of Chinese families in the Northern Territory* by the Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery in association with the Chung Wah Association in 1997.²² The exhibition was remarkable on three counts. First, it provided a history of the extensive presence of people of Chinese descent since the 1870s; second, it balanced an explicit narrative of celebration and continuity with a reflective look at the 'sour' aspects of the Chinese community's experience by looking at the impact of the White Australia and assimilationist policies; and third, it provided a structural context for Chinese migration into the area by looking at the history of trade and industry. The exhibition possessed a rare depth and historical dimension to its analysis of multiculturalism in the Northern Territory, using the Chinese community as a case study. In the process, it showed how an 'enriching' narrative did not have to exclude a more critical or reflective perspective. Perhaps one of the lessons that can be drawn from this exhibition is that the representation of cultural diversity through migration exhibitions should include relations between those that come and those that are already here—in other words, be attentive to the dialogue that occurs between groups. In that respect, an exhibition such as *Chops and Changes* offers more than initially

meets the eye as its theme allows for a comparative perspective across groups, including the Anglo majority. The limitation is that it is done within the frame of 'teaching multiculturalism'—a frame that seems to make it almost impossible to 'other' the majority, or at least put it on an equal footing.

The trend to develop more exploratory and insightful exhibitions could perhaps be seen as culminating in certain aspects of the *Horizons: The peopling of Australia since 1788 Gallery* at the NMA, which opened in 2001. Divided into five themes—Keeping Guard, Marketing Migrants, Coming to Work, Prisons Without Walls and The Peopling of Australia Since 1788—this exhibition attempted to look at migration from a more structural perspective, looking in particular at the ways in which immigration policy regulated who was allowed to come in and out. While the National Collection was partial in its collection of ethnic material culture, having collected much that could be described as belonging to the 'suitcase' narrative, an attempt was made to broaden the context, as this excerpt from the introductory text to the Keeping Guard theme illustrates:

Australia's population has been shaped by many things. But one of the most important forces has been the role government has played in deciding who and what is allowed into the country.

Horizons looked at three types of immigration regulation—restriction, quarantine and censorship—and at how each impacted on the other. It also reminded us of how official decisions can affect individual lives. Display items such as the handprint of a prohibited individual and the story of Eugene Goossens told of a more suspicious past that was peppered with uncertainty and fear. As we shall see, the attempt was brave for, by this point in Australia's recent history, public debate was turning against multiculturalism and the values of cultural diversity.

While the gallery contained examples of the enriching and rebirth narratives by including individual migrant stories, which highlighted the appalling conditions that were left behind and stories of being better off in their new country, these were done analytically with an eye to showing how this narrative was an effect of government propaganda. To show the other side of the story, there were also examples that focused on the difficulties of settling into a new country. In particular, the mythology of a 'fair go' was placed under a question mark with examples of highly qualified people who could never practice their profession again through lack of official recognition of degrees. I remember the story of Ilija Brakmanis, a Latvian-trained dentist whose professional equipment sat idle for many years. Eventually, after many years working as a domestic cleaner, Brakmanis was allowed a limited practice in Canberra. Proof that she had never expected to encounter problems in practising in Australia is given through the presence of an English translation of her qualifications, done while she was still in a displaced person's camp in Germany. Audiences were thus encouraged to think about who was allowed to come and why, how that question

had changed over time and, just as importantly, how our reception of migrants also told a story about our own cultural assumptions about those who were different from us.

The issue was of particular salience at the time, as Australia was experiencing a new wave of 'boat people' attempting to seek asylum without going through the Immigration Department before getting to Australia. Public debate about the refugee issue was mounting and a number of museums attempted to participate through exhibitions that explored the world of refugees. *Survivors of Torture and Trauma*, for example, was an exhibition at the Migration Museum in Adelaide, held between 6 September and 30 November 2001. The museum explained its role thus:

The exhibition provided a brief overview of survivors, people who have come to South Australia, overcoming incredibly difficult and often traumatic experiences to attempt to build new lives here. The exhibition aimed to help people understand the experience of survivors, who have often come as refugees and faced difficulties in Australia also. It included personal stories as well as information on the processes refugees go through in order to come here.²³

Given the increasingly strident tone of public debate at the national level against refugees, this was already a brave exhibition, which was clearly trying to enter the debate.

As it happens, neither the NMA nor the Migration Museum could have predicted two major events: 9/11 and the Tampa incident. Both were to make it increasingly harder to argue for leniency and sympathy for refugees as the fear that they might be terrorists grew apace. As the Western world geared up for 'the war on terrorism', disaster also struck off the Australian coast. An Indonesian boat, *KM Palapa 1*, laden with refugees from the Taliban, was attempting to make it to Christmas Island in Australian waters. Its engine stopped working. One boat had already sailed by ignoring them and 'numerous Australian planes had circled overhead but left them to wallow in the sea' as the Australian Government attempted to avoid responsibility and demanded that the Indonesian Government both rescue the asylum-seekers and take them back to Indonesia.²⁴ When this policy came to naught, the government eventually put out a rescue call, which the *Tampa*, a Norwegian cargo ship, took up. The intention, however, was still to stop these people from arriving on Australian territory, which was already over capacity with asylum-seekers. The Australian Government refused to allow the *Tampa* into an Australian port. Eventually, an arrangement was brokered with New Zealand and the Pacific island of Nauru, which took in the refugees so that they could apply to come to Australia from outside the country. Despite furore from the left, the electorate supported the government's stance or, at least, did not allow itself to be too bothered by the situation, as the government

was returned barely two months after what many regarded as one of Australia's worst public relations disasters. No doubt 9/11, which occurred about the same time, did much to help the government's stance, as public fear ran high. The result was a public culture in which difference became a problem not a virtue, particularly in relations between Muslim and Anglo-Australians.

Emboldened by its electoral success, the government continued to raise the debate between integration and social cohesion on the one hand and cultural diversity on the other even further, with Muslim communities often being made the scapegoat. We can see this if we trace the Prime Minister's discourse on the balance between cultural diversity and national identity.

The 2001 Australia Day address, just before the NMA opened and before either the Tampa or 9/11, gives a sense of the way things were going, for the focus was already on social cohesion:

Our social cohesion is a priceless asset. It will underpin the future progress and harmony of our nation. For this very reason we have an obligation to seek out and address those flaws in our society which threaten our community's cohesion.²⁵

By 3 October 2003, at the official launch of the Moreton 2004 Community Achievement Awards at Macgregor State School in Brisbane, when public angst was high over perceptions that the Muslim community was not fitting in, Howard stated:

We don't ask them to forget the country of their birth, nobody should be asked to do that. But we do, of course, ask that people having come to this country from all parts of the world that they are received into our community as equals. The only requirement of a patriotic Australian is a total commitment to this country and that applies whether you were born here or whether you came from another country and you embrace it as your own.²⁶

The need to soften the Islamic community's practice of difference was clearly expressed in multiple radio interviews, of which the first example came just before the Cronulla riots in 2006:

We want people when they come to Australia to adopt Australian ways, we don't ask them to forget the countries of their birth, we respect all religious points of view and people are entitled to practice them. But there are certain things that are not part of the Australian mainstream and I've identified two in particular in relation to a section of the Islamic Population.²⁷

In time, his position solidified, and he became strident in his support of the notion that a nation could be based on only one culture:

We are tolerant to people of different backgrounds but over the years at its zenith, the more zealous multiculturalism basically said that this country should be a federation of cultures. You can't have a nation with a federation of cultures. You can have a nation where a whole variety of cultures influence and mould and change and blend in with the mainstream culture...you have to recognise that there is a core set of values in this country.²⁸

And, finally, on the question of multiculturalism and its relevance for contemporary Australian identity:

If multiculturalism simply means that we respect everybody, we want everybody to be an Australian first, second and third, but we also understand that people retain affections for their original cultures and countries, and that's perfectly normal and I think we enjoy it. And we want those other cultures to be part of our mainstream culture and we welcome that. Now, if it means that we're all for it. If it means that we're going to encourage people to maintain their differences and that basically we have an attitude that well all cultures are equal, all cultures are the same, then I don't think people feel comfortable with that.²⁹

Many people on the left now think that the terms 'social cohesion' or 'integration' are just new words for the old policy of assimilation. It is very clear from the former Prime Minister's public discourse that he wanted to make Anglo-Australian values the core of Australian identity in what was very clearly a direct challenge to the notion that cultural diversity lay at the heart of Australian identity. For Howard, there was a mainstream, dominant Australian identity and cultural diversity, to the extent that it was supported, was the icing on the cake—but not the cake itself.

If we go back to the NMA, then, it is quite clear why that museum sailed into troubled waters as soon as it opened its doors in March 2001. At that stage, conservatives were angry at what they described as black-armband history, claiming that the NMA made Australians feel bad about themselves. Many argued that the museum satirised everyday life and poked fun at the ordinary Australian.³⁰ The government responded by commissioning a review, which reported its findings in 2003. By then, what came through was not so much an attack on revisionist history—indeed, the gallery that dealt with Aboriginal Australia was, on the whole, highly commended. Instead, it was an attack on pluralism—that is, on the way the NMA dealt with the themes of cultural diversity. *Horizons* was one of two galleries that came in for especially heavy criticism. The other was *Nation*. Reading the document now, after reminding myself of Howard's public pronouncements on the issue of cultural diversity versus cohesion, I am struck by how often the reviewers point to the need for an 'integrated narrative', for a 'single' story to be told, preferably in chronological

order and most of it celebratory. In their recommendations, migration almost disappears as a theme for display let alone a theme worthy of an entire gallery. The theme of cultural diversity is applauded only when it does not deal directly with the issue of immigration—as in the *Eternity Gallery*, which offers individual Australian stories up as a microcosm of the nation organised around seven different human passions. Within a rotating menu of stories, there are Australians of various ethnic backgrounds, differing sexualities, both genders, rural and urban, professional and working class.

The real purpose of the review is very much an attack on pluralism. This is signalled in the second chapter, which offers some reflections on the nature of Australian history and the vision that established the criteria for the review. Thus, in acknowledging the need to give some sense of the diversity of everyday life in Australia, the reviewers also pointed to the ‘risk...of presenting an assembly of ill-coordinated fragments, merely serving to confuse the visitor’.³¹ Consequently, they argued against Graeme Davison, one of Australia’s most respected public historians on Australian history, who had already gone in to bat for the museum’s understanding of cultural diversity a number of times. Davison had argued in a submission to the review that:

Rather than suppressing difference by imposing a single authorial voice, or brokering an institutional consensus, the NMA might better begin with the assumption that the imagined community we call the nation is by its very nature plural and in flux. In practice the degree of difference should not be exaggerated; there are many topics of high interest on which there is a substantial consensus of opinion. A national museum might then expect to play host to several interpretations of the national past, stirring patriotic as well as critical, educationally demanding as well as entertaining.³²

The panel went to great lengths to disagree with Davison’s opinion, explaining that they were ‘inclined to read more consensus than plurality at the core of the national collective conscience’. In particular, they wanted to focus on continuities rather than flux. They claimed this difference in approach was one only of emphasis and would not lead to a ‘notably different series of judgements in reviewing the NMA’.³³ The difference, however, was clearly visible both in their criteria for judging the museum, which was developed by the panel rather than given to them, and in their comments on the *Horizons Gallery*. Thus, for the panel, criterion number one was the requirement for the NMA to ‘[t]ell the Australian story—and by means of compelling narratives’.³⁴ The second was to

[p]resent the primary themes and narratives of Australia since the arrival of the British, through the building of the nation to the country’s place in the contemporary world. This includes evoking national character

traits; detailing exemplary individual, group and institutional achievements; and charting the singular qualities of the nation.³⁵

Against these two first criteria, *Horizons* was judged as suffering from 'some confusion of identity', with the panel recommending it be scrapped and refocused more 'explicitly on the European discovery-until-Federation period'.³⁶ The theme of peopling Australia, they felt, could be dealt with in vignettes in other galleries and in temporary exhibitions. Their main critique of *Horizons* was that it failed to project 'exemplary individual, group and institutional achievements'.³⁷ It is hard not to read this as a criticism of the fact that the gallery failed to present the story of migration as either the enriching or the rebirth narrative. They were particularly critical of the attempt to conscript convict history to the theme of migration, clearly expecting the introduction of convicts to lead to a very different narrative about the nation—one based on progress from small beginnings. The significance of the issues at hand was of sufficient importance for one member of the review panel to insist on a 'minority opinion' disclosure in which he argued against a chronological frame for the representation of Australian history and supporting the peopling Australia theme as important enough to have a gallery in its own right.³⁸

Given these criticisms, one could take the revamping of the *Horizons Gallery* into *Australian Journeys*, which opened in January 2009, as an attempt to deal with the problem of the politics of narrative by evading it altogether. Instead of presenting a narrative about migration in Australia, either from an enriching or a critical perspective, the present gallery evades the question by not engaging with the history of migration at all. Instead, it opts for the safer landscape of presenting vignettes of cultural exchanges, the flow of ideas and goods to and from Australia via the journeys of those who came here as well as those who went overseas. While the choice of some of the objects and stories might be informed by themes in migration history—the continuity of ethnic cultural practices, the difficulties experienced by migrants and the exchange of goods and ideas being some of them—these frames are not made explicit. Nor are the stories linked to the historical context that surrounds them. As Linda Young³⁹ comments, this approach results in 'a beautifully contrived beach decked with stories' but it does nothing to provide a 'bigger account', a frame through which one can understand the global movement of people and its impact on particular national histories. Obscured from view are the policy frameworks, the political contexts and the national histories that give rise to the journeys undertaken by migrants and travellers more generally. Difference is rendered safe, much in the same way that it was in the *Eternity Gallery*—through the attraction of personal stories.

It would be easy to assume that the problem is particularly acute at the NMA and that, somehow, this museum appears to find it difficult to engage in strong

narratives. In comparison, for example, it would seem that the Migration Museum in Melbourne is strengthening its critical narratives. In its opening exhibitions, also in 2001, for example, it managed to comment on public attitudes towards refugees through a label about asylum-seekers:

Asylum seekers are refugees, seeking new countries in which to settle. Australia provides protection for asylum seekers under its Humanitarian Program.

It is not illegal to seek asylum in Australia. It is a basic human right, accepted by all signatories, including Australia, to the 1951 UN Convention and 1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

And then underneath this heading and label:

Illegal Immigrants

Illegal Immigrants are people who have not met any legal requirements for visiting or migrating to Australia. This includes thousands of people who overstay their visas, many from Britain and the United States. Overstayers outnumber asylum seekers by ten to one.⁴⁰

Clearly, this was part of an attempt to correct some of the misunderstandings that had arisen in the public imagination in response to contemporary debates and political rhetoric.

Even stronger is an interactive touch screen in which visitors get to vote on whether someone should be allowed to come into Australia or not and what the official decision at the time was. Inevitably, making decisions on present-day values rather than through the White Australia Policy or even the post-war migration policy, the gulf between past and present humanitarian values shines through. What is most harrowing is to watch the expressions of suffering on people's faces when they are not a straightforward case. As the audience, you literally squirm in your seat, uncomfortable at the lack of imagination and sympathy on the part of the officials. And even more interesting is the fact that this booth is always in use and it generates discussion between strangers about what is happening on screen and what people are feeling about it.

Unlike the NMA, the Migration Museum, rather than having to back down from this approach, is in fact strengthening its critical approach by developing a new suite of exhibitions that engage with racism. The question thus remains, why is it so difficult for a museum like the NMA to engage with strong narratives—either pluralist or consensual? Perhaps the answer lies in the way these two positions have become politicised so that they have come to represent liberal and conservative in ways that a national museum cannot possibly navigate. Unable to take either political position, it seeks refuge in no narrative at all. The battle lines are, however, also unhelpful at a more general level. They do not

allow those on the pluralist side to deal with the fact that social cohesion, and not just social inclusion, is also necessary. On the other hand, those on the side of consensus push too stridently for integration, for the single narrative from within the one perspective. We need to get away from viewing the choices as an either/or. How do we do this?

Somehow we need to get to a point where we can talk about shared experiences as well as differences of experience. This, I suggest, is possible only by finding ways in which elements within an exhibition are clearly in conversation with one another as well as with audiences. Rather than 'teaching' diversity, exhibitions need to enact it. Here, I want to advance two ways of going about this. The first is to find themes and places that contain within them a variety of experiences. Diversity in this scenario is not something that is outside the mainstream, but is something within it. In other words, normative narratives within a nation's historiography can be opened from the inside out. All one has to do is look at how people have rubbed shoulders with one another, to look at everyday life and how it is experienced. Attention to the differing experiences of class, race, gender and location would continue; but rather than using these categories separately, they would be in dialogue with one another by virtue of their place within a shared historiographical theme or a geographical location. The second, and ideally related, strategy is to find ways in which the audience is also brought into the dialogue. Of central importance here is the use of affect as an interpretative strategy. Affect works through evoking, moving or touching the viewer, producing a visceral response that promotes empathy rather than just simply sympathy. Feeling empathy is a prerequisite for dialogue, for the recognition of commonalities. While sympathy can reinforce differences by operating in terms of power relations, empathy can build bridges. As bell hooks puts it, such strategies have the capacity to bring subjects and listeners together into the same territory and on the same footing.⁴¹

The potential of this approach is exemplified by a recent exhibition called *Migration Memories*. Curated in situ at Robinvale and at Lightning Ridge by Mary Hutchison before being combined in a temporary exhibition at the NMA, this exhibition used, among its strategies, a complex approach to sound to emphasise two things. The first was to build a sense of place in which diversity was the norm rather than something layered on top of an original community. The second was to use the layers of sound to create a space in which the viewer/listener was embedded in this diversity and hence part of it.

While the voices within the exhibition emanated from individual experiences and they ranged across time, ethnicity, age and gender, they were not there as representatives of particular ethnic groups but as people with particular stories to tell. Moreover, unlike conventional sound bites from oral histories, the sounds or stories audiences hear in this exhibition retain the quality of a conversation;

there is already a listener in the recording whose presence is allowed to shine through. These conversations also occur in multiple languages and the work involved in translation is embedded in them. The effect of this is to make translation an everyday activity, not something that is outside of it. The effect is a soundscape in which a sense of place defined by a diversity of experiences is evoked through the conversations that take place as part of its everyday life—conversations that take place in multiple languages in which English is only one among many. It is therefore a conversation in which audiences can imaginatively also participate. The effect is to give agency to those whose voices we are hearing as well as to those who are hearing them. In other words, there is a dialogue between them.

In conclusion, it seems to me that there are ways in which the use of personal stories can be used to create a meaningful patchwork, which does not degenerate either into a series of unconnected vignettes or into a narrative that simply supports a simplistic understanding of diversity in which there is a clear distinction between those who simply add colour and interest and those who are 'normal' and whom we should all aspire to be like. The real need to learn how to live together demands more than either a consensual or a pluralistic approach to representation.

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Dimensions for a folding exhibition

Exhibiting diversity in theory and practice in the *Migration Memories* exhibitions

Mary Hutchison

Introduction

Every time you walk around Angledool station, you find things; reminders of people who came here for different reasons, reminders of people who were already here when the newcomers arrived.¹

This paper discusses approaches to exhibiting diversity explored in an Australian Research Council Linkage project called *Migration Memories: Creating and analysing collaborative museum representations of Australian migration histories*. The project was based at The Australian National University in partnership with the National Museum of Australia (NMA) from 2005 to 2008. It explored alternatives to the 'celebration of diversity' paradigm typical of multicultural discourse and the individualisation of difference required by the 'consensus' model promoted in social cohesion policy. Drawing on the research, I suggest reframing diversity as an interaction between different social-historical positions and experiences. I argue that it can be achieved through interventions in the practice of exhibition-making, such as those tried in *Migration Memories*.²

Migration Memories' interventions rested on 'undoing' ethnicity as the established category of difference in migration exhibitions and asserting other aspects of distinction and potential engagement. The exhibitions created in the research process investigated the use of the historical, the local and the personal as distinct vantage points from which migration might be seen and felt in many different ways across time and place. As my discussion shows, they did this primarily by working with agency, collaboration and imagination as key elements of exhibition development and design.

My discussion, as with the *Migration Memories* research itself, is offered in the spirit of contributing to a museum exhibition practice that has grown from the aspirations of multiculturalism as an alternative to monoculturalism and assimilationist policies.³ My investigation of alternative forms of exhibiting diversity, while critiquing aspects of this practice, has the same intentions to democratise interpretations of Australian history and culture. The first part of my paper provides a brief overview of the research project and situates it within the wider history of multiculturalist discourses and their impact on Australian

migration exhibitions. It also sets out the theoretical underpinnings of the research and shows how these have been taken up in practice. The second part concentrates on the critical aspects of practice I have identified as agency, collaboration and imagination, and discusses aspects of working with the personal in historical context, the personal meaning of objects and the local as a frame of reference. In conclusion, I draw together key threads of the research to highlight the practical dimensions of exhibiting diversity as an interaction between different social-historical positions and experiences.

My role in the *Migration Memories* project was that of project researcher and curator of the three exhibitions made as part of the research. I came to the project as a curator of social history, with a historian's interest in narrative and an oral historian's interest in what individuals made of their experience; the stories they told and the discourses they drew on. I also brought a writer's perspective to the shaping of story and the selection of strategies for engaging an audience's imagination. My interest was in establishing a collaborative approach to research in which the knowledge and experience of all participants produced what was discovered and made. In the exhibitions, the active role of the participants who developed their stories with me for display was made clear by using text that was distinctly authored by them and by me. In this way, their personal experience and point of view were voiced independently rather than as 'quotations'. In the same spirit, I use pieces from the participants' exhibition texts throughout this paper to give a sense of the material that informs it, but does not exist for it or within its frame.⁴ My intention is to provide a glimpse of the voices and stories that made *Migration Memories*. In the context of this paper, it is a subtle dialogue—more poetic than literal—a reminder of conversation rather than a performance of it.

Overview of *Migration Memories* research

My uncle said to me, 'Take only your handbag. Don't look back. Whatever you have in the cupboard—forget it.'⁵

Migration Memories produced two exploratory exhibitions, each in small regional localities with rich and distinct migration histories. The first was in Lightning Ridge, an opal-mining town in central northern New South Wales; the second in Robinvale, a horticultural town on the Murray River in north-western Victoria. The development of the exhibitions was supported by partnerships with local community organisations. These included historical societies and organisations concerned with migration issues. The exhibitions were shown separately in their localities (at the Lightning Ridge Historical Society in August 2006 and the Robinvale Leisure Centre in June 2007) and together at the NMA in Canberra in September 2007. With the support of the NMA, they were returned to their respective communities.

Within the local frame, each exhibition featured seven personal ‘stories’ of migration. These reflected critical local immigration events from the colonial period to the present and included the experience of migration from an Indigenous perspective. Each story was presented as a distinct, stand-alone configuration of artefacts, images and texts within the exhibition as a whole. Each was also shaped as a ‘dialogue’ between its meaning for a contemporary local resident for whom the migration was significant, and the history of the particular migration. The displays were developed in close collaboration with the individual participants—or ‘storytellers’. Among the storytellers, there were first, second and third-generation perspectives and those based on intimate connections with place and culture.

The local was foregrounded in the exhibition design—through images, graphics and fabrication—and in introductory text. A time line showing significant local events in the context of developments in Australian migration history provided a chronological reference for the individual histories. The sound installations for each exhibition used the sound of voices in conversation, along with other local sounds, to express local cultural diversity.

A central research theme—and the one that was most relevant to this paper—concerned creating alternative exhibition practices, which used the local, personal and historical as key terms of reference in presenting Australian migration history as a common but heterogeneous experience, rather than one belonging to a particular section of society. Other areas of research included how people ‘remember’ and understand migration histories of different times and types, and the processes and impacts of creating a story from life experience.

It is important to note that the exhibitions were not a research outcome that was tested against intentions. The research process *was* the preparation, development and display of the exhibitions. Each stage was regarded as part of the exploration and as productive of material for analysis and discussion. The exhibitions themselves were seen as documents for analysis. Equally important material was provided by documentation of the process of developing the exhibitions with community participants and by visitor responses to the exhibitions in local and national settings.

Context and issues: ‘Diversity’ and migration exhibitions from multiculturalism to social cohesion

Then, in 1936, the government moved them to Brewarrina. Took the lot, children and grandparents and all. And it had a really sad ending to it because most of the old people died down there and were buried in a strange country.⁶

Migration Memories took place in a well-established landscape of Australian migration exhibitions and museums. Its response to theoretical issues in the field

was sharpened around issues of diversity in a political climate that had shifted from the celebration of cultural diversity to anxiety about it.⁷ The following discussion draws on Ian McShane's and Andrea Witcomb's respective analyses of migration exhibitions and highlights issues that are particularly relevant to the approach to exhibiting diversity taken by *Migration Memories*.⁸

The first Australian migration museum opened its doors in Adelaide in 1986. By the end of the twentieth century, a number of museums and collections devoted to the culture and history of particular ethnic groups in Australia had emerged. The NSW Migration Heritage Centre was established in 1997, the Melbourne Immigration Museum was established in 1999 and migration became a regular topic of museum exhibitions. During this period, a typical style of 'migration' exhibition emerged, which Ian McShane argued was a servant of Australian multicultural policy rather than a frame for looking at migration history.⁹ I refer to this as the 'multicultural' migration exhibition—a typical form, rather than a particular exhibition.

The seeds of a close relationship between museums and government policy were sown in the earliest days of multiculturalism when there was clear government interest in preserving cultural heritage as part and parcel of a range of programs supporting the settlement of recent immigrants.¹⁰ Heritage professionals, librarians and museum curators saw it as an important opportunity to represent, record and preserve Australia's wide range of cultures and their diverse histories.¹¹ The multicultural migration exhibition evolved through this 'good fit' between government policy and museum interests concerned with their 'responsibility'¹² to reflect the history and culture of all members of the community rather than of an elite.¹³ Its content and form were marked as much by the time in which it developed as by multicultural ideology.

The focus of the multicultural migration exhibition as it emerged was the huge number of newcomers who arrived as part of the Federal Government's revolutionary postwar immigration program.¹⁴ With time, this has been refined and extended. The major migration museums have permanent displays highlighting key periods in immigration history, including the colonial period and the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people. They also include exhibits about recent refugee settlement and interactive installations that invite visitors to apply the immigration regulations of particular historical periods to prospective immigrant scenarios. Most migration exhibitions themselves, however, whatever their genesis, take the traditional form of a single cultural display: the Greeks in Australia, the Latvians, the Vietnamese, and so on. Their hallmark is the display of traditional artefacts brought to Australia. These exhibitions reflect the idea of multicultural society as 'a mosaic of ethnic diversity',¹⁵ which expands with the addition of different groups of newcomers. Such exhibitions

have a limited capacity to explore migration history, changes in conceptions of cultural identity since migration or interaction between cultures.¹⁶

The typical multicultural migration exhibition is often presented in a way that renders 'experience' as undifferentiated within 'community' (ethnic) groups. There are no dissenting voices and there are no other aspects of the complex, experiencing self represented beyond that of migrant—and perhaps woman. This is supported by framing experience within stock narratives of migration and by looking at it through the lens of culture as represented by ethnic organisations. What we are left with is a thin, fixed and instrumental representation of experience and people. We are also left with very little sense of the wider historical context of migrations and what prompts and regulates them.

The stock narratives of the multicultural migration exhibition as McShane identifies them are the 'contribution' of migrants to Australian culture and economy and the 'rebirth' of migrants in Australia as free and successful.¹⁷ What brings migrants to this new and useful life is 'the journey' from a shadowy old world to the sunlit shores of Australia—just as the immigration posters of the 1950s and 1960s suggest. Migrants themselves in these stories are victim-heroes—stick figures. They are not engulfed in loss and loneliness and none of them does as Dora in my writing class did when she reconstituted her Hungarian self and went home. Returning is just one of the complex experiences that fails to come to light through these narratives, whether in the form brought to attention in Hammerton and Thomson's *Ten Pound Poms*¹⁸ or captured in the everyday Filipino term '*balikbayan*' (meaning the return of goods and money to people at home) or other, arguably increasingly transnational forms of migrancy.¹⁹

Perhaps the most critical problem in the typical migration exhibition is that it reflects and thus tacitly contributes to the way multiculturalism plays out in policy and popular consciousness. 'Multicultural' generally does not mean a society of many interacting cultures, but a particular section of society—the 'multicultural community'. As Ghassan Hage argues, this 'community' is constituted as essentially 'different' or 'other' from the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture of Australia. The dominant 'white' culture (unmarked by ethnicity) maintains its position by creating 'ethnic' others as 'diverse'—'enriching' and self-determining only within the confines of their definition.²⁰

It is perhaps not surprising that a policy developed to support the settlement of non-British migrants should play out in this way—nor that 'multicultural', as well as meaning 'different', should signify 'migrant'. In this context, 'Poms', whether returners or not, are not migrants and are rarely present in the multicultural migration exhibition.²¹ Recent approaches (as seen, for example,

at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne) generally depend on reframing them as having a specific 'other' culture such as Scottish or Irish.

For very different reasons, the position 'Indigenous' also stands outside 'multicultural'.²² In the multicultural migration exhibition, 'Indigenous' is a specific category of difference. It denotes 'those who were here before' and 'those who continue to be here despite'. In inviting Indigenous people to participate in an exhibition about migration, *Migration Memories* ran the risk of being seen to conflate Indigenous difference with migrant difference. It also, however, opened up ways for the category Indigenous to be included 'inside' rather than 'outside' as a kind of prologue to the exhibition. This inclusion was based on how individual Indigenous participants wanted to locate themselves in relation to migration history.²³

In the typical multicultural exhibition, migration is implicitly ahistorical and diversity is fixed rather than flexible, static rather than interactive. Despite its intentions to inform the wider society, to include and to celebrate its different components and to give those components a voice and respect their articulation, the multicultural migration exhibition is a spectacle of otherness that reinforces difference instead of changing positions. This is what Ien Ang and Brett St Louis call the 'predicament of difference'. 'Diversity' is caught up in this predicament as a sort of plural of essentialist difference. It 'is the managerial view of the field of differences to be harmonised, controlled and made to fit into a coherent...whole by the...state'.²⁴

In the shift from multiculturalism to policies of social cohesion, the approach to managing diversity by displaying it has remained consistent. Papers by Lola Young and Raminder Kaur on diversity at the Museum of London provide an example of the 'managerial view' at work in the context of social cohesion policy in the United Kingdom. In their concern to include 'non-mainstream', 'minority' cultures and groups who have previously not been part of museum representations, they discuss diverse cultures as a collection of excluded identities.²⁵ In the language of social inclusion, which is central to British cohesion policy and increasingly used in Australia, 'diverse' becomes what passes for an inclusive way of collectively describing people who might face social discrimination—for example, the 'culturally and linguistically diverse' (CALD) community. It fixes them as 'others' in Hage's terms and suggests that they have no capacity to participate on their own behalf without the help of some inclusive policy.

