

USES OF ABORIGINALITY

Popular Representations of Australian Aboriginality

Robert Windsor

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Department of English, University of Adelaide
South Australia

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for lisa who gave me the best reason in the world to write this.

for nelly and stella who were there and loved me.

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the beginning

*“Wanti nindo ai kabba?
Ningkoandi kuma yerta.”¹*

directions

Analysing the various mythologies that inform Australian understandings of Aboriginal people, Marcia Langton concludes that what is revealed is not by and large a relationship between actual people but a relationship between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors: “Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists” (Langton, 1993: 31). This thesis concentrates upon this relationship of non-Aboriginal people (especially white Australians) to the symbols and narratives they use to produce what is called Aboriginality. It is a study of popular or broadly circulating representations of Australian Aboriginality. It does not concentrate to any significant extent upon representations produced by Aboriginal people themselves: It is important to recognise that the Aboriginality that is the subject of this thesis is an object largely independent of the cultural expressions and identity formations of Aboriginal people themselves. Here Aboriginality, like madness or sexuality for Michel Foucault, is a Western discursive object “charged with instrumentality” (Foucault, 1979: 103).

¹ “Where have you pushed me to? You belong to another country.” A song sung in 1844 by Ngurpo Williamsie, of the Kurna people of the Adelaide plains, in protest at the invasion of his country.

The research for this thesis began with a largely serendipitous collecting of primary texts². Parameters were very loosely defined: no restrictions were placed on date of publication, on genre, on whether the texts were fiction or non-fiction, or on medium (films, photographs, television, and web sites were included with print texts). There were two requirements for the gathering together of this collection of objects: each item had to be (in some way) definable as “popular”, and each item had to have been produced by a non-Aboriginal person or persons. In many ways this was something of an unwieldy task, not simply because of the enormous number of objects that fall into these categories but also because of difficulties in determining what actually constituted “the popular”³.

The idea of a popular text was essential to the project. An attempt has been made to use the widely consumed to uncover the broadly representative. This aim sprang out of the personal experience of a number of years spent in higher education, where I was largely exposed to progressive approaches to the understanding of Aboriginality, followed by the experience of entering the workplace and discovering that different attitudes prevailed. This was doubly surprising in that the

² The term text, as used in this thesis, refers not only to print material but to a range of representational objects including films, television and photographic material.

³ Initially I began simply by purchasing texts that were available through popular outlets such as newsagents, certain secondhand bookstores and Aquarian bookstores. I sought fiction that would be unlikely to fit into the category of the literary. I tried only to select texts that were widely available and ready to hand: texts that were not aimed at any kind of specialist audience but appeared to be targeting the general public.

workplace I entered was a Central Australian Aboriginal school. Amongst the non-Aboriginal teachers, and other workers in the community, it was not uncommon to hear forms of racism and essentialism expressed. Many of these views I believed at the time (naively I now recognise) had long since fallen into *widespread* disrepute. This was in 1995; in 1996 - following the emergence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party - I was made further aware of the pervasiveness of such attitudes. The Howard Liberal government provided tacit support to One Nation's racism through pronouncements such as: "ordinary Australians" now felt relaxed and comfortable enough to speak their minds. At this time - in supermarkets, on public transport, in pubs and chemist shops - I overheard "ordinary Australians" speaking their minds. This thesis grew out of a desire to gain some understanding of the genealogy and the function of the barrage of misinformation and myth that (re)entered public discourse at this time. Textual objects that were in broad circulation and widely consumed seemed to be the most suitable resource for this task.

Having gathered a large number of different kinds of objects it became necessary, in order to make my task more manageable, to arrange the objects into categories. This was by no means a simple task. At first I attempted to arrange according to a form of genre distinction. It seemed that most of the objects fitted roughly into three categories: popular ethnography, crime fiction, and New Age texts. While these initially functioned well as working categories they finally proved

unsatisfactory. A number of texts I was including in the category of New Age representations were not strictly speaking informed by New Age ideology, but were either coming from a generalised spiritual or religious attitude or were more specifically Christian approaches. Popular ethnography also proved an inadequate term that I was using to describe a collection of non-fiction texts that, while including Australian Aboriginality as a primary subject, were in fact generically quite diverse consisting of personal memoirs, travel writing, Australianana, postcards, magazines, photographs, and a web site. I finally arrived at the conclusion that the unifying principle of each of these groupings was less one of textual category than of dominant representational strategy. For example, in the category of texts I had termed popular ethnography the dominant strategy of representation is one of primitivisation; that is, Aboriginality is visualised as the Other of modernity, and the primitive is utilised as a negative term that valorises the modern. In the case of the crime fiction texts the principal strategy is one of problematisation: Aboriginality is represented as a state problem, a problem of social governance, a problem for the law, something to be corrected, eradicated or concealed. In terms of the category that I had originally called the New Age the prevailing strategy is a form of idealisation in which a spiritualised and nostalgified Other is called upon as a means of supplementing the modern; Aboriginality is represented as a spiritualised entity that offers solutions to the discontents of modern life.