In Australia, the current Rudd Labor Government has taken the 'inclusion' approach to social cohesion and has established a social inclusion policy based on full participation in society.²⁶ The previous, Howard Government, however, preferred cohesion based on a consensus on Australian values—exemplified in

the 2003 government review of the NMA.²⁷ In this model, diversity is managed by erasure.

When the NMA opened in 2001, its Horizons Gallery addressed migration to Australia as a long-term and continuing event in the frame of changing immigration concerns and policies. In this way, it historicised and politicised cultural diversity—and included generations of Anglo-Celtic settlers. The government review took exception to this. It saw colonial settlement as a heroic foundation event rather than part of immigration history. It indicated that reference to immigration of the more recent period would be more appropriately mentioned as part of individual biographies featured in a gallery whose first focus was individual experience. This was where it felt ‘diversity’ would be best managed.²⁸ The review’s recommendations erase the social historical experience and impact of migration to Australia as well as the policies and discourses that have framed it over time. Social and cultural diversity disappear under the assertion of history as a singular narrative and of experience as a personal event without wider social meaning.²⁹

The *Migration Memories*’ focus on the personal, historical and local sought to take into account the problems of displaying diversity to the exclusion of complex experience and of erasing it from history by individualising it. This involved thinking about diversity in terms of encounter and interaction rather than as a static mosaic.

Theoretical frameworks and practical approaches

Sometimes you get angry for the years you weren’t accepted. Until you find another identity, you’re lost, you’re in limbo.³⁰

Paul Carter suggests that while local history in Australia is often presented as a ‘collage’ of histories of different peoples, it would be more appropriate to present it as a ‘fold’.³¹ The contrast between displays of difference and displays that create contacts across difference might be similarly described. Folding is a movement that involves connection, influence and change. To move from the collage—or the mosaic of separate pieces—to the fold is to move from a passive picture of diversity displayed as single elements in a patchwork to enacting it; imprinting the pieces with traces of each other.

The ‘folding’ approach to exhibiting diversity explored in the *Migration Memories* project was driven by my long-term theoretical interest in the interface between the individual subject and discourses of social identity. My interest is informed by scholarship concerned with the discursive constitution of individual and collective identities and the practices—the actions and relationships—that are implicated in and contribute to those discourses. James Clifford, for instance, writes of ‘practices of displacement’ as *constituting* cultural meanings rather than effecting ‘their simple transfer or extension’.³² Within the same frame of

understanding, activist writers such as bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldua offer the practice of imaginative writing as an intervention in the discursive positioning of marginalised subjects by writing them into more powerful readings.³³ It is this creation of texts that particularly interests me in relation to museum interpretation of cultures and histories. What texts encourage interaction between elements of the exhibition and between the exhibition and audience members? This question is not so much about what museum texts do, but, as practitioners, how we create them.

The research took up this 'how' question in every aspect of the exhibition-making process: in content, the process of exhibition development, in the use of interpretative devices such as the shaping of text, the management of relationships between image, text and object in design and fabrication and the composition of audio material. At a broad content level, it drew on 'the peopling of Australia' approach used by the NMA's Horizons Gallery and the Migration Heritage Centre of New South Wales.³⁴ In including migrations from the colonial period to the present and the impact of colonising migrations on Indigenous peoples' movements within Australia, it established 'migration' more as a historical theme than an event or experience in itself. As Witcomb suggests, the thematic approach opens the way for looking at historical experience from a variety of positions, including those that might be regarded as 'mainstream', and for identifying difference with experience rather than essentialist identity.³⁵

Another important element of content was the focus on the local. Like the theme, the local provides a specific frame of reference for exhibiting diversity. In the United Kingdom, as Message discusses,³⁶ it has been identified as a site for developing social cohesion across cultural diversity. Here, locality supersedes ethnicity as a focus for identification and community is created around geography rather than culture. In a rather different vein, Mat Trinca and Kirsten Wehner suggest locating Australian history in place 'as an active presence or "character" in the past [that] acknowledges the temporal and geographical specificity of encounters between peoples, places and ideas'.³⁷ The idea in *Migration Memories* was to work with the local as a site of encounter rather than as a replacement category of commonality. Importantly, the research saw the materiality of the local, rather than its ideal configuration as a 'site', as the key to bringing different experiences and perspectives into an active relationship with each other.

At a more detailed content level, the research countered the showcasing of difference by providing an intimate view of how people from very different walks of life saw migration histories that were significant to them. It took a critical view of the idea of 'representing' the experience of migration and the idea that you might array a fully inclusive list of such experiences—the stick-figure approach. It was interested in *how* something was experienced—what it felt like on the inside. It saw this as an important basis for seeing different

understandings and experiences of migration in relationship, and for inviting audiences into that relationship. It did not, however, want to suggest, like the NMA review, that difference was simply a matter of individual experience. Central to presenting the personal was locating it in the wider historical, geographical and political context of migration. For instance, it used maps, images of home countries at the time of emigration and official immigration documents to give presence to this wider context.

In collecting material concerning the personal experience of migration, the research worked with individuals rather than ethnic groups and paid attention to them as self-determining subjects within the exhibition rather than as its illustrations in the form of 'personal stories'. The model for achieving this was individual participation rather than consultation with community representatives. The collection and development process was sensitive to participant understandings of personal or collective identity but its focus was experience and what people made of their experiences. Terms such as 'perspectives' were used to assert differences of viewpoint over essentialist characteristics.

As well as taking an approach to content and the process of collecting material that was designed to 'unfold' migration from its set creases, a major area of experimentation concerned processes of exhibition development and the form of the exhibition itself.

The research's approach to this area of investigation was based on the understanding that the interpretative process was constitutive rather than one that offered a window on a topic. It is a making—or, rather, a series of makings—based initially on what the curator makes of certain material and finally on what those who view the 'outcome' of the generations of making that take place in the curatorial and design process 'make' of the makings. This is far from an instrumental relationship between intention and result. It suggests that interpretation is really something quite dense, and even opaque, that has multiple and curious effects rather than a set of outcomes that can be ticked 'achieved' or not. As Donald Preziosi says, 'We don't simply use, read, or consume museums and their contents...they are catalysts for thought and action.'³⁸ In the same way that any 'mode of artistry'³⁹ might, the research took the position that formal strategies of exhibition design and so on are as much charged with meaning as content is, and that while the process of development is related to content, it also has a vital impact on form. So all areas of exhibition making are implicated in what is made and how it can be read.

The exhibition form that fits best with the *Migration Memories*' research intentions is what can be called 'dialogic'. As Tony Bennett explains it, a dialogic exhibition is concerned with the 'multiaccentuality' of meaning. It does not operate through a 'controlling' curatorial position but across a number of sites. In this way, it encourages what Bennett calls the 'to and fro' that is implicit in

the dialogic process of meaning making.⁴⁰ This suggests a lateral rather than hierarchical relationship between material—something like a constellation of meaning making in which audience members are also participants.

‘Dialogic’ is also a term used to describe a process of developing exhibitions that is based on collaboration with community participants. In this case, as Ruth Phillips points out, ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ is also invoked. Her discussion of community collaboration in exhibitions also calls on the way ‘dialogue’ features in Paolo Freire’s democratic pedagogy as the basis for a mutual learning relationship between teachers and adult learners.⁴¹ The *Migration Memories*’ process owed much to this understanding of collaboration and the dialogue that took place as part of it. I have a particular interest, however, in applying the idea of the ‘dialogic’ specifically to the exhibition form, as it is my contention that the dialogic intentions of collaborative development cannot be realised unless taken into the detailed workings of the exhibition. On this basis, *Migration Memories* falls into the type of collaborative exhibit that Ruth Phillips describes as ‘multivocal’: seeking to show multiple perspectives alongside each other and seeking to show historical interpretation in a reflexive light as one perspective on experience.⁴²

Creating a dialogic exhibition: Agency, collaboration and imagination

Mum always said, the past is gone, it’s where you are now that counts.⁴³

The research took agency—the power to act or create effect—to be a vital characteristic of the components of a dialogic exhibition and also the basis for creating potential contact between different perspectives and worlds of experience. As indicated, the main components the research addressed in this way were the personal, the historical and the local. The historical was not taken as an anonymous general frame of the exhibition as a whole, but, like the other two, as a point of view, in this case embodied by the curator. Objects and sound were also distinct sites but they were positioned more in support of the main viewpoints; objects were particularly associated with the personal and sound with the local. Agency was also a key term of reference in the process of development, in the use of interpretative devices and in thinking about the audience.

The model for the process of developing exhibition material so that it acknowledged and supported the agency of individual participants and the curator, as already indicated, was collaboration. Howard Morphy’s essay in *Museum Frictions* about the *Yingapungapu* exhibition created by Yolngu for the opening of the NMA identifies the distinct complex of issues and intentions for Yolngu and the museum. It also shows Yolngu managing the ups and downs of the intersection of these on the basis of their long-held determination to use

their cultural material 'to protect their rights in law and maintain their autonomy'.⁴⁴ In the same volume, Ciraj Rassool discusses the District Six Museum in Capetown as a 'hybrid space' combining the interests of a museum—research, collection, and so on—with community-based governance and activism on land claims and restitution.⁴⁵

These examples describe the broad shape of collaboration as an engagement between differently positioned agents. Michael Frisch's idea of 'shared authority'⁴⁶ provides a framework for bringing curator and participants together in the exhibition itself. 'Shared authority' includes the idea of authorship, which is critical when the words and images of participants are used in public. It also concerns interpretative authority. Frisch seeks to honour 'scholarly authority' *and* the authority that is 'grounded in culture and experience' as a basis for sharing knowledge and creating the basis for a 'meaningful engagement with history'.⁴⁷

The interviews I conducted with participants at various stages of the research provided documentation of their collaboration with me in the exhibition-making process: how we negotiated our way through this authority-sharing activity. They show that it is often hard to find the words to explain the experience of an evolving working relationship. They also show how much effort we put in to engaging with and understanding each other. In many ways, we became friends, although in other circumstances we might never have even met. As well as providing the raw material for the exhibitions, these collaborations exemplified the practice of making connections across difference.

Collaboration was also the model for work across professional expertise—between curator, designers and photographers. One of the most important questions that we looked at together was the way interpretative devices could support or deny agency. For instance, in the case of making the audio, the sound designer, Lea Collins, and I looked for alternatives to the predictable sound of the interview and the way it situated the interviewee as an obedient respondent. The sound of engaged conversation locates voice very differently.

The research also saw visitors as self-determining makers of meaning. It assumed that audience members were 'knowers' rather than empty deposit boxes, to use Paolo Friere's characterisation, and that people would themselves bring diverse experiences and perspectives to the material and make their own sense of it.⁴⁸ A question for experimentation, which remains open for me, is how to collect what people 'make' of the exhibition, rather than what they think about in an evaluative way. The Lightning Ridge exhibition designer, Iona Walsh, and I looked for ways of adding audience responses into the exhibition. We were not interested in the noticeboard or post-it note form where the audience role is response (a technique that has been widely used at the Migration Museum in Adelaide, for example), but some kind of making that would really become part

of the exhibition and extend the diversity of experience and understanding of migration. Nor were we interested in the 'tell your story' approach, which can be patronising. We were searching for something that could be distinct and expressive and surprising and was least likely to be caught up in the most obvious discourses—something that could show a variety of engagements and show the exhibition itself as a living thing. It was a challenge we had to let go in favour of others. Perhaps the best answer so far is provided by a phone call I had from a teacher in Robinvale who is working on a history of his family's migration for his children. He was inspired by the use of the personal in historical context in the exhibition and was planning to use a similar approach.

Agency is critical to the intentions of the dialogic exhibition and particularly in creating the potential for contact, but something more is required to make the connection, to strike the spark. How do you get inside experience, how do you set the fold in motion? My way into this territory connects with Witcomb's interest in 'feeling' and involves the use of meaning-making strategies directed to engaging the imagination—the faculty that enables empathy.⁴⁹

Empathy is often described as being able to stand in another person's shoes. The strategies and devices employed in creative writing, storytelling and dramatic performance, with which I am most familiar, support agency and move us into other people's shoes in a variety of ways. They do it through characterisation and embodiment, which support agency, and through establishing point of view—that is, the distinct places that characters speak from. They use precise description rather than abstract generalisations. They use plot and manage narrative and other structural devices to frame the worlds they create. They work through the senses and by association. They put unlikely combinations of elements together in image and metaphor—combinations that undo cliché and make fresh connections. They don't fill up all the spaces with illustration but leave space for an audience to wonder, to draw on their own knowledge and experience, to engage on their own behalf. Part of the 'feeling' they produce is a sense of intimacy, of 'being there with'. We are 'taken', we are 'moved', possibly into positions beyond our realm of experience but also into places that we recognise. A key ingredient of the intimate experience that these devices create is pleasure. Pleasure is an 'empowering' sensation. It engages a sense of confidence and ability. It moves outward and towards rather than as horror might, backwards in recoil, or as despair might, inward. The experience of pleasure is not to do with the subject matter itself, but the way it is treated. For instance, Witcomb's discussion of a miniature model of the Treblinka concentration camp shows that it is the intimate engagement with the maker's memory and desire to memorialise, made palpable in the specificity and embodiment of his experience in the form of the model, that has the power to transform.⁵⁰

Figure 6.1 Panel from Maamaloa-Fine family, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*



Photograph courtesy of Jo Sheldrick, 2007.

The *Migration Memories* exhibitions explored materialising and evoking personal meaning through objects, images and texts and a combination of these. For instance, the sense of culture expressed by second-generation Tongan Mele Kirirua led to the development of a panel design combining photographic images and text. Photographic details of *kiekie*, *ta'avala* and *tapa* were used not as descriptions of cultural artefacts, but to give an intimate sense of 'my Tongan culture'.

Artefacts created by the participants for the exhibition had a particularly evocative quality and brought the individual into the exhibition in a powerful way. One example was Auntie Rose's feather flowers, which she made not so much as her mother had taught her as from her memory of her mother making them. Another is Frans's model of the 'view from the caravan'—an expression of his sea change migration to Lightning Ridge.

A consistent element in the invitation to engage through imagination is the creation of space for an audience to use their imagination. The explanation of objects was kept to a minimum in favour of text and images that suggested their personal meaning. For example, with the opal cutter that had been used by three generations of a family, the most important text was 'Dad'd say, Now Jen, I want half the thickness of a cigarette paper off the top of that stone'. Some issues of curiosity for both storyteller and curator were left open, not by directly asking 'What do you think?', but by presenting the situation. For instance, a squatter's account of a first encounter between a Scottish couple and a group of Aboriginal people was accompanied by responses to his account by the storyteller, Kay, by an Aboriginal elder, Auntie Rose, and by me. We all saw the situation from different perspectives.

Responses to the exhibitions that I found indicative of connection included laughter, humming along with songs in the sound installation, reading panel text out to a companion, staying for longer than anticipated, losing track of time or a companion's whereabouts and striking up conversations with other visitors about subjects prompted by the material.

The idea that held together the intentions and methods of the research's exhibition making, including the concern with agency and collaboration, was 'conversation'. Conversation expresses the 'to and fro' and 'give and take' implicit in the dialogic. It takes place between subjects who speak on their own behalf. As a form of communication, it has an open and yet intimate texture; it invites listening and response. A 'good conversation' involves listening to ourselves as part of attending to the exchange, and contains the potential for engagement and movement.

As real dialogue, conversation, and the exchange it involved, was the method through which the display-making work with participants developed. Interpretative devices in the exhibitions such as the conversational style of the

text and conversation fragments in the sound installations literally reflected the discussions that had produced the displays and implicitly invited audiences to keep the conversation going.

In practice: the personal in historical context

I loved it—being taught how to dance in Tongan, being taught how to sing in Tongan, being taught the Tongan ways.⁵¹

As Ann Curthoys has remarked, ‘the personal is historical’.⁵² Showing the connection between individual experience and historical circumstances was central to *Migration Memories*’ interest in locating migration experiences in history without resorting to an overarching single historical narrative, subsuming them under ‘culture’ or individualising them. ‘The personal is historical’ also suggests an opportunity to explore ways in which individuals might be present in an exhibition, not as illustrations of history, but as actors in it. In this section of the paper, I discuss how the research worked with the personal and historical in the process of developing the material, as well as through the ‘narrative mode’ of the exhibition.⁵³

In developing each ‘story in context’, the focus was on how the teller understood and expressed it. The major threads of meaning for the teller became the storylines that organised the material—and directed archival research for relevant images and documents that provided context for it. The story as an understanding of migration experience also directed the display of material culture. In some cases, the choice of a meaningful personal item could be made only as we both became clearer about what the teller felt was most important to say—for example, was the emphasis here on continuity or origins? In this way, the process started from the ‘inside’. Historical context and material culture extended from the personal perspective rather than the other way round.

In the exhibitions, the context was shown through images and text with the text presented in the words of the curator, an identity named as ‘Mary’. The personal included an object or objects selected by the individual as well as images and text in their own words to show the story from their point of view. These two views were woven together in the distinct, stand-alone display of each story and headlined in a title panel that identified the story as the personal teller ‘in conversation with’. In this way, the narrative mode used in the exhibitions indicated that the stories were creations of both the teller and the curator—a ‘shared authority’ based on individual agency and collaboration.

Figure 6.2 authored text, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*



Photograph courtesy of Lannon Harley, 2007. With permission from the National Museum of Australia.

There was an important graphic dimension to constructing each point of view as active and identifiable. Devices included the use of graphics that distinguished the personal and historical but did not turn either position into an illustration or an aside through frames such as quotation marks or boxes. In working with the text itself, syntax was important in distinguishing and embodying voice. The teller's words were used in the form of telling—as they might speak. This was not as an oral history transcript might produce it but as a listener might hear and recognise 'I can just hear him saying that!' The words were of course discussed and refined with the participant.

I experimented with my own text in first and third person. On the one hand, providing context was a 'cooler' position and I found that the personal voice of the teller could often more successfully carry reference to me and our collaboration: 'When Mary asked me about my old handbag I didn't know if I still had it. When I found it, there were a few things still inside.' On the other hand, first person is more lively and places the business of providing context more clearly in the picture: 'My research on migration to Australia from the Philippines highlighted the huge extent to which Filipinos leave their country of birth to earn a living.'⁵⁴

There are some issues about using personal stories with care for personal agency that are worth discussing. In the contemporary context, the personal story, particularly that of less-visible and less-powerful individuals, sits on the brink between self-determination and commodification. The camera, as Laura Bear points out in her discussion of the 'politics of display' in the exhibition *Warte Mal!*, plays a particular role in the age of fascination with 'real-life' stories.⁵⁵

Warte Mal!'s use of film counters the entertaining and voyeuristic value of the 'real life' of sex workers in the Czech Republic by creating a complex, mediated, open and layered viewing experience. *Migration Memories* was interested in avoiding devices, such as the glib use of the visual to make visible, which support the easy and thoughtless consumption of the personal story and the 'objectification', as Bear says, of its subjects.

During the making of the exhibitions, and since, there has been much discussion about providing a contemporary photographic portrait of each storyteller with their story. As I see it, this use of image undoes the agency I was seeking to assert because it works as an illustration, not an embodiment. It does not support point of view or agency of the person in the photograph because it is not for them. It is for the audience. It does not speak for the position of the subject but rather subjects them to the gaze of the viewer. In this way, it returns us to the spectacle of diversity, rather than engaging us in it. In the particular context of the *Migration Memories*' stories-in-context, it also overrides the delicate hyphenated relationship between curator and teller and erases other characters in the story. Photographs of the storytellers were certainly present as part of their stories and were captioned to identify them in time and place. Contemporary photos of them were used in introductory material. These showed them participating in the process of making the exhibition, often with me in the frame, and generally engaged in activities rather than presenting themselves to the camera.

In practice: Artefacts

For most of my life I was too busy rejecting my Italian heritage to find out much about it. Going back to Ferla was a very emotional experience for me.⁵⁶

Because *Migration Memories* did not want to identify cultural difference in the clichéd form of celebratory cultural diversity, it sought objects for their personal meaning rather than as exemplars of material 'ethnic' culture. Their role in the exhibition was not to be objects *of* interpretation but *agents* in the meaning making and interpretation of each individual story. For instance, the denim jacket and cotton trousers Sothea Thea kept to remember his journey by leaking fishing boat from Cambodia to Australia carried several interrelated meanings. They hold the immediate meaning Sothea gives them: a story to remember what he and others went through to survive. They are visibly marked by this. They also stand, in Sothea's view, for a wider refugee story of sacrifice for the next generation. From a wider angle, they are full of the lived experience of one individual during a particular period in which Cambodian and Australian history came together in both productive and uncomfortable ways. They speak for the personal experience and that history.

Figure 6.3 Panels Sothea Thea, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*



Photograph courtesy of Lannon Harley, 2007. With permission from the National Museum of Australia.

The general intention was that the individual's main object, like Sothea's clothes, would be used as a focus for each story to materialise the narrative's meaning. The challenge in exhibition terms was how things in all their lumpy solidity could be placed to act in this way—in effect, to 'move'. In the Lightning Ridge exhibition, the objects were presented in museum cases, which the designer, Iona Walsh, worked into the fabrication of each story display as far as possible. In Robinvale, Paula McKindlay worked photographs of the objects by Jo Sheldrick into the panel designs. The photographic images were of course more mobile than the objects in their material form, but the loss of materiality was significant. Where either one or the other form worked best it was because of its capacity to be most mobile or most material.

The image of Sothea's jacket and trousers was one that held its materiality in presentation, perhaps particularly because the items themselves were so intimate, so embodied. Sothea is present, not just in the text that is part of the image, but as the wearer of the clothes. Another ingredient in the success of this image was the detailed collaboration between Sothea, myself as curator and the photographer and designer.

These my only clothes I had to wear on the boat. I keep them to remember my journey.

Seventy-nine people on the boat including men, women and children. From memory the boat was about 20 metres long and 4 metres wide. I am alone so I stay in front where no one else goes. At night the water comes over but I find a small space I can lie down in. I pull the sleeves of my jacket down over my hands to keep warm and turn my back on the water.⁵⁷

The agency of objects in their material form depended on placement in relation to the exhibition panels. The arrangement of panels and a small case around a central plinth worked well for the biscuit tin that held the few letters and documents that connected Gabor Nagy to his homeland. Reading around the plinth, the case was always included. Its size and the angle of looking down into the tin and onto text that went with it created a powerful intimacy, which propelled connection with other aspects of the story. Other objects created much greater challenges within the context of the exhibition space, time and the research budget. One device we explored was the use of storytellers' words in large vinyl lettering on the exhibition case. In some contexts, this might be regarded as unorthodox but breaking orthodoxies can be critical in providing fresh ways of seeing. A fuller exploration of such possibilities would involve strategies such as combinations of media, variation in scale and radical approaches to the real fabric of the exhibition.

Another aspect of the use of objects as agents of interpretation is the possibility of treating them in the same collaborative way as the 'personal in historical context' to show their personal meaning and their meaning as items of material culture. For instance, how might the historical meaning of Sothea's clothes be made more explicit—or indeed the complex story of his jacket, which connects directly to the Vietnam-backed Cambodian government and the material culture of denim? Jennifer's opal cutter is another instance in that it materialises aspects of the nineteenth-century opal trade, which could have been explored more explicitly and fully. What I'm suggesting is that the research's exploration of evoking the personal meaning of objects opens further questions about how objects in all their singularity might operate dynamically to create dialogue across different ways of seeing and using the one item.⁵⁸

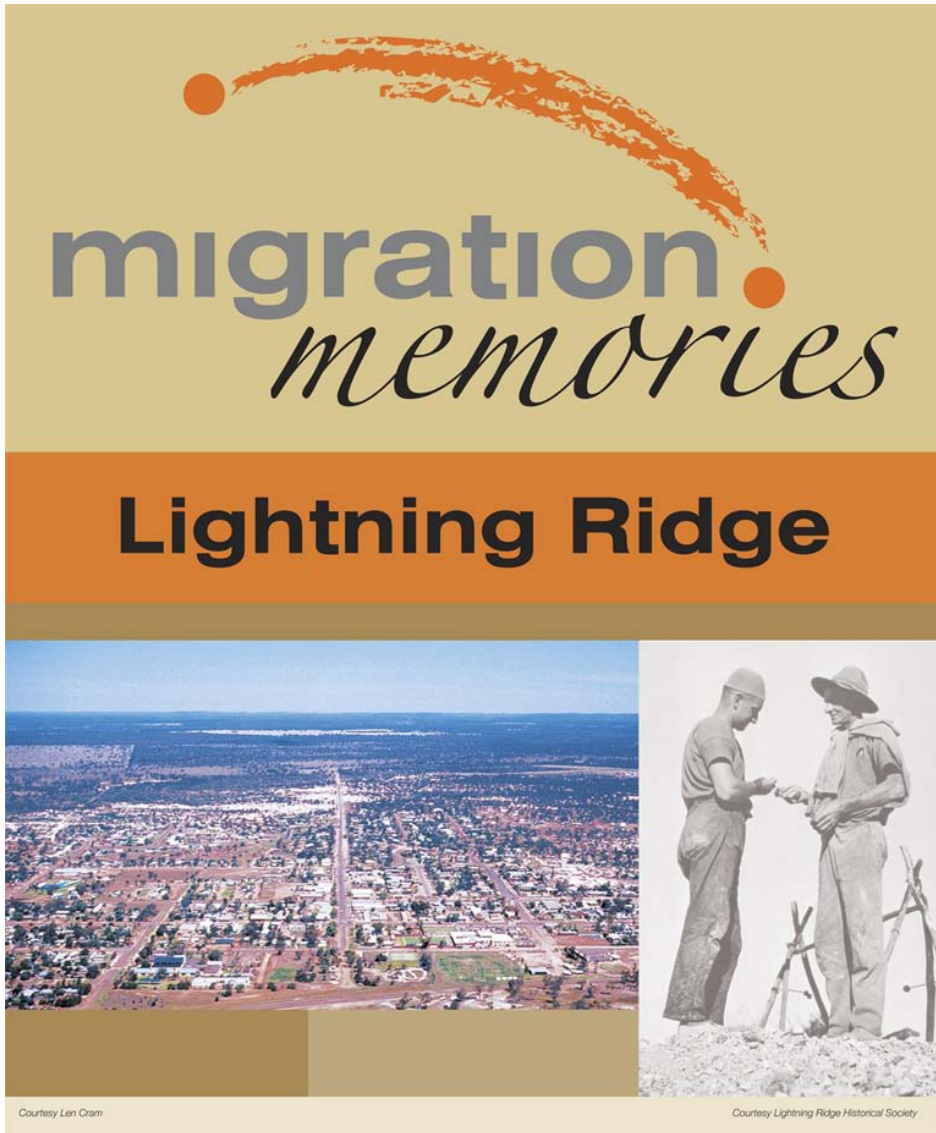
In practice: the local

Thai border full of land mines. On a boat you might drown. Double or nothing. You choose your way to survive.⁵⁹

As with the objects, working with the local perspective threw up more questions than answers when it came to characterising it and putting it to work in exhibition form.

The concrete representation of place in image and design, and the detail in the individual stories, was a vehicle for interaction between different experiences when the exhibitions were displayed in their local settings. For instance, the Tongan family's photo of the hut where they first lived in Robinvale brought generations of first experiences of working in Robinvale together—including those of soldier settlers. In the local context, visitors easily read the stories in relation to each other and their responses suggested that the result was often an expanded sense of people in place based on new connections and understandings: 'I didn't realise' or 'you know people but you don't know them'. In the national context, however, the active role of place was greatly diminished and really didn't do the work it might have done to show specific instances of Australian migration history: the encounters it produced and the way they lie on a particular landscape. At the NMA, the personal stories were anchored in time but the exhibitions' representation of the local wasn't strong enough to stop them from floating around in a general idea of Australia.

Figure 6.4 *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*, Lightning Ridge Historical Society Gallery. Designer: Iona Walsh, 2006.



Perhaps a way through this is offered by making explicit how cultural diversity, as encounter and connection, is specifically figured in a local context. For instance, in Lightning Ridge, diversity seems to be enacted horizontally, on the surface, in a way that mirrors connections between Lightning Ridge and other places, and the tracks between opal-mining claims. In Robinvale, by contrast, cultural difference has deeper roots, a vertical hold that shapes understandings of local cultural diversity and invites metaphors associated with the region's long-term horticultural history.⁶⁰ These kinds of understandings might suggest a stronger basis for exhibition representations of place as a locus of diversity, in a national context. The lesson could simply be, however, that establishing the local as a dialogic character, capable of holding its own and framing perspectives, requires quite different strategies in local and national contexts.

Conclusion

You come in here you don't speak the language. You don't know what's what. You wonder if you're ever going to understand. Then day after day, month after month, year after year—that's it mate. This is my country now. Just like it was where I was born, where I was a kid...This is the road you have to pass.⁶¹

Migration Memories set out to exhibit migration history in a way in which audiences would see themselves as well as others. Above all, it was interested in engagement across difference as a basis for informing understandings about 'us' in whatever configuration. To this end, the research exhibitions worked with the idea that embodying and grounding diversity in personal and local perspectives, and in the context of migration history, could create distinct and tangible contact points.