The central argument of this thesis - that Aboriginality as Western discursive object functions to further the interests of the West and to obstruct the self-representations of Aboriginal people themselves - grew out of a reading of the work of Martin Heidegger, especially the essay "The Question Concerning Technology" (1978); my reading of this essay has been influential in the writing of this thesis. However, this is not to claim that this is a Heideggerian analysis of Aboriginality, but only that this essay initiated a way of seeing, or facilitated an approach, that remained when others fell by the way. In a discussion of Nietzsche (1977), Martin Heidegger concludes that Western culture is pervaded by a will to power: "[The] desire to dominate in order to remake the world to satisfy Western desires"(D'Arcy 110-11). This will is enhanced, one might say compounded, by what Heidegger calls the technological. For Heidegger modern technology is not fundamentally the mechanistic or the technical, although obviously these are included in Heidegger's concept, but rather the way of thinking or mode of comprehension that accompanies and precedes the proliferation of machinery. In this mode of comprehension, or way of revealing, "everything possesses significance only insofar as it is seen and is taken charge of as something useful for serving an end beyond itself" (Lovitt & Lovitt, 229). Heidegger illustrates with reference to the damming of the Rhine to produce electric power. The power station dominates the river, disclosing it solely as resource, an entity for using:

The hydroelectric plant is not built into the river, as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather, the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is

now, namely, *a water power supplier*, derives from the essence of the power station (Heidegger 1978: 321).

Unlike the bridge which draws people into mutual and meaningful relations with the river and its environs, allowing the river to show itself as itself, the power station is a derogating employment of the river that prevents the river from revealing itself: The river as “an entity of unique integrity and intrinsic power” is lost to us (Lovitt & Lovitt 231). This disclosure of entities as something useful for the achieving of a goal (that so clearly applies to examples from the natural world such as rivers that are dammed or forests that are logged) applies equally to the human world; to art, to writing, to philosophy, to science, and to human beings themselves. According to Heidegger, the phrase *human resource* concisely “unconceals” the kind of thinking that prevails in the modern world.

A reading of Banumbir Wongar’s *Walg* (1983) also informed this approach. Wongar shares Heidegger’s concerns in respect of the technological: he looks with sorrow and revulsion at a world transmogrified by derogation and exploitation. *Walg* portrays a world dominated by commerce and technology. The novel, the first in a trilogy, explores the influence of an unrestrained technologised consuming upon the life-world of traditional Aboriginal people. In Wongar’s dystopian vision corporations ravage Aboriginal sacred sites for nuclear fuel, while in an attempt to “improve the genetic endowment of mankind”(80), the Huxleyesque “Centre for Human Development” establishes a captive

breeding program in which Aborigines are farmed for their unique genetic properties. While many have found much to be critical of in Wongar's work - not the least of which being his appropriation of Aboriginal identity - it nevertheless refers to a recognisable socio-political reality. Aboriginal people *have* been dispossessed, and their country exploited to fuel a modern technologist expansion. And while Aboriginal people haven't been subjected to genetic manipulation, their displacement *has* been accompanied by subjection to comparably invasive Western knowledges which have seized upon the raw material of Aboriginal presence only to engineer their own object: an Aboriginality which is the product of manipulation and manufacture, an instrumental discursive category of modern expansionism, a form of revealing that discloses the world as resource at the same time as it conceals that which it purports to represent.