In discussing the *Migration Memories* research, I have argued for an approach to exhibiting migration that is not wedded to the passive spectacle of diversity or, as a reaction to the potential divisiveness of this, a catalogue of personal experience. The practical strategies adopted by the *Migration Memories* exhibitions suggest the possibility of dissolving the bond between migration and cultural diversity in favour of treating migration as a historical event and experience, within which cultural position is a factor. They also suggest the possibility of viewing difference through the lens of social-historical experience, position and discourse, rather than through the essentialist markers of difference attached to 'culture'. This more fluid approach opens the way to undoing the use of diversity as a collective noun. As a noun, diversity, like community, has come to operate as a perfect managerial term in that it objectifies and makes passive. In *Migration Memories*, diversity was in many ways recast as a verb. The project approached exhibiting diversity as the action of making contact and interacting across difference. In this sense, the intention was to extend 'sitting

well with each other' (the phrase Ruth Phillips draws on to describe collaborative exhibits)⁶² into exchange between subjects.⁶³

The metaphor I have used for diversity in action is 'folding'—a connection between surfaces that produces complex and layered configurations.⁶⁴ *Migration Memories* was interested in creating a 'folding' exhibition in practice. The idea of the dialogic exhibition suggested a form for encouraging conversation between the different experiences within the exhibition and between these and the experience that audiences would bring to their viewing of it. An important part of the research concerned how this form might be realised through the practical dimensions of graphics and fabric, of scale and composition, through the use of image, text, colour, material, shape and sound. My discussion of the theory and practice of *Migration Memories* speaks for the value of attention to this level of practice in relation to wider issues about the role of interpretative cultural institutions as collectors and creators of culture.⁶⁵ It is founded on an interest in what we 'make' of each other and in how interventions in dominant understandings of 'you' and 'I' and 'us' can be made through cultural—and in this case, exhibition-making—practice. I have argued that an understanding of the practical dimensions of 'folding' and 'conversation' is required for their realisation.

ENDNOTES

¹ Joan Treweek, *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*, 2006.

² Andrea Witcomb's paper in this volume provides an overview and analysis of the political and museological issues that frame the *Migration Memories* approach. My discussion offers a response to some of her questions and suggestions in this paper and in her earlier paper, 'How style came to matter' (in Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb [eds] 2006, *South Pacific Museums: Experiments in culture*, Monash University E-Press, pp. 21.1–13). My discussion is also informed by Kylie Message's work on social cohesion, museum practices and citizenship—for example, Message, Kylie 2009, 'New directions for civil renewal in Britain: social capital and culture for all?', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4 (June) [in press, accepted 11 April 2008]; and Message, Kylie 2006, *New Museums and the Making of Culture*, Berg, Oxford and New York.

³ In response to the Howard Coalition Government's desire to replace 'cultural diversity' with 'Australian values', Andrew Jakubowicz argues that the values of multiculturalism provide a basis for an egalitarian, modern, cosmopolitan society. Jakubowicz, Andrew 2006, 'Reflections on a multicultural nation', *On Line Opinion*, 15 November 2006, <<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=5153&page=0>>

⁴ This approach takes its cue from work by Margaret Somerville. See Somerville, Margaret with Dundas, Marie, Mead, May, Robinson, Janet and Sulter, Maureen 1994, *The Sun Dancin': People and place in Coonabarabran*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, pp. i–v.

⁵ Lovelyn Miglietta, *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*, 2006.

⁶ Aunty June Barker, *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*, 2006.

⁷ For examples of scholarly discussion, see Jupp, James 1998, *Immigration*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 132–50; Galligan, Brian and Roberts, Winsome 2003, Australian multiculturalism: its rise and demise, Australian Political Studies Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 29 September–1 October 2003, pp. 3–4, <www.utas.edu.au/government/APSA/GalliganRoberts/pdf>

⁸ McShane, Ian 2001, 'Challenging or conventional? Migration history in Australian museums', in Darryl McIntyre and Kirsten Wehner (eds), *National Museums Negotiating Histories Conference Proceedings*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2001, pp. 122–33; Andrea Witcomb, this volume.

⁹ McShane, 'Challenging or conventional?'.

- ¹⁰ Jordens, Ann-Mari 1997, *Alien to Citizen: Settling migrants in Australia 1945–75*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian Archives, Sydney, pp. 233–8.
- ¹¹ Birtley, Margaret and McQueen, Patricia (eds) 1989, *New Responsibilities: Documenting multicultural Australia. A record of the conference for Museums, Libraries, Archives and Historical Collections towards a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia 11–13 November 1988 Melbourne*, Museums Association of Australia Inc., Victorian Branch, and Library Council of Victoria.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Australian museum interest in multiculturalism also reflected the influence of the ‘new museology’, which called into question whose culture was represented in museums. For example, Vergo, Peter (ed.) 1989, *The New Museology*, Reaktion Books, London.
- ¹⁴ McShane, ‘Challenging or Conventional?’, pp. 125–7.
- ¹⁵ The image of the cultural mosaic has been commonly used alongside the idea of multiculturalism since it was introduced as an immigration settlement policy by the Whitlam Labor Government in 1973. Jordens, *Alien to Citizen*; Lack, John 2001, ‘Multiculturalism’, in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne and New York, p. 445.
- ¹⁶ Witcomb (this volume) discusses exhibitions that explore cross-cultural connections as exceptions to the rule. It is my perception that exceptions to the rule are increasing. An important recent example is the South Australian Museum’s touring exhibition *Australia’s Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the inland, 1860s–1930s*, ca 2006.
- ¹⁷ McShane, ‘Challenging or conventional?’, pp. 128–9.
- ¹⁸ Hammerton, James A. and Thomson, Alistair 2005, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia’s invisible migrants*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York.
- ¹⁹ McKay, Deidre 2004, ‘Performing identities, creating cultures of circulation: Filipina migrants between home and abroad’, in Robert Cribb (ed.), *Asia Examined: Proceedings of the 15th biennial conference of the ASAA, 2004, Canberra, Australia*, Asian Studies Association of Australia and Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Canberra, <Coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2004/proceedings.html>
- ²⁰ Hage, Ghassan 1998, *White Nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Sydney, p. 117.
- ²¹ Sara Wills discusses the need to make British migrants ‘visible as migrants’ in the context of Australia’s British-based national identity. Wills, Sara 2003, *Flora’s box: empty spaces, memory and migration*, History and the Meaning of Things seminar series on History and Material Culture, Melbourne Museum, 10 September.
- ²² Hage discusses the complexities of ‘difference’ in Australia through the lens of nationalism and ‘whiteness’. Hage, Ghassan 2003, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*, Pluto Press, Annandale.
- ²³ The slippage between terms that refer to categories of exclusion was brought home to me in a poignant and ironic way in my work with Auntie Rose Kirby in Robinvale. When I asked her what migration meant to her as an Indigenous person, she said that she saw it as a process of becoming accepted. Like other Aboriginal people from the region, she and her husband came into Robinvale for work at the same time that postwar migrants were arriving. Her experience was that of being similarly excluded, but, over a similar period, becoming a recognised member of the community.
- ²⁴ Ang, Ien and St Louis, Brett 2005, ‘The predicament of difference’, *Ethnicities*, vol. 5, p. 296.
- ²⁵ Kaur, Raminder 2005, *Unearthing our past: engaging with diversity at the Museum of London*, June, Consultancy for Reassessing What We Collect, Phase 11, Museum of London; Young, Lola 2005, *Our Lives, Our Histories, Our Collections*, Museum of London, <<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/Essays>>
- ²⁶ For example, see Stephens, Ursula 2008, Rudd Government’s social inclusion agenda, Speech by the Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion to Australian Council for International Development Forum, Public Theatre, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 March 2008, <<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/allreleases/2008/march/ruddgovernmentsocialinclusionagenda.htm>>
- ²⁷ Commonwealth of Australia 2003, *Review of the National Museum of Australia, Its Exhibitions and Public Programs*, A report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia, Canberra.
- ²⁸ Ibid., pp. 22–5 and 32–4.

- ²⁹ In 2003, I curated an exhibition for the National Archives of Australia to accompany a touring exhibition about Australia's largest postwar migration reception and accommodation centre, Bonegilla. My brief was to highlight records of immigration policies and practices. In recent years, the archives has concentrated increasingly on the value of its immigration records for individuals interested in family history.
- ³⁰ John Katis, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*, 2007.
- ³¹ Carter, Paul 1994, 'From collage to fold: a poetics of place', *Periphery*, no. 20, August, pp. 3–7.
- ³² Clifford, James 1997, *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, p. 3.
- ³³ hooks, bell 1991, 'Narratives of struggle', in Philomena Mariani (ed.), *Critical Fictions: The politics of imaginative writing*, Bay Press, Seattle, pp. 53–61; Anzaldúa, Gloria 1987, *Borderlands La Frontera: The new mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco.
- ³⁴ Migration Heritage Centre New South Wales, the Institute for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney and the Archaeological Computing Laboratory, University of Sydney 2001, *Peopling New South Wales: A state-wide migration heritage partnership*, September, A scoping report to the Premier of New South Wales, Migration Heritage Centre New South Wales.
- ³⁵ Witcomb, 'How style came to matter', pp. 21.12–13.
- ³⁶ Message, 'New directions for civil renewal in Britain'.
- ³⁷ Trinca, Mathew and Wehner, Kirsten 2006, 'Pluralism and exhibition practice at the National Museum of Australia', in Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb (eds), *South Pacific Museums Experiments in Culture*, Monash University E-Press, p. 06.11.
- ³⁸ Preziosi, Donald 2008, Presentation to Public Cultures seminar series, Research School of Humanities, The Australian National University, Canberra, 5 November 2008, p. 3.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁴⁰ Bennett, T., 2006, 'Exhibition, difference and the logic of culture', in Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public cultures/global transformations*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, p. 63.
- ⁴¹ Phillips, Ruth 2003, 'Community collaboration in exhibitions: toward a dialogic paradigm', in Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (eds), *Museums and Source Communities*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 155–70.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 163–7.
- ⁴³ Sheila Nagy, *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*, 2006.
- ⁴⁴ Morphy, H., 'Sites of persuasion: Yingapungapu at the National Museum of Australia', in Karp et al., *Museum Frictions*, p. 473.
- ⁴⁵ Rassool, Ciraj, 'Community museums, memory politics and social transformation in South Africa: histories, possibilities and limits', in Karp et al., *Museum Frictions*, pp. 295–6.
- ⁴⁶ Frisch, M. 1990, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*, State University of New York, Albany, pp. xxi–xxii.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xxi–xxii.
- ⁴⁸ Freire, P. 1972, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, London, 1972. Other discussions of audiences in this vein include: Sandell, R. 2007, *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxford; Trinca and Wehner, 'Pluralism and exhibition practice at the National Museum of Australia', p. 06.9.
- ⁴⁹ Witcomb, this volume.
- ⁵⁰ Witcomb, Andrea (in press), 'Remembering the dead by affecting the living: the case of a miniature model of Treblinka', in Sandra Dudley (ed.), *Museum Materialities: Objects, engagements, interpretations*, Routledge, London/New York.
- ⁵¹ Mele Kirura, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*, 2007.
- ⁵² Curthoys, Ann 2000, 'The personal is historical: writing about the Freedom Ride of 1965', in Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (eds), *Writing Histories: Imagination and narration*, Monash Publications in History, Department of History, The Australian National University, Canberra, pp. 75–81.
- ⁵³ Laurence Gourievdis is currently working on a typology of modes of narration and email correspondence with her has been most valuable in focusing aspects of this discussion.
- ⁵⁴ Lovelyn Miglietta, Mary Hutchison, *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*.

⁵⁵ Bear, Laura 2007, 'What the anthropologist said in "The politics of display: Ann-Sofi Sidens' *Warte Mal!*"', art history and social documentary', in Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Mass., pp. 158–9.

⁵⁶ Tory Pisasale, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*, 2007.

⁵⁷ Sothea Thea, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*, 2007.

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Ian Coates at the National Museum of Australia for this insight and his early work with me on *Migration Memories* as part of the linkage funding partnership.

⁵⁹ Sothea Thea, *Migration Memories: Robinvale*, 2007.

⁶⁰ Hutchison, M. 2008, Personal histories/collective biographies: reflections on two local exhibitions of personal migration histories, Collective Biography Conference, Research School of Humanities, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Canberra, 8–10 September 2008.

⁶¹ Dusan Malinovic, *Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge*, 2006.

⁶² Phillips 'Community collaboration in exhibitions', p. 167.

⁶³ Ghassan Hage (*Against Paranoid Nationalism*, pp. 144–52) uses the motif of the pedestrian crossing to show the importance of an ethical structural relationship between society and individuals in enabling horizontal, ethical inter-subjective exchange.

⁶⁴ I am aware of the association here with the surface contacts that Elspeth Probyn describes in *Outside Belongings*, taking the position of a 'sociologist of the skin'. Probyn, Elspeth 1996, *Outside Belongings*, Routledge, New York, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Message, 'New directions for civil renewal in Britain'.

But where are you really from?

The 'crisis' of multiculturalism examined through the work of four Asian-Australian artists

Anna Edmundson

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a substantial shift in the ways in which issues of immigration, multiculturalism and citizenship have been debated in Australian political and public culture. As we near the end of this decade, 'multiculturalism' seems to be rapidly disappearing from government rhetoric (if not the political agenda altogether), with many analysts signalling a worldwide return to assimilation discourses.¹ In lieu of this, it is timely to unpack some issues related to the current 'retreat' of multiculturalism and proposed 'return' of assimilation.

In this article, I want to explore the relationship between government-led doctrines on cultural diversity and constructions of national identity.² I draw on the work of four artists of Asian-Australian descent,³ Liu Xiao Xian, Hou Leong, Owen Leong and Kate Beynon, to highlight some of the failings of current models of both multiculturalism and assimilation to effectively secure a place for non-Anglo and non-Indigenous Australians within the national imaginary. I have selected a work from each artist to serve as a lens for exploring some of the slippages that occur between different understandings of citizenship and cultural diversity: as government policy, as a concept of national identity and as a lived experience.⁴ In these works, the artists project a self-reflexive 'otherness' in relation to mainstream 'Australianness'. They also convey a more personal feeling of unease stemming from their sense of invisibility within the national imaginary. Ultimately, the artists remind us that, despite the Australian Government's attention to celebrating cultural difference, three decades of multiculturalism have failed to effectively shift the deeper historical structures and prejudices of Anglo-Australian (white) cultural hegemony.

During the course of my discussion, I try to pinpoint some of the reasons for this failure. First, I note that the transformation of the cultural landscape (from monocultural to multicultural) has been both rapid and radical, involving a major paradigm shift on government-led constructions of national identity. I draw on Jean Baudrillard's concept of 'simulacra' as a useful means of exploring the persistence of older representations of identity. Second, I suggest that a decade of sidelining of multiculturalism and cultural difference by the Howard Government (1996–2007)—heightened by a climate of increased racial tension linked to the rise of international terrorism and attendant anti-terrorist

rhetoric—is now reflected in increased public confusion about and ambivalence towards multiculturalism (for those of Anglo-Australian descent and those whom the anthropologist Ghassan Hage has termed ‘Third World-looking people’).⁵ Third, I argue that while multiculturalism was first envisioned by the Whitlam Government as a means of equalising differences between ‘mainstream’ and migrant communities, it has in many ways served only to further entrench ethnicity as the primary platform of socio-cultural difference and social fragmentation.

I conclude by arguing that a retreat from cultural pluralism in favour of current models of assimilation is bound to fail—if its intent, as is claimed, is the fostering of social inclusion. Notwithstanding the primacy of Indigenous Australia, the complexity of our population calls for a more sophisticated and *more* inclusive model of citizenship and national identity, not a *less* inclusive one. It should be possible to construct a platform for citizenship and narratives of national identity, which genuinely reflects unity within diversity, rather than one in which, *a priori*, some people are selected to be second-class citizens based purely on their perceived ethnicity.

Liu Xiao Xian’s other lives

The Ian Potter Centre—NGV Australian Art at Federation Square represents Australia’s only major cultural institution devoted exclusively to Australian art. As such, it denotes a different kind of take on Australian history—one in which an emerging vision of Australia can be seen through the eyes of its resident artists. Shortly after the opening of the Ian Potter Centre, I was surprised to find a work by one of my favourite artists in the colonial and Federation-era galleries. The work is by Liu Xiao Xian, a sculptor and photographer who was born in Beijing in 1963 and migrated to Australia in 1990. So what was it doing among the colonial portraits and ‘Heidelberg masters’ of early Australian art? Its inclusion by the gallery’s curators was at once witty and profound. As a curatorial intervention, it was effective in marking the physical presence of Chinese migrants during the time frame covered, while simultaneously highlighting their absence within the canonical (art) history.

The artwork appears at first glance to be a nineteenth-century stereograph print of the type that was widely popular during the Victorian era. Stereograph cameras produced a double print taken from slightly different focal points. When viewed through a wooden stereo-viewer, the prints merged to form a three-dimensional image. In Liu’s work, the left-hand print shows a woman of European descent formally dressed in late-Victorian attire. In the right-hand print, the artist has inserted himself into the image (and into the past) as the woman’s Asian doppelgänger. The work, which is one of a larger series entitled *My Other Lives*, stems from Liu’s interest in the history of Chinese migrants in Australia, particularly during the goldrush era.⁶ In this series, he has reworked old

But where are you really from?

photographic portraits to appear as stereographs of typical Anglo-Australian family life during the colonial era with himself as the original sitter's double.

Figure 7.1 Liu Xiao Xian, *My Other Lives*



Liu Xiao Xian, *My Other Lives*, Stereograph series #7, 2000; Lamda print, 100 x 150cm, edition of 10; Courtesy of the artist. Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased with funds arranged by Loti Smorgon for Contemporary Australian Photography, 2002.

According to the exegesis that accompanies the work:

Xiao Xian Liu, an Eastern man performs roles in a Western History - he is the wife at home - the child with a toy - the dashing young man with a penny farthing bicycle. These are his other lives. These are the ancestors whose lives we know only so much about.⁷

In Liu's work, the juxtaposition of a European and Asian face is intended to reflect the invisibility of people of Asian origin in Australian history.⁸ Walking past the 'portrait', one might not catch the subtle, almost ambiguous renderings of identity. When you do notice the insertion and consequent inversion, you become aware of the wider absence of Asian representations in Australian history and in wider notions of Australian identity.

The period, which marks the rise of a nationalist school of Australian art (the Heidelberg School), coincides with a time in which the government actively sought to prevent Chinese migration to Australia. The National Gallery of Victoria, Australia's oldest art gallery, was established in 1861, just 10 years

after the Victorian gold rush that brought substantial revenue to the colony and record numbers of Chinese migrants to the region. Although the 'ancestors' invoked by Liu's *Other Lives* had been present in small numbers since early settlement, it was not until the mid-1800s that Chinese people reached sufficient numbers to become visible within Australian public culture. The Victorian and NSW goldfields attracted such substantial numbers of Chinese that by 1861 they made up 3.3 per cent of the total population.⁹ Their presence alarmed colonial governments to such a degree that Victoria introduced legislation to restrict Chinese immigration in 1855; New South Wales did the same in 1861, Queensland in 1877 and Western Australia in 1886.¹⁰ By 1901, the anti-Chinese lobby was led by some of the most prominent politicians of the day. Edmund Barton, Australia's first prime minister and one of the major architects of Federation, stated at the time:

The doctrine of the equality of men was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman ... Nothing we can do by cultivation, by refinement, or by anything else, will make some races equal to others.¹¹

As Liu Xiao Xian reminds us, there are no artists of Chinese descent represented in the early annals of Australian art history because socially, and later legally, people of Chinese descent were excluded from the category 'Australian'.

Slippage number one: Australian monoculturalism

It has recently become popular in government discourses to state that Australia has *always* been multicultural.¹² These statements strike me as problematic because they risk obscuring or misrepresenting one of the most significant facets of Australian history—that Australia as a nation-state was founded on a principle of racial exclusion and a deliberate policy of monoculturalism. More importantly, this idea was enshrined in legislation that impacted *directly* on the cultural diversity of the resident population.

Australia's first act of legislation as a nation-state was the *Immigration Restriction Act (1901)*, which effectively banned all Chinese migration to Australia, including family members of Chinese residents. The legislation precipitated a substantial decline in the Chinese Australian population—from 29,000 in 1901 to 6000 by 1947.¹³ It was only after World War II that Chinese immigrants were allowed to become naturalised residents. The early postwar period saw increased migration, mainly from Hong Kong and Malaysia, but it was not until the late 1980s that the Chinese population once again reached the 1861 figure of 3.3 per cent of the total.¹⁴

Until the late nineteenth century, the Australian colonies held a relatively open stance on immigration in order to supply the open labour market.¹⁵ Hence the presence of Chinese merchants and labourers, Afghan cameleers, Malay and

Japanese pearl divers and Pacific Islander plantation workers who are often invoked in the 'we have always been multicultural' narrative. However, the opening act of Federation sought the removal of these same people. Within the rhetoric leading up to Federation, these 'foreign' labourers were seen as competition for 'white' jobs and a threat to age-old (British) customs. The stridency of the clarion call to 'whiteness' is aptly summed up by a now famous quote from an 1887 *Bulletin* editorial, which states that '[n]o nigger, no Chinaman, no lascar, no Kanaka, no purveyor of cheap, coloured labour is an Australian'.¹⁶ Their removal was presented as necessary for the creation and constitution of an avowedly monocultural nation.

Historically, Australia as a nation-state was founded on a model of 'whiteness', which was actively engineered by immigration legislation. By Federation, the territorial negotiations (sometimes peaceful, sometimes violent) between the British colonists and the original inhabitants had already produced a well-developed set of uniquely 'Australian' images and narratives. An existing lexicon of 'Australian' identity was already in place—of British subjects out of place, but re-formed and made stronger within the crucible of a new landscape. Many academics writing on Australian history have argued that all narratives of 'white Australia' are ultimately about issues of territoriality and anxiety about possession of the land.¹⁷ What these narratives have in common is that they operate to promulgate the idea that it is normative and natural for British settlers and their descendants (Anglo-Australians) to have inalienable rights over the land of Australia—due to their possession of a superior culture, their historical struggles with and dominion over the natural landscape, their quintessentially 'Australian' character and so on. This narrative was further bolstered in public and political culture by the idea that there was an ever-present need to defend this natural order against the threat of Asian invasion.¹⁸

When Australian multiculturalism appeared some 70 years after the White Australia Policy, it did so as an entirely new paradigm. Our current readings of the 'success' or 'failure' of multiculturalism need to be tempered by an understanding of just how deeply embedded these narratives are. While multiculturalism has been in place for more than 30 years, the White Australia Policy was in place for more than 70, (and the founding myths begin as early as 1778). As cultural historian Ien Ang has written, while

the legal and formal-political structures of the white Australia policy itself are no longer in place, the mentality that nurtured it is still part of the deep structure of Australian culture. Culture, after all, is much more resistant to change than politics and law; culture is the *longue duree* of history.¹⁹

Hou Leong's Crocodile Dundee

About the time that Liu Xiao Xian's work was on display at Federation Square, a work of similar resonance was on display in the National Gallery of Australia. The work is one of a larger series entitled *An Australian Series*, where the artist Hou Leong has taken iconic images of Australianness (such as an 'Aussie' pub, an ANZAC Day march and the culture hero, Crocodile Dundee) and digitally inserted himself into the picture in order to draw attention to the absence of Asian representations within mainstream images of Australian identity.²⁰ In these works Leong places himself in the centre of Australian culture as opposed to the periphery where non-Anglo Australians traditionally occupy only supplementary roles.²¹

Produced in 1994, Leong's *Crocodile Dundee* parodies one of this country's most famous exports, the quintessentially Australian Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee. The 1986 film *Crocodile Dundee* was directed by Peter Faiman and co-written by Australian comedian Paul Hogan, who also played the movie's eponymous lead. While the film poked fun at Australian stereotypes, it also served to reinforce these ideas, particularly to overseas audiences. In his artwork Leong has digitally reworked a production still from the movie and superimposed his face over that of Dundee. The effectiveness of the work is carried through the element of surprise: in the highly iconic image, we are expecting to see blonde-haired, blue-eyed Hogan as Dundee, not a man of Chinese descent. Leong's cheeky grin gives extra subtext—for while the original shows Hogan with his arms around the film's love interest (played by blonde-haired, blue-eyed Linda Kozlowski), this time it is the bespectacled Asian guy who 'gets the girl'.

Although Leong's work has a playful aspect, it also speaks to a real confusion and concerns shared by many Asian-Australians stemming from the disjuncture between their everyday lives—where faces on the street show people of myriad descent, not just Anglo-Australians, versus mainstream media, public culture and even political representation, which construct Australia as almost entirely a constituency of Anglo-Australians. Ultimately, the works provide testimony to the failure of Australian multiculturalism to overcome the dominant Anglo-Australian (white) cultural hegemony.

But where are you really from?

Figure 7.2 Hou Leong, *An Australian Series, Crocodile Dundee*



Hou Leong, *An Australian Series, Crocodile Dundee*, 1994; digital photograph, 70 x 50cm; Courtesy of the artist.

Slippage number two: Constructions of Australian identity

Despite 30 years of bipartisan support for multiculturalism, governmental, public culture and popular constructions of citizenship and national identity continue to be dominated by an epistemological model of Anglo-Australian 'whiteness' as normative and central, in contrast with all other cultural or ethnic groups. Beneath this foundational episteme is a bicultural model of Australian identity that allows Aboriginal people to also be Australian, but only as a significant 'Other'. Despite a deeply entrenched and institutionalised history of racism, the fact that Aboriginal people are not asked 'Where are you really from' is fairly axiomatic given their autochthonous status. For non-Indigenous, non-Anglo Australians, their identity (the authenticity of their belonging) is always deferred to a third space in public discourses.

Today, most of the common markers or tropes of Australian identity are founded on images, events and material culture that are predominantly either Anglo-Australian or Aboriginal in origin.²² These tropes emerged during a time when the dominant negotiations of national identity were between 'white Australians' (predominantly but not exclusively of British descent) and the original owners of the land. The Indigenous population's prior rights to sovereignty were denied as well as citizenship, but they could not be 'returned' to their places of origin like the Asian and Pacific Islander populations. Although the 'Aboriginal problem' was noted, the general consensus at Federation was that Aboriginal people were a 'dying race'—hence unlikely to affect the future of 'white' Australia. The eugenic policies of assimilation (introduced from 1910 onwards) sought to further facilitate this process.²³

The idea of Australia as a bastion of 'whiteness' persisted until well after World War II. The gradual disbandment of the White Australia Policy (between 1958 and 1973) was not merely a series of ideational shifts on the part of government; it saw changes to Australia's immigration legislation, which substantially transformed the cultural constituency of the Australian population. As demographer Graeme Hugo has noted, Australia underwent a massive transformation during the course of the twentieth century, from 'an overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic, homogenous population in which 95.2% had been born in Australia, the United Kingdom or Ireland, to one of the world's most multicultural societies'.²⁴ Such rapid transformation is unparalleled elsewhere in the world.

Echoing this sentiment, historian Eric Richards has argued that the (relative) harmoniousness of this transformation can be read as an international success story for Australian 'multiculturalism'.²⁵ The relative rapidity of the transformation from mono to multicultural has, however, led to a lag between older constructions of national identity based on a time when Australia was demographically and ideationally dominated by people of British descent and

later constructions, which represent Australia in its current multicultural manifestation. As a result, the constructed imaginary of Australian national identity is based on a set of historical markers that no longer reflects the lived reality of today.

This disjuncture in Australian public culture might best be summed up by philosopher Jean Baudrillard's term 'simulacra', where the image, detached from its original referent, comes to possess such potency that it is the simulacrum that is sought as the authentic image, rather than the real-life referent.²⁶ Because of their repeated and valorised presence, particular images have come to represent the authentic markers of Australian identity—even if these images no longer reflect the day-to-day lives of those they represent.

Although many of the dominant markers of Australian identity reflect an image of Australia that is no longer current, they still possess a strong emotional currency that can be used to great effect within the political milieu. Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard was particularly adept at playing on the idea of 'traditional' or 'old' Australia to generate a sense of nostalgia—a search for the 'real' Australia whose existence could be found only in the established mythical elements of the pre-multicultural nation. While some might have found appeal in the nostalgic constructs presented by Howard during his leadership, others felt decidedly uneasy. Many Australians felt understandably confused that the government was on one hand officially pursuing a policy of multiculturalism while on the other hand actively advocating assimilation and promoting Anglo-Australian (or British) traditions as the prime means of expressing Australian identity.²⁷

In her 2007 analysis of narratives of Australian national identity, Catriona Elder has argued that there are two dominant narratives of Australian ethnicity that are played out concurrently in public culture; an older 'white Australia' story which perpetuates the idea of cultural homogeneity, and a newer 'multiculturalism' story which presents Australia as a nation of immigrants.²⁸ In an interesting take on both narratives, the anthropologist Ghassan Hage has argued that, irrespective of which model they support, when Anglo-Australians debate these issues they are unwittingly sharing a common idea about national space, where both

White racists and White multiculturalists share in a conception of themselves as nationalists and of the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White 'ethnics' are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will.²⁹

Hage calls this the "White nation" fantasy—the idea that white Australians control the national space and that it is their right to decide who enters the

country, and to define what is Australian and what is un-Australian. Hage's intent is not to offer a critique of multiculturalism *per se* (at least not in its guise as a doctrine of social equality). Rather, he is attempting to highlight some of the deeper structures in place in order to expose an underlying or foundational world view which says that white Australian citizens have more rights than non-white Australian citizens because they represent the central body, the 'true blue' Australians as opposed to just the 'new' Australians.

Hage argues that the dominant criteria of Australianness are constructed around 'whiteness' rather than Anglo-celtic heritage *per se*. As such 'whiteness' is something that many non-English speaking background migrants can also aspire to. 'Whiteness', he argues, is that which is constructed as authentic Australianness in opposition to Third World-looking (and indeed Fourth world-looking) people. Hage contends that many people from non Anglo-Australian backgrounds, such as central Europeans, now construct themselves as part of what he terms the "white fantasy", where they self-identify as occupying a central national identity and have the right to speak about Third World-looking 'Others'.³⁰

Hage's arguments do not mean, however, that we should write off the historical importance of 'Britishness' in the formation of an Australian national consciousness. After all Britishness is the apotheosis of whiteness—at least in all of the founding myths. Australia's 'birth' as a nation occurred when Britain's geographical and ideational domination was at its height. It is not surprising then that a deeply embedded notion of a hierarchy of whiteness continues to haunt Australian public culture long after the demise of Britain's Empire.

Owen Leong's second skin

In Owen Leong's video installation *Second Skin*, the artist draws attention to the European fascination with Asian bodies as 'Other'—as objects of simultaneous repulsion and desire—evoking an intertwined history of European colonialism and Orientalism. The artist's face is filmed in close-up as honey is poured over his head in a single slow-motion sequence. As his hands rub the viscous liquid across his face it is unclear whether he is in pleasure or in pain. The video is deliberately ambiguous; what at first viewing appears to be a sensuous act, over time takes on a more sinister tone—the 'sweet' honey becomes cloying, sticky and uncomfortable. Leong often uses milk and honey in his work as 'racial constructs', as metaphors in which milk equals white and honey equals yellow.³¹ Much of his practice involves staging deliberate interventions against homogenising stereotypes based on Eurocentric constructions of race, in which his own body becomes the platform for alternative identities.

Figure 7.3 Owen Leong, Still from the video installation *Second Skin*.



Figure 7.3 Owen Leong, Still from the video installation *Second Skin*, 2003; Courtesy of the artist and Uber Gallery, Melbourne.

Leong is highly conscious of growing up in a country dominated by 'whiteness'. He comments:

As an Australian-born Chinese having lived in Australia all my life, I have always been made painfully aware of mainstream Australia's racial anxiety, its tenuous grip on 'whiteness' as a position of power.³²

As an Asian-Australian, he is acutely aware of dominant discourses in Australian public culture that deny him an authentic Australian identity. His work raises a very important point. Although he represents the ideal example of assimilation—born in Australia and possessing a completely Australian 'habitus' (that is, his way of walking and talking, his outlook and social dispositions)—he can never truly be an accepted part of the mainstream. As long as the mainstream is defined as Anglo-Australian, it does not matter how completely 'assimilated' he is, how often he says 'crikey' or how many crocodiles he wrestles; he is forever to be excluded from the category of 'real Australian'. As Leong states, 'It doesn't matter how Australian I am, I can't escape my Asian face.'³³

Slippage number three: Assimilation

The period directly after World War II saw the beginnings of a major demographic transformation in Australia. Like other Western liberal democracies, Australia was encouraged by the international community to provide refuge for the significant numbers of displaced persons created by the war. This, along with an imperative to 'populate or perish', led to the acceptance of small numbers of refugees from non-English-speaking European backgrounds (Asian immigrants were not accepted until after 1966). 'Assimilation' was the term used during the late 1940s and 1950s for government policies aimed at 'settling' these postwar migrants of non-English-speaking backgrounds. During the 1960s, the term 'integration' replaced 'assimilation', but the government policies essentially remained the same, that immigrants should shed their previous cultural personas and adopt the language and customs of their host society as quickly as possible in order to become fully integrated into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture.³⁴ By the 1970s, assimilation had fallen out of political favour, replaced with a new paradigm, multiculturalism, which advocated cultural pluralism rather than cultural homogeneity.

However, despite its fall from political grace, the concept of assimilation did not disappear entirely. In a work published earlier this year, historian Anna Haebich has noted the recent re-emergence of assimilationist narratives within Australian political culture:

[W]hile the word assimilation is rarely mentioned, more than a trace of its essence remains in official pronouncements on national values, citizenship and the practical integration of Aboriginal communities. This paradox of public denial of assimilation and hidden allegiance to its tenets can be explained in terms of 'retro-assimilation'.³⁵

During the conservative political climate of the Howard era (1996-2007) Australia experienced a significant shift in political discourses on cultural diversity. Although it is not within the scope of this essay to discuss the 'return to the right' of Australian public culture during the Howard era, it is worth briefly noting some significant events that occurred during this time, which benchmark a return of neo-assimilation discourses in Australia and which, according to political analyst Rogers Brubaker, reflect a wider global trend.³⁶ Many of these retro-assimilation discourses have been fuelled by the tensions generated since 2001 regarding border security, immigration and the spectre of home-grown terrorism. The terrorist attacks on 'Western' targets by militant Islamic groups—beginning with the attacks of 11 September 2001 on US soil, followed by attacks in Bali (October 2002), Madrid (March 2004), London (July 2005) and Mumbai (November 2008)—have resulted in global anti-terrorist rhetoric and increased racial tension within liberal multicultural nations.

These tensions contributed to Australia's first race riots, in December 2005, which erupted in the Sydney beachside suburb of Cronulla—allegedly between young males of Anglo and Lebanese-Australian descent. In the wake of these events, Prime Minister Howard used his 2006 Australia Day speech to openly critique multiculturalism, stating, 'We've drawn back from being too obsessed with diversity to a point where Australians are now better able to appreciate the enduring values of the national character that we proudly celebrate and preserve.' For him multiculturalism was associated with narratives that, he claimed, falsely presented 'old Australia' as 'xenophobic, racist and monocultural'.³⁷ He also re-iterated that Australia's national character was derived from Britain and made clear his commitment to the values of 'old Australia'.

Interestingly, Howard began his speech by noting the lack of a predeterminate 'test of Australianness' for aspiring citizens, saying that immigrants came to Australia 'because they want to be Australians'. He added, 'The irony is that no institution or code lays down a test of Australianness. Such is the nature of our free society.'³⁸ Despite the 'free nature' of Australian society, by September 2007, the government had introduced a new citizenship test, which required potential citizens to demonstrate their knowledge of the English language and the traditions and values of Australian society (as defined by the government). The test was deemed to somehow inculcate a greater 'Australianness' in new migrants, leading to more effective social integration.

Sadly, the test has proved anything but inclusive. An independent review of the test commissioned in 2008 under the newly elected Rudd Government (which replaced the Howard Government a month after the test was made active) found the test to be 'flawed', 'intimidating' and 'discriminatory'.³⁹ The test forebodingly echoed Australia's original citizenship test, the infamous 1901 Dictation Test, designed to keep non-white migrants out of the country. Richard Woolcott, who headed the 2008 review, supported these assumptions by stating that 'the standard of English required [in the citizenship test] was too high and discriminated against non-English speaking migrants'.⁴⁰ The irony of the citizen test is that it promotes the notion that 'Third World-looking' immigrants must learn to be authentic Australians (part of the mainstream), while at the same time denying these groups entry into the mainstream by defining it solely in terms of Anglo-Australian identity and cultural expressions. This is the catch-22 of Australian citizenship as it currently stands.

Kate Beynon's where is your original home?

Much of Kate Beynon's art revolves around her personal experiences of hybridity, and the complexity of adequately representing her identity as an Australian with Welsh, English, and Norwegian ancestry on her father's side and

Chinese-Malaysian ancestry from her mother. Her work speaks to some of the complexities of identity negotiation in a multicultural (and increasingly transnational) society and resists simplistic or singular representations of migrant identity. Beynon's work has evolved its own distinct lexicon, which draws on the visual genres of Eastern and Western comic book graphics, Chinese calligraphy and late-twentieth-century graffiti art. Many of her works are inspired by old Chinese stories and folk heroes, which she re-presents in modern situations. One of her most enduring representations is Li Ji, based on a fourth-century Chinese heroine who stepped outside her traditional cultural boundaries and saved her village from a giant python. In Beynon's work, Li Ji appears reincarnated into the modern world in different guises as a symbol of the 'global' citizen.⁴¹ *Where is your original home* was one of 11 prints based on the animated video work *Li Ji: Warrior Girl*, 2000, where Li Ji is portrayed as a Chinese Australian young woman on a journey into Melbourne's Chinatown. As she travels by tram and later on foot, she experiences flashbacks to her past life as the Li Ji from the 4th century fable.⁴²

In the 2001 work, *Where is Your Original Home?*, Li's face appears to be exploding from the canvas like a cartoon punch. Beynon presents her protagonist against a backdrop of what appears to be writing in both graffiti tag-style and *kanji* script. The text that frames Li's face is stylised but readable as the question, 'Where is your original home?'—a phrase that was taken from the socializing section of a Chinese language guide which Beynon took to China when she visited for the first time in 1995 on a study tour to learn Chinese. She comments, 'I was interested in how the intention of this question can vary from friendly and conversational, to hostile and exclusionary.'⁴³ The phrases evoke Beynon's ambivalence regarding assumptions commonly made about her cultural identity. In certain social contexts, asking someone 'where are you from?' immediately renders that person 'out of place'—a foreigner. Many non Anglo-Australians will be familiar with the scenario of being asked by a stranger, 'where are you from?'. Answering with 'Wollongong' or 'Brunswick' or 'Mt Isa' then leads to the all-too-familiar 'But where are you really from?'. Underlying the seemingly innocent question, a number of assumptions about territoriality and belonging are being played out.

While Beynon's work has often been included in exhibitions of 'Asian-Australian' art, her practice revolves around a reiteration of the complexity of personal identity. Beynon says her work explores

the multi-layered experiences of people negotiating 'hybrid' or 'mixed' identities produced by a nexus of cultural influences such as heritage, family histories, travel, language, paths of migration and a sense of belonging.⁴⁴

Figure 7.4 Kate Beynon, *Where is Your Original Home?*



Figure 7.4 Kate Beynon, *Where is Your Original Home?*, 2000; digital photographic print, 90 x 84cm; Courtesy of the artist and Sutton gallery, Melbourne.

Her insistence on the multiplicity of her personal identity (her complex hybrid self) evokes one of the interesting effects of contemporary multiculturalism, which is the privileging of ethnicity over other aspects of identity (gender, class, sexual orientation or social status, to name a few). Within this model, people tend to be accorded a single dominant ethnic identity, irrespective of their personal history. This is equally true of those of Anglo-Australian descent. Recently, Andrea Witcomb has commented on the rise of multiculturalism as the primary means of representing diversity in Australian museums.⁴⁵ The same can be said of public culture writ large. While 30 years of multiculturalism have

not successfully shifted some of the older stereotypes of Anglo-Australia, they have been very successful in making the concept of migration and ethnic diversity a primary locus for debating and defining cultural diversity within public culture. These presentations of ethnicity promote the idea that a person has only one dominant ethnic self—and that this ethnic self dominates all other aspects of identity.

As Kate Beynon's work suggests, this rendering of identity is far too simplistic. According to the Australian demographer Charles Price, around 45 per cent of the total population has three or more ancestries. "Moreover," he adds, "it is clear that many Australians of mixed ethnic origin are not simply mixtures of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh, but have at least some elements of non-Anglo-Celtic in their ancestry."⁴⁶ While people are often required to assert one dominant choice of ethnicity, the reality is that they are likely to see themselves in far more complex ways. Likewise, at any given time, other markers of identity will predominate over ethnic heritage. Thus, in the flux of everyday living, people will self-select different aspects of their identity according to changing social contexts. Multiple variables contribute to identity and, for many people, 'ethnicity' might be the least relevant on a personal scale.

The politicians who drafted the original framework for Australian multiculturalism were aware of the complexities of this issue. In its original incarnation, Australian multiculturalism, as represented by Grassby, was intended to shift older hegemonic models of Anglo-Australian identity and to equalise differences.⁴⁷ However, in the model of 'cultural difference' which has emerged under (or perhaps despite) three decades of multiculturalism, only *some* people are deemed different. Anglo-Australians have been portrayed as a single homogenous ethnic group which has enduring *values* rather than diverse cultural origins, while all other Australians have been portrayed as having an inescapable *surfeit* of culture which somehow prevents them acting as individual agents capable of making personal and autonomous (rather than culture-group) decisions.

Slippage number four: Australian multiculturalism

Australia, following Canada, was one of the first countries to adopt a formal national policy on multiculturalism.⁴⁸ In the case of Canada, this meant a national policy of bilingualism and recognition of both Anglo and Franco-Canadian cultural traditions. In Australia, however, it was taken up in a more ambitious manner. Under the progressive Whitlam Government (1972–75), multiculturalism was presented as an ideal response to Australia's increasing cultural diversity, resulting from changes to immigration legislation since World War II. Whitlam's flamboyant Minister for Immigration Al Grassby is credited as one of the 'founding fathers' of Australian multiculturalism. Of Irish and Spanish-Chilean parentage, Grassby, rejected prior citizenship models in which migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds were expected to efface all prior cultural

ties in favour of total immersion or 'assimilation' into Anglo-Australian culture. Grassby wanted to replace the assimilation model with a more pluralist approach which was better able to represent the lived reality of post World War II Australia.

In the first official reference to multiculturalism, a 1973 speech by Al Grassby entitled, *A multi-cultural society for the future*, there appears a real desire to shift older hegemonic models of Anglo-Australian identity. Grassby makes notes of the absence of images of non Anglo-Australian cultural representation within public culture and especially the media.⁴⁹ He comments, "How often do our television screens reflect anything like the variety of migrant groups encountered in a real-life stroll through out city streets, or particularly, near city suburbs?"⁵⁰ While his comments provided the stimulus for the 1978 Galbally Report, which in turn provided the framework for the establishment of Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), thirty years on, Grassby's statements continue to have direct relevance.⁵¹

The policy reforms which accompanied Australia's adoption of multiculturalism were soon reflected within the arts and heritage sector. Since the mid to late 1970s shifts in Australia's immigration policies have seen a promulgation of 'multicultural' awareness generally, as well as specific funding for multicultural artists and public programs through government sponsored organizations such as the Australia Council and the Office of Multicultural Interests. During the 1980s and 1990s, the formation of the European Union and US market protectionism led Prime Ministers' Bob Hawke and his successor Paul Keating to turn to Asian markets for economic salvation.⁵² This shift in political axis from 'West' to 'East' resulted in a new 'branding' of Australia as part of the Asia Pacific region. It also led to a significant geo-political realignment of Australian identity. The period under Keating (1991-1996) marked the zenith of Australian 'multiculturalism' with the strength of government support reflected in both government rhetoric and funding.

The 1996 federal election of a Liberal-National Coalition Government led by John Howard was followed by the 1997 collapse of the Asian economic markets. A noticeable realignment back towards the West soon followed. Although the Coalition continued (at least tacitly) to support multiculturalism as an official government policy, Howard's dislike of the policy of multiculturalism was well known.⁵³ As mentioned earlier in this discussion, the late 1990s and early 2000s were marked by a conservative shift in political discourses on cultural diversity, which both reflected and were fuelled by global anti-terrorist rhetoric and an increasing tightening of border security.

In 2007, the election of a Labor government, led by Kevin Rudd, had many analysts predicting a return of stronger Austral-Asian regional links. Those seeking a return to Australia's' prior traditions of advocating multiculturalism,

however, seem doomed to be disappointed. While the original intent of multiculturalism was to encourage Australian migrants to retain their unique languages and cultural expressions, this maintaining of difference is increasingly seen as polemical. A continued retreat from multiculturalism is evident from the current Labor Government (as well as the Liberal Opposition).

Conclusion: But where are you really from?

A 'seismic shift' from multiculturalism to assimilation or civic integration discourses is, as Christian Joppke notes, a global, twenty-first century phenomenon.⁵⁴ Yet as I have argued, the underlying foundation of assimilation narratives is the idea that social cohesion can only occur with cultural homogeneity. At the same time these narratives often conflict with equally held ideas about democratic citizenship. Historian Ann Mari Jordens has argued that a country's citizenship legislation 'reveals its conception of the ideal citizen, and the qualities required by foreigners if they are to be accepted into the community of the nation'.⁵⁵ Since 1901, successive Australian governments have implemented a number of citizenship models as part of the material instrument of socially engineering a nation. Although these government policies (immigration restriction, assimilation and multiculturalism) have differed radically in scope, all have relied on the premise that citizenship is the teleological end point of Australian identity. The promise promulgated to migrants is that the bureaucratic award of citizenship automatically conveys a sense of belonging in the imagined community of the nation. As Geoffrey Brahm Levy notes, however, this 'overlooks the fact that one can enjoy equal citizen[ship] rights and equal opportunities and still be socially alienated'.⁵⁶

As I have argued in this essay, and as the work of artists Liu Xiao Xian, Hou Leong, Owen Leong and Kate Beynon so effectively illustrate, while Australian policies of multiculturalism have been effective in repositioning Australia as a culturally diverse nation, they have failed to secure a sense of true belonging for many of its citizens. Likewise, multiculturalism's proposed 'antidote', integration or assimilation, currently promotes a model which by its very nature successfully resists true social parity. Surely there is scope for a narrative that can celebrate the achievements of the nation as a pluralist democracy, which recognises that the commonality of being Australian comprises myriad different experiences and backgrounds. The material reality of a multicultural population versus the ideational imaginary of white Australia needs to be effectively negotiated. This disjuncture will need to be mediated by government in ways more sophisticated than a retreat to a nostalgic longing for the past or a blithe assertion that 'we have always been multiculturalists'.

ENDNOTES

¹ See, for example, Brubaker, Rogers 2001, 'The return of assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany, and the United States', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 24, July, pp. 531–48; Back, Les et al. 2002, 'New Labour's White Heart: Politics, multiculturalism and the return of assimilation', *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 4, pp. 447–54; Haebich, Anna 2008, 'Introduction', *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950–1970*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Western Australia. For an excellent analysis of current debates surrounding the 'crisis of multiculturalism', see Lentin, Alana and Titley, Gavan 2008, Questioning the European 'crisis of multiculturalism', Presented to Questioning the European 'Crisis of Multiculturalism': An International Colloquium, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 12 December 2008, viewed 11 May 2009, <<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sociology/1-4-11.html>> For a comprehensive Australian perspective see Geoffrey Brahm Levey 2008 (ed.), *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism*, Bergahn Books, New York, Oxford. The most noted critique of multiculturalism comes from Nathan Glazer in his 1997 publication (*We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.).

² Following Richard White, and Catriona Elder, I take from the outset that governments consciously manipulate constructions of citizenship and national identity as part of their governing strategy and that both multiculturalism and assimilation, as key organising principles of a government policy, have impacted directly on narratives of Australian identity. See Elder, Catriona 2007, *Being Australian*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales and White, Richard 1981, *Inventing Australia: Images and identity 1688–1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

³ I recognise that the term 'Asian-Australian' is an arbitrary one which may erroneously imply shared identity between people from substantially different geo-historical backgrounds. However in relation to this article the term is useful to denote a broad marker of identity which exists in opposition to the category 'Anglo-Australian'. Liu Xiao Xian, Hou Leong, Owen Leong and Kate Beynon have very different personal histories, but they share some common experience as people with Asian ancestry who live in a multicultural nation dominated by Anglo-Australian cultural hegemony. Moreover, all four artists seek to express through their art practice the complexities of negotiating cultural identity in multicultural Australia.

⁴ I should note that this is not an art-history paper. Rather, I am interested in these works as personal and political narratives, which tell a larger story.

⁵ Hage, Ghassan 1998, *White Nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, New South Wales, p. 18ff.

⁶ Raffel, Suhanya 2007, *Binary Vision: My other lives Liu Xiao Xian*, Exhibition commentary, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 6–29 June 2007, cited on Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia website, viewed 14 April 2009, <http://www.cacsa.org.au/publications/broadsheet/BS_v30no3/bs_07.pdf>

⁷ Stills Gallery 2001, *My Other Lives, Liu Xiao Xian*, Exhibition commentary, Stills Gallery, Sydney, 14 February – 10 March 2001, cited on Stills Gallery website, viewed 18 February 2009, <http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/exhibitions/2001/index.php?obj_id=2001_02&nav=3>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 'Explore the Harvest of Endurance Scroll—Australian goldrush', National Museum of Australia website, viewed 15 April 2009, <http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection_interactives/harvest_of_endurance_html_version/> See also 'The Australian goldrush', Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal, viewed 15 April 2009, <<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/goldrush/>>

¹⁰ 'Explore the Harvest of Endurance Scroll—Anti-Chinese violence; Lambing Flat riots'.

¹¹ Barton, Edmund 1901, Committee Debate on the Immigration Restriction Bill, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 26 September 1901, p. 5233.

¹² This view seems to have acceptance across a wide range of government sectors, including: Comrie, Neil 1995, Policing multicultural Australia, Paper presented by the Chief Police Commissioner of Victoria to Australian Institute of Criminology Crime in Australia First National Outlook Symposium, Canberra, 5 and 6 June, p. 1; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 1997, *Multicultural Australia: The way forward*, Message from Council Chairman, Government of Australia, Canberra, p. 1; National Archives of Australia, *Research Guide—Immigration to Australia, 1901–39*, p. 1.

¹³ 'Explore the Harvest of Endurance Scroll—Politics and racism'.

¹⁴ 'Explore the Harvest of Endurance Scroll—Australian goldrush'.

¹⁵ Kalantzis, Mary 2001, *Recognising Diversity, NSW Centenary of Federation Committee Barton Lectures*, no. 3, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Bulletin*, 2 July 1887.

¹⁷ Despite coming from differing disciplines and focal points, a significant number of Australian academics writing on Australian narratives of 'whiteness' have argued that these narratives have their origin in issues of territoriality and anxiety about possession of the land. See, for example: Elder, Catriona 2007, *Being Australian*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales; Hage, *White Nation*; Moreton Robinson, Aileen (ed.) 2004, *Whitening Race: Essays in social and cultural criticism*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra; Papastergiadis, Nikos 2004, 'The invasion complex in Australian political culture', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 78, pp. 8–27; White, Richard 1981, *Inventing Australia: Images and identity 1688–1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

¹⁸ See, for example, Papastergiadis 'The invasion complex in Australian political culture', pp. 8–27; Elder, *Being Australian*, pp. 122–7.

¹⁹ Ang, Ien 2001, Intertwining histories: heritage and diversity, NSW History Council Lecture, Government House, Sydney, 24 September. Reproduced in full in *Australian Humanities Review* issue 24, December 2001, viewed 1 May 2009, <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-December-2001/home.html>>

²⁰ Images that provide the backdrop to Leong's *An Australian* series include an 'Aussie' pub, an Anzac Day march, a group of postwar European migrants arriving by ship and an Ampol advertisement showing a blonde-haired, blue-eyed man wearing a Drizabone, seated on a motorbike with a cattle dog and featuring the line 'I'm as Australian as Ampol'.

²¹ Kho, Tseen 2003, "'Angry yellow men': cultural space for diasporic Chinese masculinities", in Kam Louie and Morris Low (eds.) *Asian Masculinities: The meaning and practice of manhood in China and Japan*, Routledge Curzon, London, pp. 220–243, p. 230.

²² I have deliberately referred to Aboriginal Australians rather than using the more encompassing term 'Indigenous Australians', since within historical constructions of Australianness, Torres Strait Islanders are rarely represented or falsely incorporated into the category 'Aboriginal', rather than recognised as a historically and ethnically separate group.

²³ In 1997, a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report found that Australian government policies (from about 1910 to the early 1970s), aimed at the removal of Indigenous children of 'mixed descent' from their parents, were, ultimately, formulated to end the existence of 'Aborigines' as a distinct people and thus amounted to genocide. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1997.

²⁴ Hugo, Graeme 2002, 'A century of population change in Australia', *ABS Year Book Australia 2002*, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

²⁵ Richards, Eric 2008, *Destination Australia: Australian immigration from 1901*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

²⁶ Baudrillard, Jean 1994, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor Press, University of Michigan.

²⁷ See for example, Metherell, Mark 2007, 'Immigration chief at odds with PM over assimilation', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 2007.

²⁸ Elder, *Being Australian*, p. 115.

²⁹ Hage, *White Nation*, p. 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³¹ 'Man of milk and honey', *BBC News*, Manchester edition, 2006, viewed 16 April 2009, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2006/06/23/230606_owen_leong_feature.shtml>

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Owen Leong, in conversation with the author.

³⁴ Galligan, Brian and Roberts, Winsome 2003, Australian multiculturalism: its rise and demise, Paper presented at the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 29 September – 1 October 2003, p. 2.

³⁵ Haebich, *Spinning the Dream*, p. 1.

³⁶ Brubaker, 'The return of assimilation?', pp. 531–48.

³⁷ Howard, John 2006, A sense of balance: the Australian achievement in 2006, Address to the National Press Club by the Prime Minister, Parliament House, Canberra, 25 January 2006, viewed 5 March 2009, <http://www.australianpolitics.com/news/2006/01/06-01-25_howard.shtml>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Evans, Chris 2008, Moving forward...improving pathways to citizenship, Government press release, 22 November 2008, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Cited in 'Citizenship test overhaul', *Courier Mail*, 29 August 2008.

⁴¹ Brown, Ruth and Bailey, John 2006, 'Planet art', *Age*, 30 July 2006, viewed 1 May 2009, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts/planet-art/2006/07/27/1153816319365.html>>; 'Kate Beynon: artist's bio', Sutton Gallery website, <<http://www.suttongallery.com.au/artists/artistprofile.php?id=18>>

⁴² In later works such as the animated video *From the Lives of Li Ji*, 2002, and the painting *Li Ji: Future Dream*, 2003, Li Ji appears as having multiple lives, including a futuristic life as a 'multi-racial' figure. These works led to the *Hybrid Faces Project*, 2004, featuring faces of mixed but 'non-defined' racial heritage or background, which highlighted the issues experienced and imposed upon people of mixed backgrounds. Beynon's last solo exhibition *Auspicious Charms for Transcultural Living*, 2008 further developed the idea of the 'global citizen', of people affected by and embracing aspects of 'transcultural' life, whether through their own heritage, their relationships with friends and partners, through travel, work and/or experiences. Email correspondence, Kate Beynon to Anna Edmundson, dated 8 June, 2009.

⁴³ Beynon to Edmundson, 8 June, 2009.

⁴⁴ 'Artist's statement', Sutton Gallery, <<http://www.suttongallery.com.au/artists/artistprofile.php?id=18>>

⁴⁵ Andrea Witcomb, this volume.

⁴⁶ Charles Price cited in Galligan and Roberts, *Australian Multiculturalism*. p3.

⁴⁷ Grassby, A. J. 1973, *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

⁴⁸ Brahm Levy, *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Grassby, *A Multi-cultural Society for the Future*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Galbally, Frank et. al, 1978, *Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra. As well as the establishment of SBS, the 1978 Galbally report was instrumental in recommending of a range of essential services to assist incoming migrant groups which were not in existence previously. Although my interest here is in 'multiculturalism' at its widest frame — as a government platform which directly impacts on changing conceptions of Australian citizenship and national identity — it is necessary to acknowledge that the adoption of multiculturalism facilitated real improvements to the migration experience on a material level.

⁵² Chiu, Melissa 2001, Asian-Australian artists: Recent Cultural Shifts in Australia, unpublished conference paper delivered at Apexart bi-annual conference, Inside Out: Reassessing International Cultural Influence, Rio de Janeiro, July 3-9, 2001.

⁵³ Galligan and Roberts, 'Australian Multiculturalism', p. 12.

⁵⁴ Christian Joppke, cited in Phillips, Anne 2007, *Multiculturalism Without Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Jordens, Ann-Mari 1996, Redefining Australians: immigration, citizenship, and national identity, unpublished conference paper, abstract, Nationalism and National Identity (Fourth HRC Summer School), The Australian National University, Canberra, 12-16 February 1996, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Brahm Levy, Geoffrey 2008, 'Multicultural Political Thought in Australian Perspective', in Geoffrey Brahm Levy (ed.) *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, p. 16.

Acting in a community

Art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia

Howard Morphy

The word 'community' has long been used in everyday language in two distinct but related senses. On the one hand, it can refer to a group of people who interact, who occupy the same space or are a part of a collective entity: the community of people who live in a particular suburb or who belong to the same school. On the other hand, it refers to a sense of shared identity that people have—for example, by having certain interests in common or sharing a similar sense of being in the world: the artistic community, the Catholic community or more abstractly the community of like-minded individuals. In this second sense, the community can comprise a set of people who never or rarely meet together and can be applied so broadly that in most respects the people included by the term have little at all in common—the ethnic community, for example. Just because a term defies simple definition or seems to break down under close inspection, this does not, however, mean that there is not a valid idea behind it. A term that is used as often as community and that indeed is thought by its users to have a degree of moral force that implies commitment is likely to signify something important in human society.¹

There will be cases where a broad commonality of interests is reflected in real groups of people who live together as neighbours in the same place, but, more commonly in complex societies, communities cut across residential patterns. The idea of community becomes less problematic as soon as it is realised that individuals can be members of many different types of community and that membership of any one community does not prescribe its identity. This brings out the ambiguity of the two senses of community: it is possible for people who occupy the same residential space—people who belong to a community in the first sense—to belong to many different communities in the second sense. Nonetheless, in the case of both senses of the term, there is likely to be a moral dimension.

In the case of residential communities, even if they are not historically constituted, there is a pragmatic requirement to act as a moral community at least with respect to those interests that enable members to live together—common interests arise out of living together. On the other hand, the dispersed communities that are created through sharing interests in common or having a shared sense of identity or history are often motivated to act together. Members are likely to congregate together on an occasional basis through

meetings, fellowships or conferences or, if possible, meet on a daily basis. While dispersed, they act together at a distance through newsletters and magazines and, today, by forming groups on the Internet. It is important to recognise that the residential communities in the first sense can differ nearly as much from each other in their constitution as the communities of interest in the second sense that crosscut them. And, almost by definition, the residential community is going to reflect diverse communities of interest in the second sense—interests that might even be conflicting. Social cohesion clearly requires a complex balancing act between moral forces that encourage people to act together and interests that separate people from one another.

Social cohesion at a national level means something very different from social cohesion at a local level. At the local level, social cohesion refers to the capacity of people to work together on the ground and to have a sense of obligation to the community as a whole. At the national level, it is a much more abstract concept since it must link groups and individuals with vastly different and often opposed interests; a cohesive society needs to include people who believe that the arts are an essential component of a society requiring government funding and those who believe that art is a luxury or a commodity that should simply be left to market forces. Hence, social cohesion at a national level requires compromise and a balance of interests, and must allow for diversity. In the arts, social cohesion will be achieved largely by artists acting in and on behalf of the community. Nationally, a number of different factors will be involved.