The thesis is divided into three main sections. Each section analyses a different strategy through which Aboriginality is constructed as an instrument to further ends beyond, or antithetical to, the interests of Aboriginal people themselves. Each strategy is seen as an expression of "the desire to dominate in order to remake the world to satisfy Western desires"(D'Arcy 110-11). Part one, entitled "primitives", asserts that modernity, understood as identical with the West, constructs itself as the privileged and the advanced through the formation of the category of the

primitive⁴. Focussing upon a broad selection of texts which I classify as para-ethnography⁵ I examine the ways in which Australian Aboriginality - as the primitive - is used as an apparatus that facilitates the self-identification of the modern and justifies (or seeks to justify) its imperialist expansion. Included in this selection of para-ethnographic texts are a number of popular ethnographies, or ethnographic materials designed for consumption by a non-specialist readership. This section also contains a significant focus upon photographic material, including a cover photograph of a magazine from the 1930s, a postcard in current circulation, and photographs taken from popular ethnographies. Some of these photographs are reproduced in this section, others I have chosen not to include due to their potential to cause offense. As a counterpoint to photographs that demean or sentimentalise I include a photograph by Axel Poignant (Poignant & Poignant, 1996) that is born from a situation of cooperation and respect. I also incorporate a digitally re-constructed image by Adelaide artist Alan Cruickshank that interrogates the power relation of ethnographic photographer to his or her subject. This section concludes with a discussion of a web site, *The Flight of Ducks* (<http://www.cinemedia.net/FOD/>) that is a record of materials from a primitivising scientific expedition undertaken in the 1930s. In the context of this thesis the site represents an attempt to use new technologies of

⁴ In *Gone Primitive* (1990: 8-9), Marianna Torgovnick, emphasises that there are not and never were any primitive peoples: there are only objects of primitivist discourse. The content of this discourse is simply determined by whatever the current needs and values of the West may be.

writing (their interactive dimension and potential for the the construction of new and possibly subversive meanings) to address or amend the subjectifying effects of previous technologies - such as photography - upon Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Part two, entitled "problems" analyses the ways in which Aboriginality is constructed as an impediment to the realisation of national ideals and a problem of social governance. In short, this section argues that in constructing Aboriginality as a problem the state acquires the dubious authority to deploy solutions. Focussing upon a selection of crime fiction texts⁶, an association between criminality and Aboriginality (as discursive objects) is uncovered. I discuss the role of inter-racial desire in these texts, and its relationship to the central place held by the fear of miscegenation in a racialised settler state. The highly problematised figure of the Aboriginal of mixed descent is explored in connection to the work of Arthur Upfield and Leonard Mann, and the relationship of these narratives to various governmental approaches (such as assimilationism and forced removal of Aboriginal children of mixed descent) to this "problem" is foregrounded. Finally, through an analysis of the 1996 film *Dead Heart* the changing character of

⁵ This is a term that I have borrowed from Eric Michaels (1994) and modified. My usage is further explained in part one.

⁶ *Death in Dreamtime* (1993, first published 1959) by S.H. Courtier; *Bony and the Black Virgin* (1968, first published 1959), *The Barrakee Mystery* (1965, first published 1929), and *The Will of the Tribe* (1972, first published 1962) by Arthur Upfield; *Venus Half-Caste* (1963) by Leonard Mann; and the 1996 film *Dead Heart*. A short discussion of Charles Chauvel's 1955 film *Jedda* is also included.

problematised Aboriginality is addressed. Drawing upon the work of Steve Mickler (1998) this examination focusses upon the ways in which in recent times the Aboriginal problem is constructed in terms of the threat of an increased Aboriginal political power, white guilt, and the fear that Aboriginal people have become a privileged or elite group.

Part three, entitled “prophets”, analyses the ways in which Aboriginality as a spiritualised construct is utilised either as a corroboration of Western spiritual or metaphysical traditions, or (ostensibly) as a palliative for the ills of modern materialism. The section includes an extensive critique of New Age representations, and foregrounds the compatibility between New Age thought and the ideologies of individualism and consumerism. I discuss a publication by the Catholic Church, entitled *Karingal: a search for Australian spirituality* (Cameron 1993), and the ways in which the concept of the Dreaming is used to affirm conventional Christian “truths” is highlighted. The notion of Aboriginalisation (the idea that through various processes - initiation, osmosis, metamorphosis - that one can become Aboriginal) is examined with particular reference to David Tacey’s *Edge of the Sacred* (1995). The privileged place held by “nature” in spiritualised constructions of Aboriginality is also explored: Situated in opposition to modernity, and synonymous with purity and authenticity, in these texts nature emerges as a quasi-solution to all manner of complaints, and the Aborigine is revered as one more intimately connected to the natural world. With

spiritualised and nostalgified Aboriginality the idea of modernity as a complex and superior stage of development is subordinated to the notion of a modern world that has lost its way. Aboriginality (represented as the non-modern) functions to allow the modern to articulate its needs and desires. The modern emerges in terms of its longings, which are focussed upon an Aboriginality imagined to enjoy a privileged relationship to nature and the sacred. However, as John Frow (1997: 101) notes, the paradox of this valorising is that at the same time that the Other is exalted it is brought into the sphere of influence of its categorical opposite, “a modernity destructive of the very otherness that it celebrates”. To recap, each section analyses representational strategies that seize upon Aboriginality to further needs beyond, or antithetical to, the needs of Aboriginal people themselves