Different communities and interest groups need to feel that they have access to resources on an equitable basis and are included in the decision-making processes. Factors of identity politics, however, are also likely to be crucial: there are sub-communities. For these, it matters how inclusively Australian art is represented in local and international contexts. And for these sub-communities, the extent to which the artistic community itself embraces cultural diversity, gives space to different practices and recognises value in different histories also matters. Feelings of social inclusion in the case of Indigenous Australians are influenced by the extent to which their rights are recognised and by the success or failure of government policies in alleviating social disadvantage. Equally important has been reversing the history of exclusion that for many years removed Aboriginal Australians from the public face of the nation. The absence of Aboriginal art in the museums and galleries and the failure to resource Aboriginal art practice were signs of this exclusion.² A sense of shared identity or commonality of interest can be influenced by the ways in which institutions that operate at a national level articulate and contribute to the success of organisations at a regional or local level. If those links work well then, even if local communities still feel disconnected from the national identity, they will at least be able to take advantage of mechanisms for inclusion.

Art as action

I begin with the premise that art is a way of acting in the world.³ Art is a way of expressing knowledge—a means of expressing the experience of being in the world and a means of communicating ideas and values. As a form of action, art can influence the world in innumerable ways. Art can be a means of political intervention and identity formation, it can help transform the environment in which people live and provide inspiration or comfort to individuals and communities by expressing emotions in aesthetically powerful ways. As a form of action, art requires a community—a community of speakers, of viewers, of actors—and helps build communities.

In this paper, I will focus on two complementary examples: the ways in which Yolngu people have used art to mediate the impact of European colonisation since the 1930s and the role of Boomalli (established in 1987) in the development of a networked community of artists in south-eastern Australia. Yolngu might appear to be more like a community in the first sense (of people who live together) and Boomalli might appear to be a community in the second sense (of a dispersed set of people who share interests in common), but there are overlaps. And in both cases art plays an important role in helping to make and remake the communities in enabling them to act as the world changes around them.

Art can enable people to be active as agents in determining their own futures. I will show how art creates and maintains ties within a community and helps resolve important political and social issues, and how it enables communities to act effectively in their engagement with the world outside. In the Yolngu case, I will focus on the cases of the *Yirrkala Church Panels* and the Saltwater Collection of bark paintings held at the National Maritime Museum. These examples will allow me to show the ways in which art, by playing a role in the maintenance of a regional community of people who live together, also enables artists to work together to achieve wider community objectives. In the Boomalli case, I will show that the organisation brought together a previously dispersed set of artists who were able to create opportunities that were otherwise denied them. I will argue more generally that the arena of public culture—arts exhibitions and awards, cultural institutions and their audiences—provides a framework that enables local communities and communities defined by shared interests to influence the national agenda and change the face of the nation. Art both enables the creation of local identities and contributes to the building of a cohesive nation by enabling people to communicate to different audiences and thereby helps create a national discourse.

The bite in the bark

The history of the *Yirrkala Church Panels* and the bark petition is too well known to be repeated in detail. What is often not realised is that they were not simply

directed towards outside audiences but reflected the creation of regional Yolngu polity based at Yirrkala. The view that Aboriginal society comprises small isolated social groups disconnected from each other has long been discredited. Yolngu people now number some 6000 speakers of closely related languages. There has always been a loose regional system of governance that enabled people to travel across the region safely and find their place in all corners of the Yolngu world—to establish their '*gurrutu*' (relationships to other people).⁴ The system of governance was and is underpinned by the '*madayin*'—the sacred designs and songs that were created by ancestral beings in place but which extended in a network of ties across the region. Underlying the region's artistic production is a system of rules that people follow and that has widespread recognition.⁵ It is also, of course, an expression of the ancestral forces that underlie society and country. Before European colonisation, people knew the vast Yolngu world through the *madayin* but would never have met together as a whole (even though as individuals many would have travelled widely across the region). Rather, they knew their own part and how they fitted into a whole. With the establishment of the mission stations across eastern Arnhem Land in the 1920s and 1930s, Yolngu began to congregate together in larger settlements without ever losing their connection to their own country. In those larger settlements, they were faced with the problem of living together and organising their world in close proximity to one another; a segment of the Yolngu community that had previously been dispersed across eastern Arnhem Land came together as a whole. And in those mission stations they had to present themselves as a whole to the outside world—to the missionaries, anthropologists and government officials who intervened in their lives.

Within a very short time, Yolngu living at Yirrkala produced paintings for the outside market. They worked with anthropologists such as Ronald Berndt, Charles Mountford, the artist-ethnographer Karel Kupka and the artist-curator Tony Tuckson and his collaborator, orthopaedic surgeon Stuart Scougall. They worked together in partial seclusion in spaces set aside for the purpose. These collaborations in a communal space, outside the context of a ceremonial performance, brought together artists from Melville Bay to Blue Mud Bay. Tuckson and Scougall's visits in 1959 and 1960 laid the foundations for the Art Gallery of New South Wales' Yirrkala collections and art became a means whereby Yolngu communicated the value of their culture to the outside world.

The *Yirrkala Church Panels* were produced in 1962, but the groundwork for them had been prepared by these earlier visits from anthropologists and collectors. While the forms of the paintings reflected traditional Yolngu clan designs, the grand scale and composite structure of the paintings reflected the dialogues between outsiders and Yolngu that had occurred in previous years. Artists from Yirrkala developed a form of episodic narrative paintings that traced the journeys of ancestral beings across Yolngu land. They often combined a

number of designs from different places on the same large sheet of bark or, in the case of Berndt crayon drawings, on the same large sheet of brown butcher's paper. Yolngu artists decided how they would use their art in communicating with outsiders and how their sacred law could be presented in public contexts. Thus, when it came time for the Methodist Mission under Edgar Wells to build a new church, it was also the moment to introduce Yolngu religious iconography into a Christian context. It was Narritjin Maymuru who originally suggested to Wells that Yolngu paintings should be included beside the altar.⁶

The Yolngu had many motivations; however, the two core reasons were to show that Yolngu had their own sacred heritage and to emphasise its connection to land and land ownership. Yolngu were by then aware that others were showing an interest in their land—in the immense reserves of bauxite that lay just beneath the surface of the Gove Peninsula. The *Church Panels* comprised two huge sheets of masonite painted with the sacred designs belonging to the clans of the region. Visitors to the church would be able to see the ways in which paintings mapped their rights in land and also apprehend the sense in which land was a sacred endowment.

The *Church Panels* were as much for the Yolngu worshippers, who formed the main congregation, as they were for outsiders. Yolngu society is divided into two moieties—Dhuwa and Yirritja—and so too were the panels. The Dhuwa and Yirritja panels were placed on either side of the altar. In this way, fundamental features of the structure of Yolngu society were incorporated in the design of the church: the house of God housed the Yolngu world and they were able to worship more comfortably within it. Syncretism has been a strong theme in Yolngu religious life and there was no sense that their beliefs were incompatible with Christianity.⁷ The placing in the context of the church also made the paintings public—open to be viewed by people irrespective of clan membership, age or sex. They were a step towards creating a public regional identity that reflected the underlying structure of the Yolngu polity. In painting the panels, the senior artists felt they had to take account of the regional system as a whole and needed to include those who were not represented at the mission as well as those who were. Thus, paintings belonging to the Munyuku and Madarrpa clans were produced by secondary rights-holders with the permission of their leaders, who were residing in mission settlements to the south. Having taken the step of mapping out the region, it was important to make it inclusive. The paintings did not cover the entire Yolngu area, but the subregion associated with the eastern and southern clans, the majority of whom moved to Yirrkala.

The *Church Panels* were part of a process for dealing with outsiders that could be traced back to well before European colonisation and included encounters with the Macassarese. The panels were, however, a significant intervention in Australian politics and, in addition, they provided an effective model for future

action. The most immediate impact was that they became the stimulus for the Yirrkala Bark Petition. Gordon Bryant and Kim Beazley, Sr, visited Yirrkala in the year that the panels were installed in the church. The paintings communicated the message Yolngu intended and Beazley suggested that in making their concerns about mining known to the Commonwealth Government in Canberra, a petition painted on bark would be most effective.

The Saltwater collection

The Yirrkala Bark Petition was an important step on the road to land rights in the Northern Territory. Yolngu took the Commonwealth Government and the mining company NABALCO to court in 1971 over the granting of a mining lease over their land. Although they lost that case, it was the catalyst for the Woodward Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights, which eventually resulted in the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976*.

Although the *Land Rights Act* granted Yolngu ownership of their land down to the low watermark, it left certain areas of their tenure unclear—in particular, ownership of the intertidal zone. Yolngu are dependant on the resources of the sea and shore for much of their livelihood and the majority of today's settlements are coastal. In the 1990s, Yolngu again sensed a threat to their land ownership as a result of leases being granted for fishing and crabbing enterprises that included the intertidal zone. Matters were brought to a head in 1996 when Yolngu found the severed head of a crocodile in a temporary camp of barramundi fishermen near Garrangali in the top of Blue Mud Bay. The place where the head was found was associated with Bāru, the ancestral crocodile. Bāru is a creative ancestor of the Madarrpa clan and the clan's leader was Djambawa Marawili. Djambawa was a leading artist and was at the time chairman of the Buku Larrnggay Mulka artists' centre at Yirrkala. Interestingly, it was the Madarrpa clan that was not included in the paintings of the *Church Panels*. In this case, Djambawa too responded not as an individual but as a member of the community of interconnected clans along the coast from Blue Mud Bay to Melville Bay.

As a result of a number of meetings, Yolngu artists and clan leaders decided to produce a series of paintings that represented different clan countries along the coast, asserting their historic rights over the land and sea. On this occasion, rather than remaining on display in Yirrkala, the paintings became a travelling exhibition, accompanied by a detailed catalogue documenting the meanings and localities represented. The paintings were eventually acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum as part of its permanent collection.

The making of the Saltwater Collection signalled Yolngu concern about their rights to the intertidal zone—a concern that resulted in them bringing a case before the Federal Court under the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. The production of the collection of paintings

provided an Indigenous mechanism for community action that could be transformed into a body of evidence and used in the Australian legal framework.⁸ The paintings embodied and encoded people's relationship to land and required that they exercise their traditional laws and customs on a regional basis, and the exercise of those laws and customs was in turn a demonstration of native title rights under Australian law. As a consequence, during the hearings of the case in the Federal Court, examples of the Saltwater paintings were used as evidence and incorporated in witness statements. The legal action on this occasion was successful and the claim over the waters of the intertidal zone was finally recognised by a decision of the High Court in July 2008.

Art action, dialogue and change

Yolngu are able to use art as a means of action because it is an integral part of their system of knowledge and way of life. It comes out of their past but it can also be an instrument of change and part of the process of community transformation as circumstances change. Those transformations are in part the consequence of European colonisation and the particular forms it has taken. In Arnhem Land, the establishment of mission stations created regions that cut across Indigenous societies in every way imaginable: kinship, language, regional trade, ceremony, and so on. Those missions, inevitably, over time became a focal point for regional Indigenous lives. They were not determining; and certainly connections remained strong across the region quite independent of introduced settlement patterns.⁹ The mission stations, however, had consequences on the way in which Indigenous societies articulated with Australia as a whole.

Yolngu artists acted in multiple frames. They painted the chests of boys in circumcision ceremonies, made ground sculptures and created complex sacred objects. They also, however, produced work for sale to outsiders, in the context of the evolving post-European settlement structures. While those settlements did not determine the particular form of the art, over time, the settlements became part of the process for creating subregional styles and individual artistic identities. Hence, within the Yolngu region, the art from Yirrkala, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku and Maningrida all developed somewhat different trajectories according to local circumstances. Each community has been influenced by its particular local history, which provides different contexts for artistic intervention on a community basis. The history of the Yirrkala region includes a strong theme of national political action, in part because of the particular nature of their encounter with Europeans and the threat to their land posed by mining. Precisely those same underlying structures and potentials for action that enabled Yolngu to act as a community in the case of the *Church Panels* and Saltwater paintings also, however, enabled the Yolngu artists of the Ramingining region to participate in collaborative ventures such as the Aboriginal Memorial.¹⁰ Many similar processes can be seen at work in other regions of Indigenous

Australia: the Ngurrara canvas produced by the Gidja people as part of their native title claim¹¹ or the large canvas from artists from Kintore produced to support dialysis programs in Central Australia.

The pattern of mission and government settlement can also be seen to be a factor in producing stylistic differences within the region. Often the distinctive styles reflect diversities that already existed within the broader region but which began to be associated with particular communities. In north-eastern Arnhem Land, it is possible to distinguish between stylistic features of paintings produced in the Yirrkala region and those in the Milingimbi region even though they belong to the same group of interacting clans. Certain contemporary stylistic movements such as the *buwuyak* movement in the north of Blue Mud Bay influenced art from Yirrkala and not from Ramingining.¹² In western Arnhem Land, the art produced by Kunwinjku-speaking peoples at Maningrida¹³ and Gunbalanya (Kunbarlanja)¹⁴ has diverged, with the former emphasising the tapestry-like covering of the surface form of the bark with intricate cross-hatching and the latter emphasising x-ray and figurative art. None of these particular differences is fixed in time, since the regional systems as a whole are dynamic and community art centres are in dialogue with each other. The Aboriginal Memorial generated from Ramingining in the 1980s provided the basis for the expansion of interest in hollow-log coffins as artworks from which the Yirrkala community benefited greatly.

A similar analysis could be made of the impact of community on art style in Central and Western Australia. The distinctive art styles associated with different community art centres are in part the product of recent local art histories: people working together in a community and creating works that express their contemporary regional identity. Location and interaction with the art market are clearly factors in creating and maintaining the distinctive differences between Balgo, Papunya, Yuendumu and Lajamanu. Interestingly, artists often move between those communities and, in some cases, switch styles according to where they are painting. The art being produced in each community differs over time and, as the writing of Central Australian art histories develops, patterns of cross-influence will emerge.¹⁵

From grassroots to national institutions

The development of Indigenous art practices has been influenced and facilitated since the 1970s by policy initiatives by government, cultural institutions and by the private sector—by what I refer to as the domain of public culture.¹⁶ Resources provided by the government to the Australia Council and to support Indigenous arts initiatives, including local art centres, have provided opportunities that would otherwise not have existed. The development of national and regional awards for Indigenous artists helped to promote Indigenous art

and enhanced the prestige of artists within local communities. And gradually, over time, commercial galleries have developed specialisations in Aboriginal art. The interventions have aroused considerable controversy, with art centres and government marketing agencies coming under attack at different times from different directions. And some initiatives that were once strongly supported have perhaps gone out of favour forever—a centralised government marketing organisation could be one example. Adopting a historical perspective on the past 30 years, however, we can see the interventions as being largely positive and can identify a trajectory in which Indigenous agency has had a considerable impact.

The past 35 years of Aboriginal art have been a time of experimentation and change in the form of the art produced and in the art market. While the durability of institutions is not always a positive sign, I would argue that in times of change, organisations and structures that last or continually re-emerge are signs that something is working. Art centres are one type of institution that has survived—albeit a varied type. Indigenous arts awards have thrived. There are good reasons why peak organisations such as the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) and the Association of Central Australian Aboriginal Art and Craft Centres (desArt) keep rising like a Phoenix out of the ashes. At a higher level of structure, the Australia Council has played a very significant role. None of these is without controversy and nothing lasts forever. The reason why these organisations have a degree of durability, however, is that they have been built from the community up or have responded to community needs and they have played a role in creating social cohesion and community identity in a changing world. It is important to see them as agents of change, but in harmony in many respects with community values. They work with the community rather than against it.

Art centres in general are examples of grassroots local organisations and the success and durability of centres are an index of social cohesion and a factor contributing to that cohesion. Clearly, in individual cases, art centres fail and in some places there seems to be a pattern of failure, which needs to be diagnosed. And clearly, ‘art centres’ are not going to work on the same basis across Australia.¹⁷ They could, however, have affinities with institutions that exist elsewhere—with community centres, print workshops, adult education centres, schools of art, and so on—institutions that bear a family resemblance with Indigenous art centres. And, as I will go on to argue, I see an institution such as Boomalli belonging firmly within that diverse set.

One of the reasons why art centres work in many communities is that they pre-existed the government initiative that funded them. Indeed, the funding of art centres came out of local action. In the Yirrkala case, the art centre came out of a history of some 50 years of embryonic existence.¹⁸ The history and origins

of Papunya Tula, a very different kind of operation, provide another example.¹⁹ But why an art centre? The reasons are multiple, but two stand out. First, the remote location of many communities means that a coordinated marketing strategy is required—there needs to be someone to manage the sale and distribution of art on a community basis. Second, the art itself is in many cases embedded in a system of rights and restrictions that extends across the community; the production of paintings for sale involves the exercise of rights in communal property.²⁰ As a consequence, there are very sound reasons to set up regional art centres on a community basis. Working in harmony together in new contexts is likely to increase social cohesion rather than result in community dissolution. And cohesive action in one domain of activity is likely to provide a model or impetus for cohesive efforts in other areas.²¹

A productive way of looking at Indigenous art centres and community art production in general is that they provide a potential point of articulation between Indigenous bodies of knowledge and systems of governance, and the broader Australian society. For art to be a successful Indigenous business, issues of local governance have to be taken into account, yet at the same time what is produced must enter into global markets. It is remarkable how well Indigenous communities have managed these issues. Art centres have rarely been held back by disputes about what can or cannot be produced. There are, of course, some notable occasions when major disputes have occurred, but they have generally been quickly resolved, and anyone working in an art centre will know that problems that require solutions crop up on a daily basis. My experience, however, over 35 years working with artists from Yirrkala, is that they have managed complex problems of cultural adjustment to a new context of art production incredibly well. Art centres can be seen as models of the ways in which new organisations based on Indigenous foundations and systems of governance can develop in the space between local communities and national institutions.

The process is two-way since art centres require both national resources and a place in the national agenda, but in turn provide government with local institutions that can manage national investments in an accountable way. There is a need to create strong networks that link the local communities with the actors and institutions in the national domain, networks that connect people at the local level but also provide linkages with the public and private sectors. It is in that context that institutions such as desArt and ANKAAA play a potentially important role. It is also important not to draw too hard and fast a distinction between these different levels of organisation.

Government funding, if mediated through institutions that have strong connections with local trajectories, is likely to be more effective than if it is allocated according to a top-down model. Modelled locally, it can also enable or

facilitate developments that encourage social cohesion while allowing for diversity.

Moving south

My focus so far has been on the agency of artists in communities in northern and Central Australia. The initial stimulus for many of the changes that resulted in the inclusion of Indigenous art and artists as part of the national agenda came from 'remote' Australia. The Aboriginal Arts Board in its early years had a bias towards what were seen to be more traditionally oriented communities, and the Aboriginal Arts Award established by the NT Museum and Art Gallery had a similar focus and was certainly criticised on that basis by some. Their focus, however, shifted quite rapidly over time and became broader. Indeed, the people who were involved in setting up such organisations early on were very responsive to the critiques that developed and helped change the focus of institutions such as the Aboriginal Arts Board.

Indigenous artists in south-eastern and Western Australia originally felt themselves to be as much excluded from the mainstream of Australian art as did artists in the north, and in many respects their artworks were less visible. The lack of visibility and lack of support, however, did not mean a lack of active engagement with arts or a lack of art practice.²² Aboriginal people in southern Australia demanded recognition and support for their creativity. Many Indigenous artists were emerging in south-eastern Australia in the late 1970s and 1980s, at a time when Aboriginal art was beginning to be more firmly established in the national consciousness; artists such as Leslie Griggs, Gordon Syron, Lin Onus, Robert Campbell, Jnr, Arone Meeks, Fiona Foley and Avril Quail were beginning to establish their reputations at that time. As Brenda Croft wrote, however, 'at the time there was significant resistance to this new set of artists. The reaction was based on assimilationist assumptions that had existed covertly from the first half of the century.'²³ These assumptions positioned the art of Indigenous people in the south as inherently inauthentic. And, just as in the north, it was the agency of the artists themselves that created the grassroots organisations with a capacity to grow. The best-known example of an Indigenous art cooperative in south-eastern Australia is Boomalli, established in 1987. Croft's outline history of Boomalli shows how it grew out of a group of activist Indigenous artists who eventually came together to create a network of support for each other, to overcome prejudices against their work and to create a place for it to be exhibited and sold.²⁴

The circumstances of Indigenous artists living in south-eastern Australia are clearly very different from those in many of the communities in northern Australia, though no hard and fast boundary should be drawn. The artists of the south come from many different communities with different histories and

in many cases have developed distinctive individual styles.²⁵ In some cases, the artists are self-taught, others are reconnecting with 'local' traditions and many are art-school trained and are familiar with Western art discourse and theory. Taking account of their diversity, however, they found themselves in a similar position in the art world, struggling with issues of authenticity and identity, sharing a history of exclusion and attuned to many of the same themes in their lives and the lives of their families. 'For urban and rural Indigenous people the visual arts provided a long-awaited platform from which to present their perspective, and previously disregarded collective history that acknowledged different experiences.'²⁶ Hence, an organisation such as Boomalli grew out of the artists' common interests and a desire to work together and collaboratively achieve common objectives while at the same time maintaining individual identity; 'they shared experiences that formed a bond between them and encouraged them to exhibit collectively'.²⁷

The same governmental structures that supported the art of remote regions were used to facilitate the development of Indigenous organisations in south-eastern Australia. Boomalli was strongly supported in its early years by the Aboriginal Arts Board under its then director, Gary Foley.²⁸ Support for travelling exhibitions overseas and representation in art awards were equally important as means of establishing presence in the art world, but also as signals of identity. The political context was, however, different: in the south-east, people faced the challenge to their 'authenticity' as Indigenous artists. Initially, Boomalli's aim was to create the spaces within the national framework for the art of Indigenous people from south-eastern Australia. This meant engaging with and challenging the structures of organisations that had been set up to support Aboriginal artists, ensuring that they were oriented towards the diversity of Aboriginal art practice rather than particular sectors. In the case of art awards, it required changing the conception of Aboriginal art and broadening categories.

Boomalli began as a collective venture for its ten original members and has survived into the present through a number of transformations. It has changed as circumstances have changed and as the original members' lives have developed in different directions. Early on, it addressed a national agenda, responding to the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations by inserting an Indigenous presence, increasing opportunities for urban artists and developing exhibition programs. Boomalli provided a creative environment for artists such as Tracey Moffatt and Robert Campbell, Jnr, and leading curators including Hetti Perkins and Brenda Croft. Inevitably, Boomalli has a different history from an art centre such as Buku Larrnggay Mulka at Yirrkala, where the focus is on expanding the connections of the local community with the national and global. At Boomalli, there is a stronger focus on individual careers. Both, however, are evolving grassroots organisations that provide a focal point for community action.

The struggle to include the diversity of Indigenous Australian artists within the same overall framework could have been divisive, but on the whole it has had almost the opposite effect. The opening out of the categories of Indigenous 'art' and 'artist' also opened up art discourse across the Indigenous community and created many collaborations. Indeed, the pioneering exhibition *Koori Art '84* included the Yolngu artist Banduk Marika, who had just begun her career as a printmaker. It was this exhibition that provided the seeds from which Boomalli grew. In the mid-1980s, artists such as Lin Onus and Fiona Foley established close relationships with artists in Arnhem Land and Central Australia, and the collaborative curatorial practice of Djon Mundine opened up exciting areas of art practice and exhibition. Over time, Aboriginal art has come to be an arena in which diversity is accepted, and once diversity is accepted room is created for relatively autonomous traditions to exist side by side and for local and regional art histories to be produced.²⁹ Certainly, the possibility for opposition and conflict remain always present. Art skirts the boundaries of authenticity and identity: people can deny that what others are producing is art or challenge the Indigeneity of what is produced. Such heat seems always to be a potential of art practice where art is integral to the ways people act in the world.

Conclusion

Buku Larrnggay Mulka and Boomalli both represent communities of artists and artists who come from communities. In both cases, they facilitate cohesion at the local level and enable people to act in relation to common interests. The Yirrkala artists are from a community in place. Art has been integral to the continuity of their society and it has been an instrument of their engagement with the world outside. Buku Larrnggay Mulka as a community art centre has a board of Yolngu artists, which manages it according to Yolngu customary law and is concerned with the continuity of cultural practices. While Yolngu art is highly innovative, the governing board emphasises working in traditional media such as bark and the use of Indigenous pigments. Yolngu artists work to maintain the relative autonomy of their society and to communicate their values to outsiders.

Boomalli's objectives are different and yet overlapping. Boomalli includes artists from a wider region. Although Sydney based, it includes among its listed members artists such as Arone Meeks from Cairns, Fiona Foley, who is a Badtjala from southern Queensland, and Christine Christopherson, who is Iwatja from western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Its original purpose was to support 'urban Indigenous artists finding it difficult to have their own work shown as authentic Aboriginal art in the mainstream'. It established a '[c]o-operative to provide a platform for Aboriginal and Torres Straight [sic] Islander artists to exhibit and promote urban Indigenous art on their own terms'.³⁰ As such, Boomalli needed to encompass a diversity of artists from very

different backgrounds—and to strike a balance between the common concerns of the artists and their different histories and identities. The initial emphasis on urban art reflected the need to challenge the view that the only authentic Aboriginal art was that produced in remote communities in continuity with ‘traditional’ practices.³¹ As Boomalli developed, however, in Croft’s words, ‘it became increasingly apparent that the restrictive and inaccurate categorisation of work by urban and rural Indigenous artists was no longer tenable’.³² Artists associated with Boomalli were themselves connected to places and to local communities. The members of Boomalli began to emphasise their local identity and the diversity of Indigenous art practice, opposing the categorising of people under gross labels.³³ At the same time, artists from communities in Arnhem Land and Central Australia became an increasing presence in the urban environments of southern Australia. Exhibitions of Aboriginal art and general books about the subject began to reflect the diversity of the Indigenous population. For example, *Aratjara*, the major international exhibition that toured Europe, was not premised on the basis of a dualistic division between traditional and urban art.³⁴ The result was that organisations such as Boomalli, rather than being opposed to ones such as Buku Larrnggay Mulka, became complementary.

In their different ways, both Buku Larrnggay Mulka and Boomalli have played positive roles in building and maintaining communities. And, as communities of different kinds, they have intersected and complemented each other. Together, they exemplify the diversity of Indigenous society—a diversity that has had a significant impact in the domain of Australian public culture. Buku Larrnggay Mulka has maintained the relatively autonomous traditions of Yolngu artists yet collaborated with other art centres through peak bodies such as ANKAAA and desArt in areas of mutual interest, such as Indigenous copyright and lobbying for government funding of support staff, training and development. Boomalli, as well as supporting its own members, provided a venue for the exhibition of Indigenous art in Sydney and a springboard for collaboration across cultural boundaries. The intersection of such community organisations has introduced the complexities of Indigenous art to a wider public. The simplistic dualistic division of Aboriginal art into categories such as tribal or rural in opposition to contemporary or urban has been successfully challenged. The idea that creativity is the product of either individual genius or cultural inheritance has been problematised since some Indigenous artists will emphasise their individuality while others emphasise collective rights.

Some of the changes that have occurred in art production have certainly been influenced by the colonial structure of settlements, opportunities created by the market and government instrumentalities. The process of incorporation within the wider Australian polity, however, has not been passive in nature. Indigenous groups have often been able to utilise these new institutions to achieve their

own objectives and they have also been able to change government policy and have some impact on the institutional structures and practices of the encapsulating society. Indigenous Australians in turn have had an impact on Australia's cultural institutions and policies, often giving greater agency to the artists in the ways in which works of art are exhibited. Often the issues that Indigenous Australians are concerned with are ones that affect artists more generally—issues of moral rights and resale royalties being examples. The increasingly important position that Indigenous artists are gaining in the arts community as a whole has the potential to mediate the concerns of local communities at the national level and provide effective channels of communication through art.

Social cohesion can be achieved at a national level only by facilitating the building of social cohesion at the local level, by creating the environment in which people feel that they are able to act as members of communities to improve the worlds in which they live. In Australia, the institutional structures that have been created in the arenas of art, culture and heritage have played a significant role in enabling Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to act through art to create some positive changes in their lives and in the lives of their communities.

The concept of community in social theory has always been in dialogue with that of society. The concept as I have used it involves the recognition of diversity at the local and the national level. It envisages an Australian society in which diversity is recognised and is transparent at the level of public culture. At the local level, communities enhance social cohesion in effect by emphasising difference; communities comprise people who share common interests and values that often differentiate them from others. At the level of society, social cohesion requires that local interests are encompassed and accommodated in the public domain. This involves a shift from holding a particular set of values in common to valuing a framework, and an institutional structure, that allows for differences to be expressed and that is opened up to processes of persuasion. Within a nation-state, the public sphere is going to be influenced by the diversity of communities it contains. And within Australia, social cohesion at the national level requires the accommodation of Indigenous Australian interests in discourse in the public sphere. In the long term, this has the potential to affect the character of the society.

ENDNOTES

¹ Sally K. May provides an excellent review of the relevant theoretical literature on community in her study of the Injalak Art Centre in Gunbalanya (Kunbarlanja) western Arnhem Land. May, Sally K. 2006, *Karrikadjurren: creating community with an art centre in Indigenous Australia*, Unpublished PhD thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.

² Morphy, Howard 2007, *Becoming Art: Exploring cross-cultural categories*, Berg, Oxford.

³ Morphy, Howard 2008, 'Art as a mode of action: some problems with Gell's *Art and Agency*', *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 5–27.

- ⁴ Morphy, Frances 2008, 'Whose governance, for whose good? The Laynhapuy Homelands Association and the neo-assimilationist turn in Indigenous policy', in J. Hunt, D. Smith, S. Garling and W. Sanders (eds), *Contested governance: culture, power and institutions in Indigenous Australia*, CAEPR Research Monograph No. 29, ANU E Press, Canberra.
- ⁵ Morphy, Howard 1991, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal system of knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
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- ⁷ Morphy, Howard 2005, 'Mutual conversion: the Methodist Church and the Yolngu, with particular reference to Yirrkala', *Humanities Research*, vol XII, no. 1, pp. 41–53.
- ⁸ Morphy, Frances 2008, 'Enacting sovereignty in a colonized space: the Yolngu of Blue Mud Bay meet the native title process', in D. Fay and D. James (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Land Restitution: 'Restoring what was ours'*, Routledge-Cavendish, Abingdon and New York, pp. 99–122.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Jenkins, Susan 2003, *It's a Power: An interpretation of 'The Aboriginal memorial' in its ethnographic, museological, art historical and political contexts*, National Institute of the Arts, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- ¹¹ Dayman, Karen and Lowe, Pat 2000, 'The Ngurrara canvas', in Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 493–6.
- ¹² Morphy, *Becoming Art*, pp. 105ff.
- ¹³ Taylor, Luke 2005, 'John Mawurndjul—"I've got a different idea"', in Christian Kaufmann (ed.), *'raark'—John Mawurndjul: Journey through time in northern Australia*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, pp. 43–8.
- ¹⁴ May, Karrikadjurren.
- ¹⁵ Morphy, Howard 1998, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon, London, pp. 299ff.
- ¹⁶ Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven D. 1992 (eds), *Museums and Communities: The politics of public culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC.
- ¹⁷ For an overview, see Wright, Felicity and Morphy, Frances 2000, *The Art and Craft Centre Story*, ATSI, Canberra.
- ¹⁸ Morphy, *Becoming Art*, section 1.
- ¹⁹ Perkins, Hettie and Fink, Hannah 2000, *Papunya Tula: Genesis and genius*, Art Gallery of New South Wales in association with Papunya Tula Artists, Sydney.
- ²⁰ For a more detailed history of Yolngu art in relation to the outside world, see Morphy, *Becoming Art*, section 1.
- ²¹ Morphy, Howard 2005, 'Indigenous art as economy', in Diane Austin-Broos and Gaynor Macdonald (eds), *Culture, Economy and Governance in Aboriginal Australia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, pp. 19–28.
- ²² For a relevant historical background, see Kleinert, Sylvia 1994, 'Jacky Jacky was a smart young fella': a study of art and Aboriginality in south-east Australia 1900–1980, PhD Thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- ²³ Croft, Brenda 1999, 'Boomalli: from little things big things grow', in Luke Taylor (ed.), *Painting the Land Story*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, p. 101.
- ²⁴ Croft, 'Boomalli'.
- ²⁵ There have been very few studies of community arts in regional southern Australia. Lorraine Gibson's research in Wilcannia provides an ethnographic perspective on recent art practice in a NSW country town in relation to issues of identity and difference. Gibson, Lorraine 2008, 'Art, culture and ambiguity in Wilcannia, New South Wales', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 314–30.
- ²⁶ Croft, 'Boomalli', p. 98.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 104. The original members were Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Brenda Croft, Fiona Foley, Fernando Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Quail, Michael Riley and Jeffrey Samuels.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 104.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 111.
- ³⁰ Quoted from the history section of the Boomalli web site (<<http://www.boomalli.org.au>>).

³¹ See Morphy, Howard 1995, 'Aboriginal art in a global context', in D. Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the prism of the local*, ASA Decennial Conference Series, Routledge, London, pp. 211–39.

³² Croft, 'Boomalli', p. 111.

³³ 'Instead of speaking generally of urban art, I believe it would be helpful and true to recognise different people's countries. I am a Butchulla person. I think that artists working in the city should be identified in terms of their people's country.' Foley, Fiona 1991, 'Urban art', in Rosemary Crumlin (ed.), *Aboriginal Art and Spirituality*, Collins Dove, North Blackburn, Victoria, p. 2.

³⁴ Morphy, 'Aboriginal art in a global context'.

Writing/righting a history of Australian Aboriginal art

Susan Lowish

The writing of Aboriginal history has never been free of political implications...literature reveals and reinforces the changing hues of dominant social and political ideas, especially relating to race and colonialism.

— Ann McGrath and Andrew Markus¹

More sophisticated equivalences are starting to be made between works of Aboriginal art and the rest of the objects that inhabit the art world;² as such, this is an exciting time for the discipline of art history. It is also a dangerous time, as it negotiates pathways through different narratives and is confronted with the dynamic interface of Indigenous and settler art histories. This paper discusses some of the problematic methodological approaches adopted by art historians and anthropologists in several major publications that have become standards in the fields of Australian and Aboriginal art. It examines the use of the label 'Aboriginal art' as an identifier of a category the contents and borders of which are currently racially defined and argues that a temporal emphasis be adopted that would see 'Aboriginal art' understood more as a period style. It argues that different kinds of primitivism have contributed to and maintained the difficulties in relating Aboriginal art to Australian art and vice versa. Finally, this paper considers how Aboriginal art can be written about in the future and asks how best to proceed. How do we write (or right) the history of Australian Aboriginal art?

For a long time now, there have been requests for more critical engagement with the art of Indigenous Australians. These requests have come from artists keen for dialogue and from scholars seeking to analyse the critical reception of the work. More than 15 years ago, the need for critical theory was clearly outlined by noted scholar and Indigenous rights advocate Marcia Langton in relation to Indigenous film and video production.³ She argued that new critical frameworks were needed for analysing the representation of Indigenous peoples because discourse too often revolved around questions of authenticity. In 2000, art historian Roger Benjamin reviewed some of the difficulties in writing critically about the artwork of Indigenous Australians—especially by settler Australians and other people of non-Indigenous descent. He cited the political situation in Australia and the Eurocentric basis of critical concepts as being among the major obstacles to writing about this art.⁴

Notably, Benjamin has recently curated an exhibition in the United States of early works from Papunya. Journalist Nicolas Rothwell goes so far as to declare that Benjamin's work opens up 'a new chapter in Aboriginal art criticism'.⁵ His catalogue text supposedly 'liberate[s] the viewer from the perspective of anthropology and encourage[s] a new mode of looking at Papunya work'.⁶ While Benjamin does bring his own inimitable style to the writing, it surely benefits from the incorporation of work by noted anthropologists such as Nancy Munn and Fred Myers, whose rigorous fieldwork and grasp of Indigenous languages and concepts are used to augment Benjamin's own visual analysis.

While the exhibition will not travel to Australia due, we are told, to Indigenous opposition to the revelation of sacred imagery, the emphasis on beauty, multiplicity of interpretations and, in short, the qualities that characterise 'great art' in the high modernist sense are emphasised in the collection and curatorship of this exhibition and some of the writing in the catalogue. One is left wondering whether keeping the exhibition overseas also enables avoidance of certain 'obstacles': engaging politically with Indigenous Australians over the ownership, display and publication of some very valuable cultural material within Australia's colonial context.

Of course, part of the difficulty for all art critics has been determining the criteria for making aesthetic judgements in relation to an art that appears to have come from a completely different aesthetic tradition, employing largely unfamiliar iconography and requiring entirely different bases for analysis. Some, like Eric Michaels, have argued that Aboriginal art is 'the product of too many discourses' and that 'contradictions of this system [of production and circulation] resist resolution'.⁷ For others, like Howard Morphy, it is possible and necessary to find cross-cultural equivalences in the understanding of art.⁸ Although I believe that through an analysis of art over time it is possible to chart the ways in which Indigenous art for sale has responded to the shifting tastes of the market, the ways in which this discourse plays itself out on the printed page are not straightforward and present a dilemma that still besets attempts at critical writing on Aboriginal art.

Similar to criticism, the writing of histories of Indigenous art in Australia is also an area fraught with difficulty.⁹ Langton argues that the history of filmic productions of Indigenous Australians is deeply racist, distorted and often offensive.¹⁰ Indeed, it has only been since the 1970s, with the pioneering work of Essie Coffey—who directed *My Survival as an Aboriginal* (1979)—and the intense negotiation captured by Ian Dunlop at the beginning of the *Yirrkala Film Project* (ca 1970), recently highlighted by Pip Deveson,¹¹ that Indigenous people have been seen to be actively involved in making film and video. This aspect of the history of Indigenous film is analogous to writing on art, as it has

only been in the very recent past that accounts of Indigenous art production have actively involved Indigenous voices.

Although it is just as racist to believe that Indigenous Australians will make 'better' representations simply by being 'Aboriginal',¹² Indigenous perspectives are the most vital part of what has been a field dominated largely by non-Indigenous people. Langton identifies the central problem as

the need to develop a body of knowledge on representation of Aboriginal people and their concerns in art, film, television and other media and a critical perspective to do with aesthetics and politics, drawing from Aboriginal world views, from Western traditions and from history.¹³

Langton advocates placing Indigenous and non-Indigenous views together into dialogue. If done well, the results can be spectacular.

While there is an almost overwhelming amount of material already published on Indigenous Australians, much of the older material sits firmly within the Western traditions of archaeology, anthropology and ethnology. Very little seems to incorporate Indigenous world views in an active sense (as opposed to their being passive subjects of the research) or makes much of an effort to contextualise these views historically. In relation to Aboriginal art, some publications that go towards redressing this imbalance are: *Yarrtji: Six women's stories from the Great Sandy Desert* (1997) by Tjama Freda Napanangka et al.; *Saltwater: Yirrkala bark paintings of sea country. Recognising indigenous sea rights* (1999) by the team at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka; *Gwion Gwion: Secret and sacred pathways of the Ngarinyin Aboriginal people of Australia* (2000), authored by four Ngarinyin elders and men of law, Ngarjno, Ungudman, Banggal and Nyawarra; and, most recently, *Aboriginal Art: Creativity and assimilation* (2008) by Gamilaroi artist and art historian Donna Leslie. There are also a number of monographs on and by artists working in a wide range of styles and media, including Yirawala, Fiona Foley, Ginger Riley and Kathleen Petyarre.

In *What is Art History?* (1976), Mark Roskill describes the monograph as 'the most basic type of publication that art historians produce'.¹⁴ That there are relatively few monographs on Indigenous artists, and even fewer by self-declared art historians, highlights the lack of resources and scholarship of an art-historical nature for Aboriginal art. Ideally, the *catalogue raisonné* should be the honest estimate of an artist's art-historical stature:

The *catalogue raisonné* is just that—reasoned—and serves three purposes: the establishment by critical means of an artistic oeuvre; enabling others to find what you could not; providing, through selection and discussion, elements likely to be of use to others working in the same general area and more than likely facing much the same problems.¹⁵

There is yet to be a *catalogue raisonné* of the artistic output of any Indigenous Australian artist. At best, this situation suggests a lack of resources; at worst, it suggests that art historians have been slow to accept the idea of individual Indigenous artists or have not considered Aboriginal art to be an appropriate area of study. The concept of the artist is culturally constructed.¹⁶ Clearly, the concept of Indigenous artist is constructed differently and has a distinctly different historical trajectory to the concept of non-Indigenous artist.¹⁷ Until the fundamentals are in place, the art history of Aboriginal art will remain an impoverished field.

There are a number of recently published works that attempt a more comprehensive overview of the history of movements or styles in Indigenous art.¹⁸ None of these works, however, could be strictly considered a history of Aboriginal art. Owing to the great diversity in artists, artworks, themes and ideas, the need to construct working methodologies for rigorous criticism and the sheer amount of knowledge required to come close to mapping related historical processes, authoring the definitive volume is probably an impossible task. *Aboriginal Art* (1998) by anthropologist Howard Morphy outlines episodes in the history of the production, circulation and reception of a number of works, styles and mediums in a roughly chronological order. Morphy's work stands out because it is alive to the complexity of discourses surrounding Indigenous art works. He maintains an emphasis on how knowledge is generated about Indigenous Australians throughout his discussion.

Morphy writes:

[T]he recent history of Aboriginal art has been a dialogue with colonial history, in which what came before—an Aboriginal history of Australia with its emphasis on affective social and spiritual relationships to the land—is continually asserting itself over what exists in the present.¹⁹

Morphy presents the history of Indigenous art as a dynamic exchange. More recently, the notion of dialogue has found some currency among established art historians. Sasha Grishin, who heads the Art History Department at The Australian National University, has recently authored an article titled 'A new history of Australian art: dialectic between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art'.²⁰ The article outlines the methodology for a forthcoming book:

The methodological contention in this study is that non-Indigenous art in Australia has always been to some extent involved in a dialectic with Indigenous art and that this together with the multicultural composition of the population as well as the country's proximity to Asia, have all contributed to a visual culture which is unique and distinctive.²¹

This refiguring of the importance of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art could put Grishin in direct opposition to the 'father of

Australian art history', Emeritus Professor Bernard Smith, who, in 2005, wrote of the inclusion of Aboriginal art: 'it does falsify the history of taste in Australia to insert art works into periods when they would have never been thought of as art in the special sense.'²² It is, however, best left to Grishin to defend his thesis when the book is out. Far more interesting for the present debate is Morphy's proposed shift in the way in which the very terms of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art are conceived.

In the final paragraphs of *Aboriginal Art* (1998), Morphy comes to the conclusion that if the hierarchy present in extant art histories was reversed 'the boundaries between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art history would be dissolved, but in such a way that world art history would be rewritten in relation to present Aboriginal art practice'.²³ This deconstructionist manoeuvre works well to expose the hegemony of Eurocentric notions of history—a hegemony so complete that it is only through such a radical reversal that the power relations that exist within current art-historical attitudes to Indigenous art become apparent. Imagine the uproar if one were to write the history of Australian Aboriginal art, briefly mentioning 'Western art' as an undifferentiated, de-historicised whole and then enforcing this as the only true narrative: the real story. It is only once we accept the outrageousness of the situation in reverse that we can begin to understand the present and also the need for the re-evaluation of European encounters with Aboriginal art. As Langton tells us, Indigenous perspectives are needed to redress this imbalance.

Aboriginal art in Australian art histories

More often than not, Australia's Indigenous art is described as the oldest surviving art tradition in the world, yet categorising the history of its production as art history has been attempted only recently. In 2001, senior curator and historian Andrew Sayers published a revised Australian art history as part of the *Oxford History of Art* series, in which he wrote: 'Aboriginal art does have an art history, in the accepted meaning of that term.'²⁴ In his introduction, Sayers succinctly outlines his strategy of including many Indigenous works in his discussion of Australian art: 'the shared destiny of peoples in Australia must be reflected in the history of its art.'²⁵ Aware of the political, historical and cultural meaning of the adjective 'Australian' and that including Aboriginal art *within* the history of Australian art might be seen as 'cultural appropriation', Sayers seeks to negotiate this problematic term by maintaining that there is 'a duality in the art of Australia'.²⁶ This duality exists because 'Aboriginal art is fundamentally different in conception from the art of Europeans in Australia'.²⁷ There is, according to Sayers, a "'basic ontological gap" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal views'.²⁸

Whereas Morphy sees Indigenous art as a dialogue with colonial history, Sayers favours a comparative approach, as illustrated by his analysis of two images of Groote Eylandt: one by William Westall and the other by Gulpidja.²⁹ The images are juxtaposed, with little information provided about the works. Lacking any real discussion about Indigenous aesthetic conventions, an equivalence is assumed and judgments of taste ensue. One of the dangers with this approach is that analysis leads to reinforcement of the same/other distinction rather than any form of rapprochement. Langton implores us to reduce the visual cultural disparity through informed critique; Sayers argues that Indigenous art remains distinct from the rest of Australian art at its conception. He describes his newly shaped history of Australian art as being more of a 'journey through a landscape with stops along the way' than a search for a connecting idea that will traverse all Australian art.³⁰

Although his position has since developed, as seen in the National Portrait Gallery's opening temporary exhibit, *Open Air: Portraits in the landscape*, which extends the notion of portraiture to include various forms of Indigenous art, Sayers' 2001 version of Australian art history reveals a fairly singular perspective. His history is inclusive of Indigenous art at least on one level, insisting that 'it can only be a distortion to see Aboriginal art as wholly separate from some other field which might be designated as "Australian art"'.³¹ The ultimate impression, however, is one of insurmountable difference: we know this art exists, we must therefore try to incorporate it into our history, but it appears to be so different that only the most tenuous links to settler Australian art can be made. Sayers' work is an example of an attempt to acknowledge Aboriginal art in the history of Australian art but without trying to understand it. His history does not translate as 'cultural appropriation', which is what he fears; rather, the engagement with the works is superficial and relies primarily on their visual impact, doing little to disrupt the status quo.

Art critic and lecturer Christopher Allen presents a starkly different approach to the history of Australian art, despite using many of the same art works as Sayers to illustrate his narrative. In the 224 pages of *Art in Australia: From colonisation to postmodernism* (1997), he mentions Aboriginal art twice. The first instance is in relation to the Australian painter Margaret Preston, for whom 'Aboriginal art offered the possibility of a reconciliation between modernism and the nationalist landscape tradition'.³² The second instance can be found in the final paragraphs, where Allen writes of the present popularity of desert acrylic painting in Australia and internationally. He describes this 'trend' as a new authenticity seized by a desperate art world.³³ There is no attempt to engage with any Aboriginal artworks and no individual Indigenous artists are mentioned by name.

Langton states that 'the barely concealed suspicion of the most acerbic critics of the Aboriginal art market is that transactions are driven by a demand for a primitivist art product as surrogate contrition'.³⁴ She might well be referring to Allen, as he argues that acrylic painting represents 'the latest avatar of the Aborigine in European Australian culture'.³⁵ Allen is openly antagonistic towards any revision of the importance of 'Aboriginal art' in Australian art history, closing his commentary with the contentious statement: 'Aboriginal art has had, practically speaking, no effect on contemporary Australian art'.³⁶ This is in direct contrast with Sayers' view that 'demarcations in the forms of indigenous art and non-indigenous art are breaking down';³⁷ it also flies in the face of figuring Australian art history as a dialogue, as proposed first by Morphy and now Grishin.

Allen's and Sayers' publications are just two examples of histories of Australian art. They can, however, be seen as indicative of two main approaches to the positioning of Aboriginal and Australian art histories: Sayers being 'inclusionist' and Allen exclusionist. We can see this in operation at the level of narrative. Whereas Sayers argues that the relationship of people to the land has been an enduring theme in Australian culture and his history of art is built around this important idea,³⁸ for Allen, the failure of settler Australians to connect with the land is the defining characteristic. For this reason, and because the publishers, Thames and Hudson, devoted another book in their *World of Art* series to Aboriginal art (Caruana 1993, revised 2003), Allen restricts the content of *Art in Australia* to art made by non-Indigenous people. While this provides a neat framing narrative for a particular Australian art history, it enforces a view of 'Aboriginal art' as having outsider status.

There have been other major publications in the field of Australian art history, including John McDonald's *Art of Australia. Volume 1: Exploration to Federation* (2008), discussed below, and *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art* by Alan McCulloch, Susan McCulloch and Emily McCulloch Childs (2006). The most disturbing aspect of *The New McCulloch's* is its separate section on Aboriginal art. Why Indigenous artists are sectioned off like this is not made exactly clear. When Susan McCulloch was asked about it in an interview, she replied:

It's really for the convenience of the reader. It's not intended to be a separationist thing. It's just that, when you're reading—we have several sections that are divided into their own areas, such as exhibitions, galleries and prizes, and we felt that Aboriginal art was so much a contained flow of its own dynamic, interwoven with the rest of Australian art—there are crosses over in the rest of the text as well, but, from a purely practical point of view, we felt that it was much easier for people to look up a Tjupurrula or a Japanangka or a Napanangka in their own

section, because you almost need to know what you're looking for before you can find it, if it's not in its own section.³⁹

Of course, it is also easier to keep treating Aboriginal art as a 'special case' by placing the issues raised by its appreciation in the too-hard basket. Isn't it about time we all learn artists' names and get used to saying them? If it is confusing to have too many Tjakamarra, then what about all the Smiths, Boyds and Lindsays?

Apparently, there were months of discussion in the McCulloch camp about the decision to section off 'Aboriginal art and artists' and most of their supporters from the rest of 'Australian art and artists' in this encyclopedia. Albert Namatjira and Yirawala, Leonhard Adam and Baldwin Spencer were integrated in Alan McCulloch's 1984 edition, but sectioned off in 2006. Curiously, Rex Battarbee remains with the rest of the 'whiteys', although his main claim to fame is not his artwork but that he briefly taught, and more notably promoted, Namatjira. There are many other artists who perhaps more properly belong in the main body of the text—not because they are so well known, such as Rover Thomas, Emily Kngwarreye or Clifford Possum, but because they actively oppose being labelled as 'Aboriginal artists'. Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennett and Brook Andrew are just some of the most prominent proponents of this particular point of view.

To assert that the history of Australian art has been written largely at the exclusion of Indigenous art and artists is to make no great claim. This does not, however, negate the need for investigating and exposing the reasons for this exclusion. Olu Oguibe, who writes on contemporary African art, suggests one reason:

It is evidence of the arrogance of occidental culture and discourse that even the concept of history should be turned into a colony whose borders, validities, structures and configurations, even life tenure are solely and entirely decided by the West. This way history is constructed as a validating privilege which it is the West's to grant.⁴⁰

Oguibe's stance can be read as a reaction against centuries of ignorance and paternalistic attitudes displayed towards Indigenous art worldwide. Morphy has argued that instead of apportioning blame it might be more productive and more interesting to examine the histories of inclusion.⁴¹ Given that the history of Aboriginal art in Australian art history has largely been one of exclusion and difference, a more successful model for an 'inclusionist' narrative might best be sought in another discipline.

Art history and anthropology

Aboriginal art has been the focus of some important anthropological studies of Indigenous peoples—Mountford (1958, 1961),⁴² Berndt (1971), Munn (1973), Morphy (1991), Taylor (1996) and Watson (2003) among them—even though it has been argued that ‘art’ objects have received little attention from anthropologists for much of the twentieth century. The reason, explains Morphy, is due partly to problems with the definition of art—the applicability of the concept cross-culturally—and due partly to neglect of material culture by anthropologists.⁴³

Morphy categorises the history of approaches to the anthropology of art into three main types: first, typological sequencing linked to diffusionist or evolutionary paradigms; second, the explanation of form in relation to aesthetic effect; and third, stylistic analysis associated with culture, areas, tribes or schools. The last two of these methodological types have strong links to practices in art history, yet Morphy argues that ‘the study of non-European art became constrained by the terminology and interests of the European and Euro-American art history of the time’.⁴⁴ This seems antithetical to the view that for much of the twentieth century anthropological descriptions of Aboriginal art contributed to the delayed inclusion of Aboriginal art in the art gallery.⁴⁵ Clearly, Aboriginal art has been in a double bind for most of the twentieth century: not sufficiently ‘fine’ to be art and not sufficiently ‘authentic’ to be culture. Thus, it was effectively marginalised by both disciplines.

In his recent book *Becoming Art* (2008), Morphy suggests a more art-historical anthropology might address the neglect of Aboriginal art but is unconvinced that art history, as it stands, is a cross-cultural category.⁴⁶ Even if one disagrees with Morphy on this point, the question remains: are two heads better than one? According to Robert Layton, anthropology brings many advantages to the study of art:

[A]nthropological studies of art provide useful antidotes to a number of tendencies in art-historical analysis. They challenge models of changes in style that regard naturalistic representation as the pinnacle of achievement; the tendency to map artistic culture areas without reference to the social functions of art; and the focus on artists or schools of artists in isolation from their place in a wider community.⁴⁷

A cynical art historian might respond by suggesting that the discipline of art history, just like the rest of the humanities, has been mounting its own internal critique of these issues for quite some time.⁴⁸ Whether or not these reassessments of art-historical method have been brought about as a result of the influence of anthropology is a matter of some speculation. The same cynical art historian might be similarly annoyed by Morphy’s many references to ‘the narrowness’

of the definition of art in the Western category of fine art.⁴⁹ It is important to be clear: artists do not have a particularly narrow definition of art; indeed, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys demonstrate that. It is more that art has been a culturally constructed category and that these cultural boundaries are frequently traversed by artists but re-enforced by institutional structures such as museums and galleries and enshrined in a particular teleological art-historical narrative.

There are two important points to make in relation to this. One is that there are several different histories operating at once and not all 'arts'—for want of a better term—find equivalence in the same time frame; second is that the object of anthropological and art-historical studies differs in fundamental ways. The question of most importance for anthropology seems to be: how can the study of art contribute to an understanding of human cultures? Art history has different aims. At its most basic, 'the goal of art history is first to place the work of art in history and then assess it in light of its unique position'.⁵⁰ Art history is also connected to related fields, such as criticism and connoisseurship, which require judgments of value and taste. Although the contents of, and the process of establishing, a canon of fine art has been under attack for some time, the art market, public museums and galleries still rely largely on this notion to establish their assessment criteria.

Donald Preziosi has emphasised the strong connection that exists between writing about art objects and the organising principles of the museum, at one stage referring to art history as *museography*.⁵¹ He has also observed that in the past quarter-century, various claims have been made about 'the need to rethink the "object" of art history, and the "profound contradiction" embodied by a "history of style...[as] the attempt to establish a narrative or causal chain within the assumed autonomy of art"'.⁵² Claire Farago has also pointed out that

the history of the classification of the arts and categories for judging artistic excellence deserves to be studied from a point of view broad enough to take into account the extensive migration of visual culture long before [European] global contact was initiated at the end of the fifteenth century.⁵³

The history of art has always been global; however, certain narratives have dominated that reinforce particular paradigms at the expense of others.

Thus, it is important to reframe the question 'What is art?' Preziosi draws our attention to the philosopher Nelson Goodman, who states:

Part of the trouble lies in asking the wrong question—in failing to recognize that a thing may function as a work of art at some times and not at others...the real question is not 'What objects are (permanently) works of art?' but 'When is an object a work of art?'⁵⁴

I have risked opening up a whole other pathway by introducing the topic of defining art (temporal or otherwise). Everyone who has an opinion on this topic, it seems, also has their own definition emphasising the aesthetic to a greater or lesser degree. I am not so much interested in charting the shifting status of objects or evaluating loose or tight definitions of art. Instead, my purpose is to critique the existing writing on Aboriginal art and to explore the limits and possibilities of an art history that does something for Aboriginal art.⁵⁵

Should the category 'Aboriginal art' be understood more like a period style, especially in the way in which it is defined in traditional art history? Certainly, particular understandings of what is meant by the term 'Aboriginal art' appear to belong to particular historical epochs, although these are not defined according to style or iconography, which might befit a more traditional art history.⁵⁶ This means that it is in the *writing* about the art rather than the art itself that we might find the location of the art's definition. An obvious limitation with this approach is that it reveals nothing about the thing in itself or what it is or does for people other than those writing about it. In a field as complex and sparsely researched as this, however, the introduction of such a critical framework must be an important first step.⁵⁷

Legacies of primitivism

I believe that one important reason why it is taking so long for Indigenous art to be studied in any detail by present-day art historians is because many are still grappling with a way to deal with the category of 'primitive art'.⁵⁸ Sometimes confusion arises because the different meanings of the term 'primitive', as it is used in art history, become intertwined. There are at least three distinct meanings. First, as a largely archaic term, 'primitive' was used to refer to peoples outside the 'great centres of civilisation', reflecting the mistaken belief that some cultures were less advanced than others. Second, the term applies to the early phases within the historical development of painting or sculpture specifically in European countries, such as pre-Renaissance Italian art. Third, 'primitive' is a term used to describe artists with no formal training or whose works are highly idiosyncratic in a way that is outside the academic, traditional or even avant-garde manner.⁵⁹ While some contemporary Indigenous artists' work could be described as primitive in that they work outside existing traditions (for example, H. J. Wedge or Ian Abdulla), the term is not used because of its negative connotations and for fear of reprisal.

Aboriginal art as primitive art has featured in many anthropological anthologies—Carol Jopling's *Art and Aesthetics in Primitive Societies* (1971) and Anthony Forge's *Primitive Art and Society* (1973) being just two examples. Earlier, Raymond Firth used 'Aboriginal art' as indicative of 'simple art' in his chapter, 'The social framework of primitive art', in the influential *Elements of Social*

Organisation (1951). Despite the growing awareness throughout the twentieth century that the term 'primitive art' was increasingly inappropriate, it continued to be used. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Art*, this was because 'agreement as to an alternative nomenclature was not reached'.⁶⁰ When current dictionaries define 'primitive' as 'early, ancient, old-fashioned, simple, rude', the term continues to cause offence.

Seeking an alternative, such as 'cultural art',⁶¹ 'world art' or 'ethnic art' while keeping the concept intact does nothing to address the issue. The Australian art historians Ian Burn and Ann Stephen clearly explain the negative aspects of the term primitive and its underlying meaning:

The primitive is a particular ideological construct in Western culture, a classification within an evolutionary view which locks non-European indigenous people like the Australian Aborigines into an earlier stage of human development and denies their art the possibility of being a mature, complex and contemporary expression.⁶²

It is not possible completely to divorce these negative connotations of the past from any present-day use of the term. Similarly, substituting another term leaves the initial impetus unexamined. An alternative strategy would be to openly recognise the socio-political purpose and effects that such characterisations reflect and to be aware how words carry with them traces of past meanings.⁶³ In order to gain a greater understanding of why the construct 'primitive' has remained a powerful categorical impulse in Western descriptions of 'non-Western' art, it is necessary to delve a little deeper into the beliefs that underpin it.

As a term, primitivism is difficult to define. Robert Goldwater writes in his highly influential study *Primitivism in Modern Art* ([1938], 1986) that '[p]rimitivism is not the name for a particular period or school in the history of painting, and consequently no description of a limited set of objective characteristics which will define it can be given'.⁶⁴ Arthur Lovejoy and others, however, have been able to trace the concept back to antiquity. In *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas* (1935), they argue that the concept of primitivism stemmed from two distinct tendencies in human thought; these have become confused and need to be separated. Lovejoy has named these tendencies 'chronological primitivism' and 'cultural primitivism'.

Chronological primitivism is concerned primarily with 'the temporal distribution of good, or value, in the history of mankind' and in determining when 'the best state of the world in general is supposed to occur'.⁶⁵ Since chronological-primitivist beliefs situate the best of mankind in the past, they contrast with 'ideas of progress', as this phrase has come to be understood in the past two centuries. Cultural primitivism, on the other hand, is 'the discontent

of the civilized with civilisation, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it'⁶⁶ and is concerned with a desire for a more simple, less-refined existence. As Lovejoy explains:

[T]he cultural primitivist's model of human excellence and happiness is sought in the present, in the mode of life of existing primitive, or so-called 'savage' peoples...the preacher of primitivism commends them as examples to be followed, or exhibits them as more fortunate branches of our species whose state is to be envied.⁶⁷

I imagine that a version of cultural primitivism might be what Roger Benjamin is referring to when he uses the phrase 'the fetish for early Papunya boards'.⁶⁸ It is, however, the idea of progress that informs art history's 'teleological quest' and chronological primitivism that explains the placement of Aboriginal rock art in the opening chapter of three separate publications: William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art* (1934), James Gleeson's *Australian Painters: Colonial 1788–1880, Impressionists 1881–1930, Modern 1931–1970* (1971) and, most recently, John McDonald's *Art of Australia. Volume 1: Exploration to Federation* (2008). All of these works position Indigenous Australian rock art at the beginning of their version of art in Australia and never mention it again.⁶⁹ In essence, this variation on the inclusionist paradigm for writing Aboriginal/Australian art history slots Aboriginal art in where it appears to fit chronologically. There are several problems with this approach, not the least of which is that it supports a dangerous and misleading evolutionary paradigm, which continues to label Indigenous people as having 'a stone age culture'.⁷⁰

Chronological accounts of Western art have tended to position rock art in Europe at their origin. It does not make sense, then, to position Aboriginal rock art as the origin of non-Indigenous Australian art. Perhaps a more logical way in which to sequence rock art in the history of Australian art is by positioning it in relation to the point at which it was 'discovered' by non-Indigenous people. As problematic as this seems, it is still more honest than inserting it at the very beginning of an account of a tradition to which it bears little or no resemblance. There are a number of prominent contemporary critiques of primitivism, including works by James Clifford (1980), Sally Price (1989), Shelly Errington (1998), Thomas McEvelley (1992) and Mariana Torgovnick (1990). None of these critiques deals with the specific treatment (or lack thereof) of Indigenous art in Australia. Ironically, while Australian Aboriginal art continues to be marginalised in publications on Australian art, it is also marginalised in these critiques of primitivism and other publications on primitive art.⁷¹

New art histories

New art history has been defined as 'a capacious and convenient title that sums up the impact of feminist, marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, and

socio-political ideas on a discipline notorious for its conservative taste in art and its orthodoxy in research'.⁷² It is often seen in opposition to traditional art history, which is defined as being 'about style, attributions, dating, authenticity, rarity, reconstruction, the detection of forgery, the rediscovery of forgotten artists and the meanings of pictures'.⁷³ The possibility of defining 'traditional' art history has, however, been put under a cloud, with some authors arguing that 'new art history' is an extension to the capacity of art history to apply critical methods to its own practices.⁷⁴ If such a thing as new art history exists, can it aid in refining the methodology of an Aboriginal art history?

The main advantages of new art history appear to be in expanding the definition of art—the range of objects, media and issues—and also in the realm of critique. As film studies lecturer and feminist author A. L. Rees and Frances Borzello explain:

The new art historians question, giving not only art but the society which enshrines it a long, hard look. They question the status of art, and the most automatic assumption that art means paintings and sculptures in certain styles. They ask how such objects and not others came to be called 'art' in the first place, and why they alone are worthy of study.⁷⁵

This approach concentrates on the critique of extant orthodox histories of art, revealing how many of these histories are blind to their class, gender and racial biases. It also concerns itself with theory and the social conditions under which art is produced. But what if there is no received history to critique? Once the injustice of the omission has been made evident, how do we proceed? While it is possible to critique the social conditions of the reception of 'Aboriginal art', as demonstrated through the literature of the day, how can one critique the 'traditional' history of Aboriginal art if it is not on record? Certain deconstructionist techniques and gender, race and class theory have been useful in causing a revision of practices in humanities disciplines, but these 'tools' should not obscure the initial need to acknowledge a history of Aboriginal art.

The material basis for 'new art history' resided in its development in several prominent teaching institutions in the United Kingdom: Leeds University, Middlesex Polytechnique and the so-called 'plate-glass universities' of East Anglia, Essex and Sussex.⁷⁶ A similar expansion across the United States produced the 'inter-discipline' visual studies, also known as visual culture. One of the main protagonists of the push to include visual studies in the curriculum of universities, W. J. T. Mitchell, has suggested that 'aesthetics is an eighteenth-century discipline, art history a nineteenth-century one, and visual studies that of the twenty-first'.⁷⁷ In summarising the main positions of 'visual culture', Mitchell presents the following five 'moments':

1. Visual culture should be mindful of the different disciplinary histories that have converged in it...2. Visual culture must resist the temptation to the sort of easy pluralism that would deny any general force to its central concept...vision is a cultural concept...3. Visual culture must address the relation of vision and the other senses...4. One of the principal objectives of visual culture is the de-reification of its theoretical object, human vision...5...it must be grounded not just in the interpretation of images, but also in the description of the social field of the gaze, the construction of subjectivity, identity, desire, memory, and imagination.⁷⁸

Mitchell's 'manifesto' of visual culture offers the potential for inclusion, expansion, re-evaluation and critique of the 'old' discipline of art history. Not everyone agrees that this is the 'right' way to go. Bernard Smith has argued that the discipline of art history already possesses the tools and techniques necessary to deal with the expanding world of visual culture. He states that 'art history needs to be more alert to the challenges that come from the empirical sciences than from those that proceed from fashionable philosophers who dabble in art history and from current ideologies'.⁷⁹ He outlines the main components of art history as identification, classification, evaluation and interpretation and devotes much effort to the defence of the existing scholarly rigours of the discipline. In her response, art critic and visual culture lecturer Anne Marsh has suggested that expanding the disciplinary boundaries of art history is an enriching process; inclusion acts to enliven the field.⁸⁰ Importantly, she also emphasises that the main threat to art history comes from the economic rationalist agenda currently dominating decision making in Australian universities.

While I agree with Marsh about the current state of play with art history departments having to justify their place economically within Australian universities, Smith is right to defend the need for proper art-historical scholarship in Australia. This need is particularly acute in relation to the study of Aboriginal art, regardless of the ethnicity of the researcher.

In conclusion, while the debates between 'old' and 'new' art history and the introduction of studies of visual culture might contribute to an understanding of the shortcomings and potentialities of the field, they do not constitute an adequate platform from which it is possible to delve into the past while maintaining a perspective firmly focused on the future potential of writing about Aboriginal art. This platform can be established only once agreements have been reached between researchers and the subjects of the research. An open dialogue must take place concerning the aims and objectives, needs and wants of art history and those involved at all levels of the production, circulation, valuation and collection of Indigenous art. Coming to a shared understanding of the purpose of art history is vital for establishing honest relations between all parties. The

best way to move forward is to find these points of agreement, which in turn have the potential to engender mutual respect.

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ENDNOTES

¹ McGrath, Ann and Markus, Andrew 1987, 'European views of Aborigines', in D. H. Borchardt (ed.), *Australians: A guide to sources*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Sydney, p. 117.

² From the visual equivalences drawn between late European and American modernists and Western Desert acrylics painters to the placement side by side of 'views' of Groote Eylandt, curators and critics are searching for different ways of drawing equivalences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art. Some interesting conceptual and aesthetic approaches have been tried in the inaugural temporary exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, *Open Air: Portraits in the landscape*, and a temporary hanging of the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia by Acting Director, Gary Dufour, in September 2008.

³ Langton, Marcia 1993, 'Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television', Australian Film Commission, Woolloomooloo, New South Wales, pp. 23–8.

⁴ Benjamin, Roger 2000, 'The brush with words: criticism and Aboriginal art', in Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale (eds), *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 466–70. See also Benjamin, Roger (ed.) 2009, *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal paintings from Papunya*, Distributed for the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University Press.

⁵ Rothwell, Nicolas 2009, 'From the desert, artists came', *The Australian*, 13 February, <www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,25046305-16947,00.html>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michaels, Eric 1988, 'Bad Aboriginal art', *Art and Text*, vol. 28, p. 73. See also Acker, Tim 2008, 'Aboriginal art: it's a complicated thing', *Artlink*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 64–8.

⁸ See Morphy, Howard 2008, *Becoming Art: Exploring cross-cultural categories*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.

⁹ See Jansen, Charles 1986, *Studying Art History*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ. According to Jansen (p. 44), art history is deemed more objective and has an 'explanatory power', which differs from art criticism, which 'consists of opinions processed into judgments of quality'. Anne D'Alleva notes that 'art criticism is the practice of evaluating art for its aesthetic and cultural worth, rather than using it to tell history'. She also notes that writers such as Pliny the Elder and Giorgio Vasari mixed art history with art criticism but they became separate disciplines in the eighteenth century. See D'Alleva, Anne 2006, *How to Write Art History*, Laurence King Publishing, London. It is also worth noting that in Australia the disciplines have never been that distinct. Robert Hughes was art critic for *The Observer* about the same time as he wrote *Art in Australia* and Bernard Smith was art critic for the *Age* for the three years leading up to his publication of *Australian Painting*—still one of the foundational texts of Australian art history.

¹⁰ Langton, 'Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television', p. 24.

¹¹ See <www.naa.gov.au/about-us/research-grants/frederick-watson/former-fellows/deveson-2006.aspx>

¹² Langton, 'Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television', p. 27.

¹³ Ibid., p. 28.

- ¹⁴ Roskill, Mark 1976, *What is Art History?*, Thames and Hudson, London, p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Johnson, William McAllister 1988, *Art History: Its use and abuse*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, p. 272.
- ¹⁶ See Soussloff, Catherine 1997, *The Absolute Artist: The historiography of a concept*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota.
- ¹⁷ See Morphy, Howard 1995, 'Aboriginal art in a global context', in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the prism of the local*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 211–39.
- ¹⁸ Some examples of these are the excellent catalogue *Papunya Tula: Genesis and genius* (2000), which outlines the birth of what some describe as the most revolutionary art movement in Australia; the encyclopedic reference work *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (2000), which combines solicited essays by a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and artists with alphabetically indexed entries on important topics and people; and the classic introductory survey *Aboriginal Art* by Wally Caruana (1993, revised 2003), part of the *World of Art* series by Thames and Hudson.
- ¹⁹ Morphy, Howard 1998, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press Limited, London, p. 4.
- ²⁰ Grishin, Sasha 2008, 'A new history of Australian art: dialectic between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art', *International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 7, pp. 59–65.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- ²² Smith, Bernard 2005, 'On writing art history in Australia', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 82, p. 11.
- ²³ Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 420.
- ²⁴ Sayers, Andrew 2001, *Oxford History of Art: Australian art*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, p. 2.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Considering the amount of territory he covers, Sayers mentions 'Aboriginal art' in a surprising number of places throughout the work. Sayers begins with an account of the early reception of rock art, Baldwin Spencer's collections and the popularity of some forms of 'Aboriginal art' at the turn of the nineteenth century. He devotes an entire section, between post-object art and 'the provincialism problem' to 'contemporary Aboriginal art'—meaning acrylic painting of the Western Desert from 1971 onwards.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ³² Allen, Christopher 1997, *Art in Australia: From colonization to postmodernism*, Thames and Hudson, London, p. 106.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- ³⁴ Langton, Marcia 2000, 'Homeland: sacred visions and the settler state', *Artlink*, vol. 20, no.1, pp. 11–16.
- ³⁵ Allen, *Art in Australia*, p. 215.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- ³⁷ Sayers, *Oxford History of Art*, p. 2.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ³⁹ McCulloch, Susan 2007, Excerpt from interview transcript, *Sunday Arts*, ABC TV, <www.abc.net.au/tv/sundayarts/txt/s1786884.htm>, reproduced in Lowish, Susan 2007, 'Too many Tjakamarra's?', *Australian Book Review*, no. 296, November, pp. 20–1.
- ⁴⁰ Oguibe, Olu 1993, 'In the "heart of darkness"', *Third Text*, no. 23, p. 3.
- ⁴¹ Morphy, Howard 2001, 'Seeing Aboriginal art in the gallery', *Humanities Research*, vol. 8, no.1, p. 37.
- ⁴² The inclusion of Mountford in this list might not sit well with some anthropologists, but he is an important figure in the promotion of Aboriginal art as a field of anthropological inquiry.
- ⁴³ Differences between European and American schools of anthropology aside, Morphy argues that 'the source of the neglect of art and material culture can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, and is associated with the rejection of the evolutionary paradigm'.

Morphy, Howard 1994, 'The anthropology of art', in Tim Ingold (ed.), *Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 656.

⁴⁴ Morphy, 'The anthropology of art', p. 657.

⁴⁵ Stewart, June 1974, *Bibliographical Essay on Art Historical Studies in Australia Since 1958*, Griffin Press, Adelaide, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Morphy, *Becoming Art*, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Layton, Robert 1996, 'Anthropology and art', in Jane Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 2, Grove for Macmillan, New York, p. 138.

⁴⁸ See especially Preziosi, Donald 1989, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a coy science*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

⁴⁹ See especially Morphy, *Becoming Art*, pp. 18–20.

⁵⁰ Kleinbauer, W. Eugene and Slavens, Thomas P. 1982, *Research Guide to the History of Western Art*, American Library Association, Chicago, p. 3.

⁵¹ Preziosi, Donald (ed.) 1998, *The Art of Art History: A critical anthology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, p. 507.

⁵² Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, p. 2.

⁵³ Farago, Claire 1995, 'Reframing the Renaissance', in Claire Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Preziosi, referencing Goodman, in *Rethinking Art History*, pp. 190–1.

⁵⁵ It should be noted that by focusing on written works that already use the term 'Aboriginal art' the question is not 'are they art?' but instead becomes one of 'in what sense are they art?'

⁵⁶ Wölfflin, Heinrich [1932] 1950, *Principles of Art History: The problem of the development of style of later art*, G. Bell and Sons, London.

⁵⁷ Preziosi has stated of art history in general: 'its future survival as a discipline will be read in its ability to understand its own complex and contradictory history.' Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, p. 52.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the exchange that took place between Bernard Smith and Donald Brook in the pages of *Meanjin* (1987–88). See also Smith's distinction between 'art in the special sense' and 'art in the general sense' in Smith, Bernard 1998, *Modernism's History: A study in twentieth-century art and ideas*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney; and Smith, Bernard 2006, 'Creators and catalysts: the modernisation of Australian Indigenous art', *ACH: The Journal of the History of Culture in Australia. Special Issue: Antipodean Modern*, vol. 25, pp. 11–25.

⁵⁹ Osbourne, Harold (ed.) 1970, *Oxford Companion to Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 925.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 924.

⁶¹ See Labbé, Armard J. 1992, *Images of Power: Masterworks of the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art*, Culture Arts Press, Santa Ana, California.

⁶² Burn, Ian and Stephen, Ann 1992, 'Namatjira's white mask: a partial interpretation', in Jane Hardy, J. V. S. Megaw and M. Ruth Megaw (eds), *The Heritage of Namatjira*, William Heinemann, Melbourne, p. 252.

⁶³ For more on the theoretical basis of this idea, see Bakhtin, Mikhail [1975] 1981, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Edited by Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.

⁶⁴ Goldwater, Robert [1938] 1986, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Enlarged edition, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, p. xxiv. Note: when first published, in 1938, the title appeared as *Primitivism in Modern Painting*.

⁶⁵ Lovejoy, Arthur et al. 1935, *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, Roger 2009, 'The fetish for Papunya boards', in Roger Benjamin (ed.), *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal paintings from Papunya*, pp. 21–50.

⁶⁹ This is particularly strange in McDonald's work, as a major and beautiful illustration in the first chapter is a two-page spread of the main gallery in the Nourlangie Rock area of Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory. According to George Chaoulopka, this particular frieze was painted in 1964 by

Najombolmi ('Barramundi Charlie'). Chaoulopkka, George 1982, *Burrunguy Nourlangie Rock*, Northart, Darwin.

⁷⁰ Senator Nigel Scullion, Senator for Northern Territory, Deputy Leader of The Nationals, Member of the Country Liberal Party, said in his maiden speech to Parliament, '[I]f you ever get a phone call from somebody who claims to have the answer to the challenges facing indigenous Australia, just hang up...I am sure that the social debris from the collision between a Stone Age culture and modern times is not going to be cleaned up through implementing just one or two ideas' (<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/senators/homepages/first_speech/sfs-00AOM.htm>).

⁷¹ See Phelps, Steven 1975, *Art and Artefacts of the Pacific, Africa and the Americas*, Hutchinson and Co., London. This large tome contains only six pages on Australia, utilising Spencer and Gillen (1899) and Basedow (1925) as references. Similarly, Pericot-Garcia, Luis et al. (1969, *Prehistoric and Primitive Art*, Thames and Hudson, London) contains a mere five paragraphs based on the work of D. S. Davidson.

⁷² Rees, A. L. and Borzello, Frances (eds) 1986, *The New Art History*, Camden Press, London, p. 2.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 2, summarising the main tenets of Roskill, *What is Art History?*.

⁷⁴ See Bann, Stephen 1986, 'How revolutionary is the new art history?', in Rees and Borzello, *The New Art History*, pp. 19–13; and Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, pp. 19–31.

⁷⁵ Rees and Borzello, *The New Art History*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Holly, Michael Ann and Moxey, Keith 2002, *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass., p. ix.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 544–5.

⁷⁹ Smith, Bernard 2000, 'In defence of art history', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 130, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Marsh, Anne 2000, 'The future of art history: the discipline in an expanded field', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 133, p. 10.

Wandjina, graffiti and heritage

The power and politics of enduring imagery

Ursula Frederick and Sue O'Connor

Introduction

Figure 10.1 A Wandjina-style figure amid graffiti in Perth.



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2007.

This article explores the re-purposing of rock art imagery in contemporary graffiti. We examine a particular case study from Perth, Western Australia, whereby graffiti resembling Wandjina rock art figures appeared throughout the metropolis (Figure 10.1). The power of this graffiti drew considerable attention from the public and the media. It also, however, drew attention to the complexities of representing cultural heritage and the custodial responsibilities faced by the Indigenous people of the Kimberley region (Figure 10.2). The appearance of Wandjina in Perth, outside their place in the remote north-west of Australia, was enjoyed by many as an appreciation of the power and beauty of the Wandjina. For others, including those with the rights and obligations of looking after Wandjina, it was also an unsettling occurrence. In light of past

debates about what is vandalism and what is culture, the Wandjina of Perth present interesting insights into the power of images and living heritage.

Throughout the world, thousands of rock shelters, boulders, mountains, caves and riverbeds have been inscribed by the human hand. These marks take the form of paintings, petroglyphs, murals, prints and stencils, incisions and grooves. Many were made several millennia ago and only partial traces remain. Some are figurative depictions of animals, people and material goods, while others are abstract shapes and designs such as concentric circles, zigzags or herringbone. These sites and their vast iconography, how they were arranged and where they occur, tell us something of how the people of the past engaged with the surfaces of the Earth. Although their meanings remain largely obscure, the very presence of these marks demonstrates an enduring human impulse to mark the world.

Ethnographic records reveal much more detail about the motivations for such marking practices. Some accounts reveal their didactic purpose, their role in communication, as narrative and as entertainment or for increase rituals. The oral testimony of Indigenous peoples also indicates that rock art could be multivalent components of a broader dynamic culture. As such, these marks on rock walls are regarded as key integers in the maintenance of social, cultural and cosmological connections. Certainly, many Indigenous accounts from Australia suggest that the rock art we view today is the ancestral law, stories of life and cultural beliefs made tangible.

In our present-day lives, graffiti is one extension of our human mark-making legacy.¹ Graffiti reveals how people occupy space and how they choose to express their experiences. It shows how individuals elect to move through, interact with and communicate via the fabric of their environment. Archaeologists, rock art specialists and amateur enthusiasts have dedicated considerable time and effort to documenting, analysing and interpreting the traces of the past. With few exceptions,² however, the study of contemporary mark making is outside the domain of most archaeologists. As other scholars have noted,³ graffiti research to date has largely been the work of sociologists, criminologists, psychologists and geographers.

There are, we believe, sufficient resonances between the rock art of the past and the graffiti of today to warrant exploration of their intersections. An archaeological eye towards the human made, a range of methods and an understanding of deep temporal trajectories offer archaeologists a unique perspective on graffiti studies. Similarly, the results of graffiti researchers provide locally situated accounts and evidence for archaeologists to consider in theorising about the past.

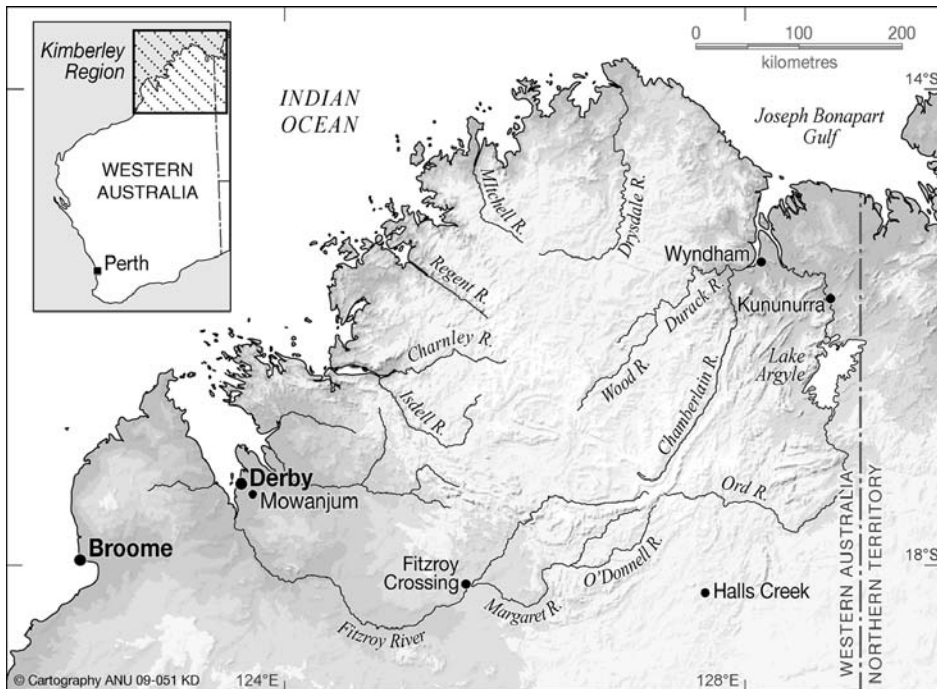
As archaeologists with a special interest in visual cultures, we are particularly intrigued by the way graffiti artists employ cultural heritage in their activities. In this article, we focus on the unique Wandjina figures of Western Australia.

In doing so, we explore the re-purposing of the past by graffiti artists in the context of a living tradition of Indigenous cultural practice. Set against an Indigenous history of repainting Wandjina in rock art and other media, the emergence of Wandjina graffiti offers unique insights into the power and politics of enduring images.

Background

Before the mid-1990s, graffiti, as it is currently practised, was relatively uncommon in Perth, Western Australia. In recent years, however, graffiti art⁴ has become an increasingly popular activity, as it has in so many other places throughout the world. Along with the racist slogans and vernacular scribble that have always existed, the city now exhibits the sophisticated wild-style tags, elaborate wall pieces, paste-ups and stencils that characterise the creative diversity of twenty-first century graffiti as urban art. This increased diversity, coupled with the undeniable artistic ability, imagination and wit evident in much contemporary graffiti, has played a strong role in generating public interest and in urging many people to overlook the illegality of the action to ask ‘How can something so good be so wrong?’

Figure 10.2 Map of the Kimberley showing places mentioned in the text.



Courtesy Cartography ANU.

While the public acceptance of graffiti art has grown with it, there remains strong opinion about who has the right to mark our streets. This question of authority lies at the heart of debates about the production, policing and removal of graffiti. There have been progressive attempts within some sectors of Australian government to commission murals, establish legal graffiti sites and even promote and protect street art as cultural heritage.⁵ Still, most local and state governments within Australia continue to define graffiti as antisocial behaviour and legislate against its practice. The WA Government and Perth city councils have developed a particularly tough stance by Australian standards and maintain strict anti-graffiti policies and penalties.⁶ Despite the implementation of police task forces, the threat of legal prosecution and even jail time, graffiti art continues to flourish in Western Australia.

Even as the artistic merit of graffiti receives renewed validation from art quarters around the globe, the legitimacy of graffiti as an art practice remains tightly bound to its standing as a criminal act. The challenge of what is right and what is wrong is a consistent theme in contemporary graffiti art practice. Some graffiti artists draw inspiration from this prohibitive status and the risks they take, often reiterating the roles of rebels, outlaws and revolutionaries in the work they produce. UK graffiti artist Banksy is renowned internationally for his play on the legal rights (or lack thereof) of graffiti producers. In Australia, such commentary is manifest in similar ways (Figure 10.3), but occasionally with the inclusion of local legends, such as the Victorian bushranger Ned Kelly. Perhaps in partial protest against their own lack of rights to public display, graffiti artists also have long been critical of other legal communication strategies such as corporate branding, mass media and advertising. Clearly, graffiti artists state their case in this debate through their continuing defiance of the law and in their choice of content and form.

What are missing in much of the public discussion and state-centred concerns about legal authority are vital issues of cultural legitimacy, ownership and property. As Rob Cover⁷ points out, the majority argument against graffiti really concerns a contest about 'ownership', which for Cover includes the fabric of the public sphere in which graffiti commonly operates, but it also incorporates the right to speak and the ownership of fixed signification.⁸ Indeed, much of the power within contemporary graffiti resides in the slippages in signification that occur through the remixing of popular or iconic imagery. Graffiti artists are well aware of this power and regularly utilise remixing as a form of play and as a tactic for voicing their opinions.

Often the graffiti that plays with words and existing imagery to create new meanings is directed at corporations and governments as a form of culture jamming. It has, however, also become something of a convention and means of conversation within the graffiti community. The prevalence of image remixing

as a device of contemporary graffiti, while related to other arts of sampling, signals a significant development in its practice. Concerted graffiti artists now achieve notoriety through stylistic innovation and by outwitting one another with clever image play rather than merely by tagging. While the appropriation of images is an acceptable method in making graffiti, originality in the selection and application of those images is important. In short, few graffiti artists want to see another Che Guevara stencil unless it is treated in a particularly unique way. This is not because the image is derived from another person's photograph (Alberto Korda's) but because the image itself is overexposed to the point of cliché. Although it is ostensibly anonymous, a graffiti design or a tag, in its particularity, can act like an artist's brand,⁹ linking their mark to their identity—albeit codified. Graffiti as a kind of autographical writing¹⁰ offers some explanation for why graffiti artists seek to stamp their individuality and why ripping off another's image might be perceived as weak. In these respects, graffiti art offers insights into more nuanced notions of 'copying', authenticity, originality and creative imagination. This leads us to our interest in graffiti as an act of remixing the past for the present. If the challenge is to find something that is recognisable without being passé, where do graffiti artists find the images they appropriate?

Figure 10.3 A large stencil piece in Melbourne, Australia.



Photograph courtesy of Katie Hayne and Ursula Frederick, 2007.

Figure 10.4 Representations of Ned Kelly in contemporary Melbourne graffiti.



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2007.

Re-purposing the past

Print media, television and advertising provide graffiti artists with plenty of material to hijack. The Internet has made these and other sources easily accessible. While the Web provides a portal to the saturated stuff of the twentieth century, it also offers contact with more obscure images held in digital archives and databases. A vast portion of the world's rich legacy of visual arts and cultural traditions is now online for us to 'visit'.

By cultural heritage, we mean archaeological and historical material, such as the architecture of ancient civilisations and frescoes of art history. Other examples might include rock art, statuary or a particular decorative style evident in material culture. Most of the cultural heritage we have observed in graffiti art comes from a pantheon of popular art and archaeology motifs. The iconic Tutankhamen has appeared, along with Easter Island Moai, Aztec ruins¹¹ and Michelangelo's *David*. Many stencil artists have drawn on the strong film and photo-media heritage of the twentieth century to re-picture historically significant figures and cult classics. In Victoria (Australia), this has acquired a local flavour, with the re-presentation of the nineteenth-century bushranger Ned Kelly (Figure 10.4). Other graffiti artists observe a link between themselves and the anonymous 'artists' who painted on walls thousands of years ago. Banksy's Peckham Rock¹² and Lascaux-inspired mural¹³ reveal how the cultural traditions of the past can be re-purposed for contemporary use.

Wandering Wandjina

In 2006, a remarkable graffiti phenomenon swept the streets of Perth. A unique figure known as a Wandjina appeared as graffiti—more than 1000 kilometres south of its Kimberley home. Within months, the Perth Wandjina had multiplied significantly, with more than 100 examples evident across the city's surfaces (Figure 10.1). Its distinctive form emerged in car parks and on freeway flyovers as well as on rubbish hoppers, apartment buildings, trees and laneway walls. The graffiti appeared in a variety of iterations: as stencils, freestyle paintings and ground sculpture, ranging formally from the solitary bust of conventional rock art representations to more imaginative renderings, such as the depiction of a Wandjina driving a pink car.

By early 2007, the Wandjina graffiti had developed something of a following among Perth locals. 'Wandjina watching', as it came to be known, involved 'spotting' new Wandjina, photographing it and then uploading the image with location details to the website flickr.¹⁴ By geo-tagging the images, a map of Wandjina graffiti sites was created for others to view and visit on the ground. The documentation of graffiti is a popular pastime conducted by artist/writers and other appreciative observers as well as police and graffiti removalists. The phenomena of making and watching Wandjina, however, led to a much larger

community response and media spectacle that yielded insight into important issues of authority, power and display.

What are Wandjina?

Wandjina are the supreme spirit ancestors of the Indigenous people of the Kimberley. They are found in painted form on the walls and ceilings of rock shelters in the clan estates of the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambal language groups,¹⁵ although visually similar figures can be found in Bunuba country in the central Kimberley and on Koolan Island in the Buccaneer Archipelago—traditionally part of the territory of Umiida people.¹⁶

Wandjina have names and some display individual characteristics, which identify them; however, all Wandjina share certain features that make them instantly recognisable. Their faces have eyes and nose but never a mouth. Their anthropomorphic forms are frontal and often imposing in scale, sometimes extending up to 5 metres across the walls or ceiling of shelters; however, very small examples also occur (Figure 10.5). Their heads are surrounded by a semicircular band of solid colour or radiating or dotted lines that give the impression that they are wearing a helmet or headdress.¹⁷ The radiating lines from the head are said to represent the lightning that foreshadows the wet season rains.¹⁸ Wandjina are often shown as a full body, or at least head, shoulders and torso, but some have only the head and shoulders represented. The body lacks anatomical detail and is filled with visually powerful decorative designs such as dotted and striped lines over solid pigment. An oval shape on the chest placed centrally beneath the shoulders is said to represent the 'Wanjin's heart, in others its breastbone, and in yet others, a pearl-shell pendant'¹⁹ (Figure 10.6). Most Wandjina are upright but some are depicted horizontally where they 'lay down' in the shelters. Some are painted in groups and others individually. Most Wandjina are drawn in outline onto a matt-white pigment background, which is created by blowing the pigment from the mouth. The outline is often in black or red and the decorative infill is applied over the white background in red, yellow, orange or black pigment. Most significantly, Wandjina are luminous and imposing, their dark eyes gazing out from their white face mesmerise, appearing to rise out from the rock surface.

Figure 10.5 Detail of small Wandjina faces painted at Saddlers Springs, Iminji, WA, November 1973.



Photograph courtesy of Kim Akerman.

Figure 10.6 Wandjina with black-cockatoo feathers painted in Otiliyalyangngarri Cave, Mount Barnett, WA, 13 April 1985.



Photograph courtesy of Kim Akerman.

The Wandjina was intrinsically linked to the mythological life, social organisation and seasonal movements of Indigenous Kimberley peoples. Kimberley people believe that the Wandjina undertook 'creative journeys which left the land and all living matter in its present form'.²⁰ Each Indigenous group or 'clan' had its own territory or 'estate' and, following the creative journey, Wandjina 'lay down' in a shelter within each clan estate. 'Each Wandjina has a name, a moiety and a set of totemic symbols from which each clan is directly descended'²¹ and for which the members of that clan are responsible. Frequently associated with the Wandjina are myriad other motifs portraying mythological beings and a wide variety of plants, animals and items of material culture. These motifs are often linked to events that occurred in the creative journey of the Wandjina with which they are associated.

Figure 10.7 Wattie Karrawarra, painting the *Wanjina Kalerungari*, Derby, WA, 7 April 1975.



Photograph courtesy of Kim Akerman.

Figure 10.8 Decorated bark bucket—*karaki*, height: 460mm. Artist: Lily Karedada, Wunambul. Lily Karedada produced this work for Waringarri Arts. She has decorated it with two Wandjina figures, one of which is shown here.



Photograph courtesy of Western Australian Museum, Anthropology Department A26508.

While Wandjina are the anthropomorphic representations of spirit ancestors, they are not seen as 'art' and it is believed they were not originally painted by people. They *are* the powerful creative beings who put themselves onto the rock after the creative process was completed.²²

Mowaljarlai encapsulates this in his description of them as

IMAGES with ENERGIES that keep us ALIVE—EVERY PERSON, EVERYTHING WE STAND ON, ARE MADE FROM, EAT AND LIVE ON.

Those IMAGES were put down for us by our Creator, Wandjina, so that we would know how to STAY ALIVE, make everything grow and CONTINUE what he gave to us in the first place. We should dance those images back into the ground in corroborees. That would make us learn the story, to put new life into those IMAGES.²³

This is not to say that the Wandjina images are not repainted or retouched as they age and lose their lustrous quality. Because the Wandjina put their own images on the cave walls before they returned to the spirit world, keeping the images fresh and strong is a responsibility of the living and repainting them is an integral part of the process of ensuring the regeneration of all life forms.²⁴ Senior men of the clan would retouch or restore the Wandjina in their clan estate at the end of the dry season. This would ensure the coming of the north-western monsoon and the rains that replenished the land.²⁵ Because of this, Wandjina representations are not static but show stylistic changes over time and space.

Ian Crawford, who produced the first major study of the Wandjina motifs in the Kimberley, relocated several Wandjina that had been recorded historically. He was able to document how their form changed with successive retouching episodes. For example, Crawford²⁶ reports that the Wandjina at Langgi, which was repainted between January and February 1929, is not just a

restoration of an earlier painting, but a completely new one covering earlier paintings. The old men are very secretive about restoration of paintings, claiming...that the originals are the work of the Wandjina, not of men. They do admit that these paintings are cleaned and restored occasionally, but it is clear...that they sometimes disregarded the old paintings altogether.

The new painting at Langgi differs slightly in style from such older paintings as are visible. This allows us to form some idea of the changes in style which have occurred.²⁷

Antiquity of the Wandjina

The antiquity of the Wandjina painting tradition is still uncertain. As the historical account above and studies of the successive layers on the painted rock surfaces indicate, some Wandjina have been repainted or retouched over many generations. Technical examinations carried out on cross-sections of rock crusts have found evidence for upwards of 40 distinct paint layers within a single painting.²⁸ If, however, Wandjina were retouched annually to ensure the coming of the wet season rains, it would take only a few generations to accumulate this number of paint layers. Interestingly, Watchman's²⁹ research on the cross-sections demonstrated that multiple painting episodes were evidenced in some cross-sections but not in others, and supported Clarke's³⁰ suggestion that the degree of repainting could have been motivated by the significance of the underlying image.³¹

A recent dating program on the pigment taken from 'classic' Wandjina indicates that the tradition might be no more than 1500 years old.³² Crawford³³ documented the regional variability in 'archaic' Wandjina painted beneath the more recent forms and argued for a trend towards increasing homogeneity over time. Further recording of the range of variability and dating of 'archaic' forms is needed to gain a better understanding of the origins of the Wandjina tradition.

Contemporary Wandjina art movements

Today, Wandjina are painted by Indigenous Kimberley artists on a variety of media, including bark, hardboard and canvas, and are produced for the national and international art market (Figures 10.7 and 10.8).³⁴ They are also carved out of pearl shell, on baobab nuts and painted onto utilitarian objects such as baskets.³⁵ Although art in this new media is produced largely for sale, O'Connor et al. have recently argued that it is still intimately connected to country and landscape and

represents a continuation or transference of traditional practice. Stories about the travels, battles and engagements of Wandjina and other Dreaming events are now retold and experienced in the communities with reference to the paintings, an activity that is central to maintaining and reinvigorating connection between identity and place. The transposition of painting activity from sites within Country to the new 'out-of-Country' settlements represents a social counterbalance to the social dislocation that arose from separation from traditional places and forced geographic moves out-of-Country to government and mission settlements in the twentieth century.³⁶

Wandjina are also still occasionally repainted in rock shelters by traditional owners of the country.³⁷ Blundell and Woolagoodja³⁸ record how Sam Woolagoodja repainted a coastal rock art site at Raft Point, near the entrance of Doubtful Bay, during a filmmaking expedition with Malcolm Douglas in the 1970s. 'Sam took advantage of his filmmaking trips to repaint' and to fulfill other obligations to his country and kin. Woolagoodja had been given custodial rights and responsibilities for this country and the site by a clan known as Umbrewewal before the last of their old people had 'finished up'. Rock cod portrayed in the Raft Point site were totems for the Umbrewewal clan. Refreshing the paintings was a 'way for Sam to care for this country and thus fulfill the responsibility that had been given to him by his Umbrewewal relations'.³⁹

Woolagoodja handed the responsibility of the upkeep and repainting of Wandjina images in rock shelters and caves in this area to his son Donny Woolagoodja. As recently as 2005, Donny, a well-known contemporary Kimberley artist from Derby, repainted a very important Wandjina named 'Namarali' as well as other motifs at the rock shelter known as Karndirrim in the western Kimberley (Figure 10.9). The process of repainting, and the spiritual and physical journey it involved, was documented by Blundell and Woolagoodja in their book *Keeping the Wandjinas Fresh*. Donny has also created many paintings of Namarali and other Wandjina on canvas. These paintings follow closely the artistic conventions of the images on the shelter walls (Figure 10.10).

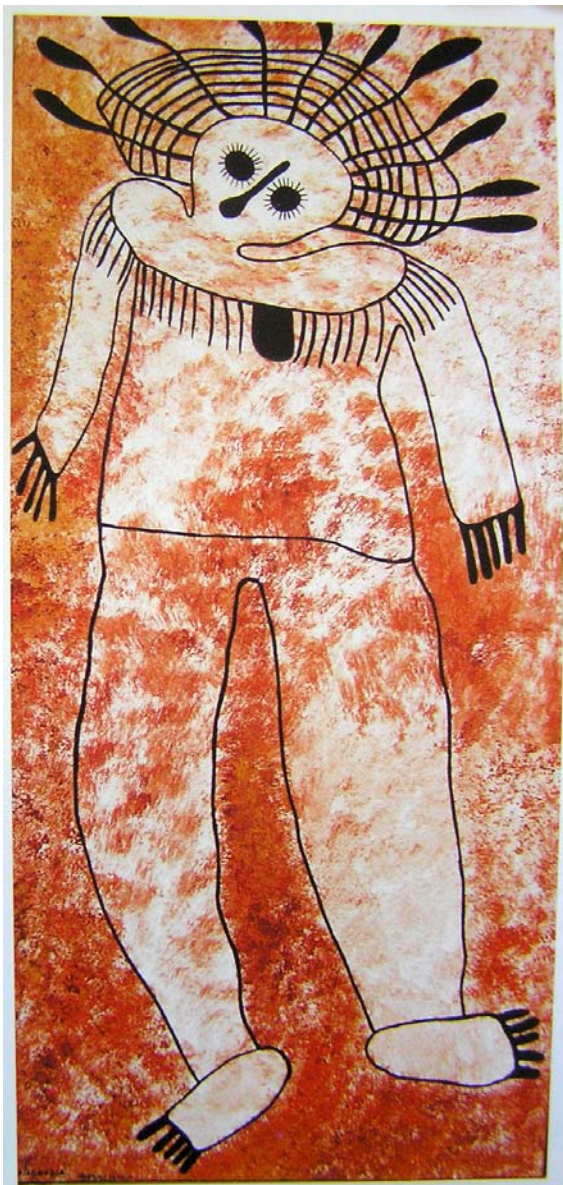
The origins of portable art portraying Wandjina are even less certain than those of the Wandjina rock art. Ryan and Akerman⁴⁰ report that the earliest bark paintings collected date from the 1930s. They note, however, that while it has usually been assumed that the Wandjina barks were produced in response to a commercial demand from Europeans, the German anthropologist Helmut Petri records 'a stone shrine-like construction with an associated arch made of bark painting of two Wandjina figures'.⁴¹ This observation would suggest that barks were produced in a traditional framework for use in ceremony or ritual and might have operated alongside Wandjina rock art.

Figure 10.9 *Namarali* at the Karndirrim rock shelter after repainting by Donny Woolagoodja in April 2002.



Photograph by Sahyma Lachman, reproduced with permission of Donny Woolagoodja.

Figure 10.10 *Namarali at Rest*, contemporary painting of the Wandjina Namarali by Donny Woolagoodja, 2004. Acrylic on Canvas; 1802 x 881cm.



Photograph from Blundell, Valda and Woolagoodja, Donny 2005, *Keeping the Wandjinas Fresh: Sam Woolagoodja and the enduring power of Lalai*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, p. 192, reproduced with permission the artist.

Who has the right to make Wandjina imagery?

Although there is a wealth of ethnographic data to attest to the practice of repainting of Wandjina and other rock art within rock shelters, contemporary repainting has met with considerable controversy. For example, when in 1987 a group of Ngarinyin people from the western Kimberley repainted some of the rock art sites in the Gibb River area, a longstanding public debate ensued. The repainting was done by young men and women from the western Kimberley who were engaged on an Australian Federal Government employment scheme. The debate is briefly touched on here as it has strong contemporary resonances, revolving around ownership of Indigenous imagery and who has the right to reproduce it.⁴² In brief, critics of the Ngarinyin repainting argued that it was not undertaken in a traditional context, was not executed by the appropriate aged and gendered members of the community, involved the use of non-traditional materials and did not conform to traditional style. The most vocal of the detractors were non-Indigenous rock art experts, who argued that the Kimberley painted sites were a *universal* heritage and Indigenous people should not have the *sole* right to make decisions about their repainting.⁴³

On the opposing side of the debate were those like the Indigenous cultural leader Mowaljarli, who argued that the Wandjina paintings were not 'art' and therefore the concerns about aesthetics were irrelevant. Others commenting on the political subtext of the debate stated that 'all human art is part of a dynamic experience and if we are going to oppose repainting we are condemning Aboriginal art to the status of cultural relic'⁴⁴, and that contemporary Indigenous livelihoods and cultural continuity should take precedence over 'heritage'.⁴⁵ The argument that repainting was undertaken by people of inappropriate age and gender was also shown to be a contentious one. Early anthropological records demonstrate that women could, and did, participate in painting and retouching of rock art in the Kimberley. Most early ethnographic work was carried out by male anthropologists, who not surprisingly documented painting as a male pursuit; however, Kaberry, one of the few female anthropologists to undertake field-based research into women's roles in Indigenous Kimberley societies,⁴⁶ specifically referred to women's ceremonies and women's involvement in repainting.⁴⁷

Today, Wandjina art is produced by men and women of all ages and production and sales are coordinated through artist cooperatives such as the Mowanjumb Spirit of the Wandjina Corporation.⁴⁸ Indigenous artists working within such cooperatives and individually are also protected to some extent from unfair appropriation of images by copyright law.⁴⁹ Indigenous artists have successfully pursued claims for damages against those infringing copyright.⁵⁰ This has been particularly clear-cut when an individual's paintings have been directly reproduced on commercial products. Less straightforward are cases where styles or designs that are regarded as collectively owned are reproduced. In the case

of Wandjina art, where the contemporary artists are taking inspiration from images that are believed to have created themselves and where they are reproduced to reinforce Indigenous customary law rather than for individual benefit, issues of copyright are less clear-cut.⁵¹ It is, however, generally agreed within the Indigenous community that only Indigenous artists who claim descent through one of the linguistic groups traditionally associated with the Wandjina should be able to reproduce these images. Reaction to the emergence of the Perth Wandjina graffiti exemplifies this moral response to 'rights'.

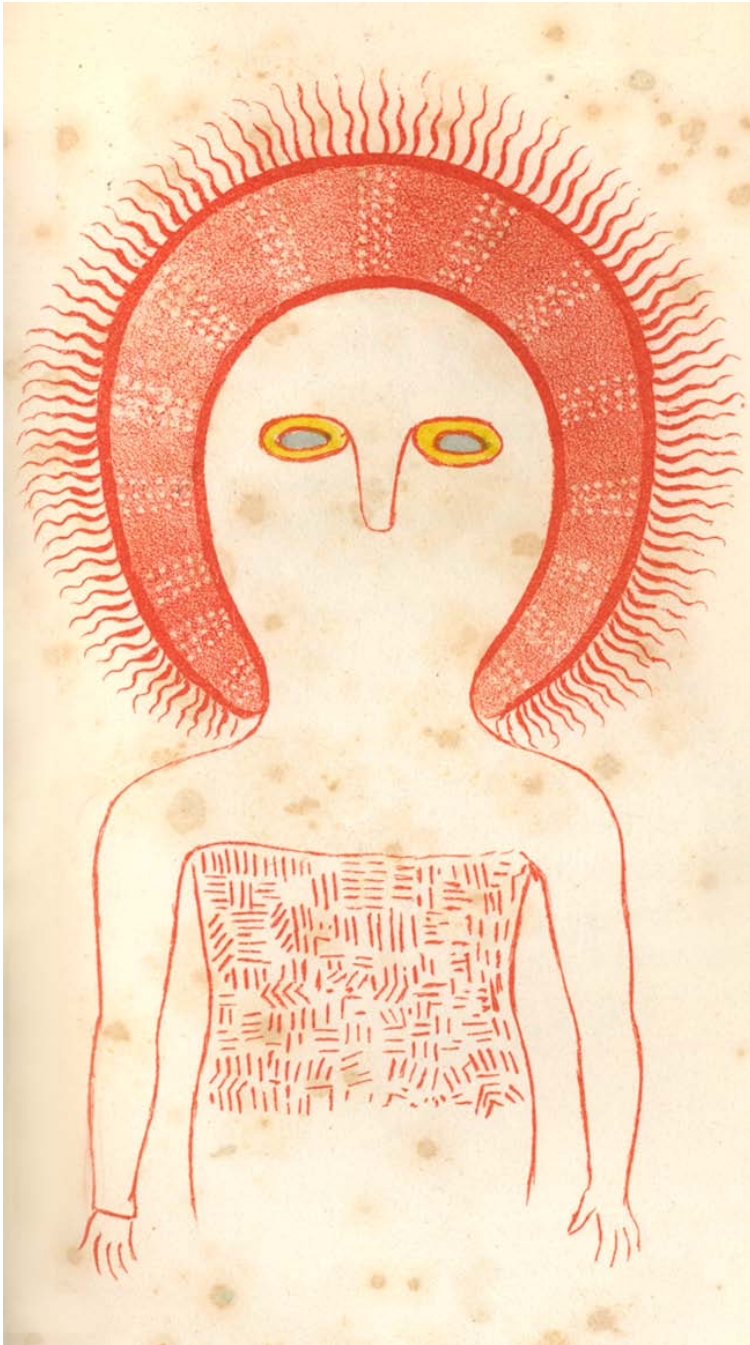
The Wandjina mystique

Outside the Indigenous community to whom they belong, Wandjina have long been the subject of speculation. Their mystique can be traced to the earliest European recording of Wandjina rock art by George Grey, during his expedition of 1838–39.⁵² Grey questioned the derivation of the Wandjina paintings: 'Whatever may be the age of these paintings, it is scarcely probable that they could have been executed by a self-taught savage. Their origin, therefore must still be open to conjecture.'

By calling into question the origins of the Wandjina paintings he saw in the Kimberley, Grey initiated a kind of conjecture that has continued to this day.⁵³ Grey's initial belief in the non-Indigenous external origins of Wandjina took firm sway among the interpretations that followed. His illustrations and the creative licence they entailed (Figure 10.11) played a part in seeding further speculation. Some commentators were convinced they could translate ancient script from the headdress detail of Grey's drawing.⁵⁴ Later, Erik Von Daniken⁵⁵ famously used the Wandjina as evidence of humanity's ancestral connections to outer space. Magazines and web sites supporting celestial evolution theories continue to interpret Wandjina figures in this way. The characteristic semicircular headdress is often referred to as an extraterrestrial's helmet.

As these examples indicate, one aspect of the Wandjina's contested heritage envelops the views of alternative archaeology and hidden-history theories.⁵⁶ The other trajectory of debate regarding Wandjina concerns the cultural and intellectual property of Indigenous people and their rights to repaint the Wandjina image. This controversy revolves around a division in how Wandjina are perceived either as culturally situated tradition or as part of a collective universal heritage. Both lines of debate distance Wandjina figures from the Indigenous people to whom they belong. Their effect is to question Indigenous ownership and their custodial rights and obligations in mediating how Wandjina are represented and in managing the powers that they carry. This context of mystery, controversy and speculation adds an important dimension to the appearance and reception of Wandjina in Perth and in understanding the full gamut of reactions that were conveyed.

Figure 10.11 Drawing of a Wandjina by Sir George Grey, 1841.



Discussion: Wandjina watching and other responses

To some extent, the appearance of Wandjina graffiti and the responses that followed extended its enigmatic history into a new chapter. The mystery surrounding its spontaneous emergence and replication, as well as the anonymity of the graffiti artist(s) involved, lend weight to the speculative atmosphere that surrounds the Wandjina. Moreover, the range of responses to this graffiti reflects the difference in perspectives in other debates linked to this striking figure.

It would be fair to say that many Australians—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—are familiar with Wandjina as represented through contemporary paintings and exhibitions, as rock art images in the public domain or as a centrepiece installation at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games. Undoubtedly, many people might share an appreciation for the Wandjina figure as a visual form without knowledge of its socio-cultural and cosmological importance within the Kimberley. Perhaps the visual gravitas of these figures goes some way towards explaining the fascination many non-Indigenous people have with Wandjina—a fascination that has also found expression as speculation and contestation about the origins and maintenance of Wandjina paintings.⁵⁷ To some extent, this speculative tone resurfaced when Wandjina graffiti first began to appear in Perth. The sudden occurrence and anonymity that graffiti art upholds fed into the mystique that Wandjina have long held for those who do not understand them. As they multiplied in different guises (stencils, paintings, ground sculpture) and on various surfaces (walls, plants, trees, rubbish hoppers), they were also reproduced on blogs, flickr and in media reports. Commercial television sensationalised their presence as if they had come out of nowhere.⁵⁸

The formal qualities of the Perth Wandjina contributed to this impression. The figure was often depicted rising out of the ground or coming around a corner (Figure 10.12). The striking features of the rayed headdress and the large eyes combine to give the Wandjina graffiti a spontaneous, almost startled appearance (Figure 10.13). It is difficult to know whether this sense ‘of being caught out’ was among the artist’s intentions. In any case, it presents a nice allusion to the risk-taking artist who must remain anonymous and to the elusive trickster nature of spirits that live and appear on rocks in northern Australia (see, for example, Mimi). The presence of stencils that are similar to so-called ‘Mountford figures’⁵⁹ alongside Wandjina at two sites might suggest the graffiti artist(s) had some degree of rock art literacy. Even if the author of the Wandjina graffiti was familiar with Australian rock art, however, it is difficult to know if s/he knew anything of the Wandjina’s significance.

Figure 10.12 Wandjina freestyle painting.



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2007.

Before long, the Perth Wandjina, rather than the graffiti artist responsible, had acquired a personality, a degree of local celebrity and a fan base. The sensation that Wandjina were spontaneously popping up only fuelled the desire, among admirers, for discovering more of them.⁶⁰

I knew it was sort of a special and sacred symbol, something not normally seen out there on a car yard wall...I do actually get a little bit excited now because I think ooh am I the first person to photograph this one in the group that's been putting them on the web.⁶¹

Rosemary Lynch was only one of many enthusiastic locals who appreciated finding the Wandjina within the city. In part, it was the fact that Wandjina seemed out of place in the urban setting that piqued her initial interest: 'it struck me as really unusual to see that image by the street.'⁶² With others, she began documenting the graffiti and posting updates online in her blog and a dedicated Wandjina thread on flickr. Another Wandjina watcher, Nic Beames, described the activity as follows:

Figure 10.13 Wandjina head stencils.



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2007.

We've got a group set up where there are about ten or 11 people watching and observing and some of those people are contributing...we would probably have somewhere between 60 and 80 of these images.⁶³

This small collective played a large part in bringing the Perth Wandjina to the attention of others. A flurry of media reports and articles followed that placed as much emphasis on the group's activity as on the graffiti itself. An interesting aspect of this media spectacle was the discourse that developed around the idea of the Wandjina as mysterious and different to other graffiti. In short, the Wandjina were admired as 'artistic' and 'high quality' by way of contrast with tagging.⁶⁴ What is also evident in these accounts is recognition of the Wandjina

as an Indigenous symbol and ancestral being. Many observers saw the positive side of the Wandjina as raising awareness of Indigenous culture.⁶⁵ One online commentator put it this way:

I have been chasing these wandjina images all over perth, they are a beautiful way to reclaim and recolonise the urban sprawl with indigenous art. The image is haunting, as if the spirit itself is watching over the new people of the land, or perhaps reminding us to acknowledge the traditional people.⁶⁶

These remarks and the overall take on the Wandjina graffiti demonstrate an important shift in the popular understanding of Wandjina's origins as entirely Indigenous, not external or alien. This marks a difference from past episodes of speculation and controversy. The question still revolved around the origins of the Wandjina, but the inflection and tone had changed. Focus shifted away from whether Indigenous custodians should refresh Wandjina to whether the graffiti artist had the right and ability to handle the Wandjina's power as a Kimberley elder would.

One way of thinking about the Wandjina watching response is that it mirrored the actions of the graffiti artist. In effect, Wandjina watchers were appropriating the original graffiti to create their own remixed versions. One individual created their own video by animating photographs of the Perth Wandjina against a soundtrack of a crackling campfire and a didgeridoo playing. Furthermore, their blogs, image threads and videos emulated the replication strategies of graffiti, only this time they were extending the circulation of images via the viral networks of the Web. Ultimately, the Wandjina had come full circle, as the graffiti were observed online from the Kimberley.

The response from the Kimberley towards the graffiti was one of concern. As Kimberley artist and elder Donny Woolagoodja put it: 'If the wrong person or people are using our image, it's possible that they will bring a very powerful energy to themselves which could harm them.'⁶⁷ Woolagoodja's statement underlines the importance of rights and respect for Wandjina and their power. It also reiterates the ownership of Wandjina by Kimberley people as central to Kimberley custom and law.

Despite this, Woolagoodja offered praise for the graffiti writer's ability: 'He can paint all right, he does the Wandjina just like us...I've seen that one of the Wandjina driving a car—I call that one "the pink lady".'⁶⁸

By all accounts, the authors of the Wandjina graffiti couldn't be discredited on either their aesthetic sensibility or effort. S/he captured the key attributes that made the Wandjina recognisable: large eyes, no mouth, pearl-shell ornament, radiating headdress and bust with decorative infill (Figure 10.13). A notable distinction is that the Perth figures appear as the conventional bust, never as a

full-length figure. This might suggest that the inspiration for the Perth Wandjina came from accessible, even popular, sources rather than the full breadth of Wandjina characterisations found in old or specialist texts,⁶⁹ contemporary art or in situ paintings. This is not to suggest that the stylisation evident in Perth Wandjina has limited the scope of its creative application: the Wandjina driving a car is one example; another has the head of a Wandjina and the crucified body of a black Jesus (Figure 10.14). Here again the headdress becomes a site for reinventing meaning, now doubling as the crown of thorns.

Figure 10.14 Wandjina Resurrection



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2008.

In many cases, the Perth Wandjina appeared as solitary figures, which contributed a sense of boldness. Less frequently, they appeared in pictorial scenes and on walls with large amounts of other graffiti. The latter case demonstrated how the Wandjina were reiterated successfully to be simultaneously diverse and emblematic. An archaeological analysis of one Perth graffiti site⁷⁰ showed that the Wandjina was the most frequent motif produced and employed a greater variation in size, technique and colour than any other graffiti present. At this site at least, the Wandjina show differences just like they do in the Kimberley. In fact, the Perth renditions are remarkably sympathetic to the 'real' Wandjina found in the north.

This likeness was precisely what made the graffiti powerful and disconcerting. For example, Perth-based Indigenous artist and arts administrator Glenn Pilkington worried that the imagery of Wandjina was being used without any

consultation with the traditional custodians.⁷¹ Pilkington's response reminds us that the Wandjina are cultural property, even though some people might not realise it. This point—that someone owns the Wandjina—was not lost on one member of the graffiti community. Their straightforward response was to repaint the Wandjina graffiti and thereby give it new meaning. A single stencilled word covered a number of Wandjina figures: 'STOLEN' (Figure 10.15).

Figure 10.15 Stolen Wandjina stencil.



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2007.

Figure 10.16 Wandjina graffiti in ruin.



Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick, 2008.

Conclusion

The Wandjina graffiti and the responses that it elicited were an exceptional phenomenon—a contemporary intersection between the art of the past and the art of the present. It was a thought-provoking discussion, played out in various media, on what is art, what is vandalism and what is authority—or who has the right to signification, as Cover⁷² put it, and who has the right to make marks and meanings in a public context?

Despite the veil of secrecy under which the graffiti community must operate, the individual making the Wandjina eventually came forward to discuss their actions with a select group. In her short documentary *Who Paintin' Dis Wandjina?*, Taryn Laffar⁷³ was able to incorporate the artist's perspective while protecting their identity from the viewer. And, after Kimberley elders expressed a desire to make contact with the graffiti artist, s/he complied. It is understood that they reiterated the power of the Wandjina and made a request for the artist to stop painting them. The graffiti artist agreed and, since that time, many of the figures that did exist have been torn down, painted over or are in a state of ruin (Figure 10.16).

There is something to be learned from the fact that the graffiti artist promptly responded to Indigenous elders' requests, when a punitive state law did not stop him/her from doing graffiti in the first place. It raises questions about whose

power and authority are heard within communities and how respect can be earned through consultation and negotiation rather than blame. Moreover, this study suggests that if we are to grasp what is right and wrong when it comes to evaluating graffiti, the influence of community and cultural legitimacy is as valid as the implications of legislation and legal authority.

Three years on, a few Perth Wandjina remain. Among them is the Wandjina with arms outstretched, like Jesus awaiting death and then resurrection (Figure 10.14). The significance of this scene is not lost on those who see the synergies between this spiritual symbol of renewal and the regenerative power of the Wandjina. As much as it invokes conceptions of suffering, redemption and spirit, the black Jesus Wandjina underscores the potential for images to transform and to communicate cross-culturally.

Finally, the story of the Perth Wandjina remains instructive even as their materiality fades. They demonstrate the ephemeral nature of our traces. They prove that of all the marks made by human hand, some endure the passage of time while the majority do not. It makes the Wandjina of the Kimberley all the more remarkable not simply because old paintings have been preserved but because their custodians have ensured, through insistence and despite contest, that the Wandjina spirit be kept alive, kept bright, kept strong.

Authors' note

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ENDNOTES

¹ Here we do not mean to imply that there is a direct equivalence between graffiti produced today and the rock art of Australia or elsewhere, either in terms of motivation or meaning. We do, however, stand by our suggestion that the locally nuanced and culturally specific processes of mark making that span human history might share certain resonances to be investigated.

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