part one

primitives

para-ethnography

Eric Michaels (1994: 165-76) developed and used the term para-ethnography to describe writings that share ethnography's object but are more closely related to literature than to science. The texts that Michaels used to illustrate this concept were Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987), Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987) and the work of Carlos Castaneda. Michaels noted that despite an absence of formal research methodologies such materials might nevertheless acquire considerable status, influence and authority. In this chapter I borrow Michaels' term and use it to describe a range of cultural materials that lack the formal methodology of ethnography but take Aboriginality as an object of interest that ostensibly provides a glimpse of human pre-history; in other words, objects that construct a primitivised Other. The category includes a number of quite different objects: the popular ethnography¹, the postcard, the magazine, the school book, the career and travel memoir, the (auto)biography, and the web-site.

The books (which are the major focus of this chapter) were all first published between 1935 and 1963². During this period Aboriginals

¹ By this term I mean work produced by academic or professional ethnographers but for a popular readership: examples include *The First Australians* (1952) by R.M. & C.H. Berndt and *Brown Men and Red Sand* (1948) by Charles Mountford.

² An enormous number of these texts were published in this period. A perusal of the Australiana section of most secondhand bookshops will give some sense of the enormous popularity of this kind of text. I have collected seventeen examples: Barrett, Charles & Kenyon, A.S. *Blackfellows of Australia*, Melbourne: Lawrence Kay, 1936?; Berndt, R.M. & C.H. *The First Australians*, North Sydney: Ure Smith, 1969 (first published 1952).

became important symbols in a burgeoning Australian nationalism, and these books are part of a process of formation of non-Aboriginal Australian identity: they are a kind of Australiana. However, while the texts are a form of Australiana they are also a form of ethnography. Taking Aboriginal people as something to be pondered over, and sharing the temporal logic of anthropology³ - as well as number of its techniques (surveillance, collection of artefacts, photography⁴) - they attempt to render intelligible⁵ a primitivised Other.

Croll, R. H. *Wide Horizons: Wanderings in Central Australia*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1937.

Finlayson, H.H. *The Red Centre: Man and Beast in the Heart of Australia*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1935.

Gartrell, Marjorie. *Dear Primitive: A Nurse Among The Aborigines*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1957.

Groom, Arthur. *I Saw A Strange Land: Journeys in Central Australia*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950.

Harney, W.E. *Life Among The Aborigines*, London: Robert Hale, 1957.

Hatfield, William. *Desert Saga*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933.

Hill, Ernestine. *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens Ltd, 1948.

Idriess, Ion L. *Our Living Stone Age*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963.

Ingamells, Rex. *Aranda Boy: an Aboriginal Story*, London: Longmans Green & Co. 1952.

Lockwood, Douglas. *I, The Aboriginal*, Adelaide: Rigby Ltd, 1962.

Madigan, C.T. *Central Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1944.

Madigan, C.T. *Crossing the Dead Heart*, Melbourne: Georgian House, 1946.

Mountford, Charles. *Brown Men and Red Sand*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950.

Simpson, Colin. *Adam in Ochre: Inside Aboriginal Australia*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1951.

Tennant, D. *In the Track of the Native*, Sydney: T. Tennant, 1944

³ Johannes Fabian (1983) describes anthropology as “a science of other men in another time” (143) ... “a discourse which construes the Other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal” the consequence of which is “[t]he Other’s empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence, a conjuring trick which is worked with the help of an array of devices that have the common intent and function to keep the Other outside of the Time of anthropology” (11).

⁴ Photography and anthropology/ethnology have a long and close association. Christopher Pinney (1992:75) notes that the invention of photography and the establishment of The

While the texts share the subject, the logic, and some of the techniques of anthropology they target a popular readership (including or even especially children) and consequently their emphasis is more upon amusement than enlightenment⁶: like America's *National Geographic* they can be said to exist on the boundary between science and entertainment⁷. Most narrate journeys of *adventure* to remote regions (usually Central Australia) and in this respect more closely resemble popular travel writing or frontier adventure stories than ethnography. Some strive for a nostalgic revival of the explorers' experience by presenting their accounts of Aboriginality almost as if it were a first sighting⁸. Many of the publications were enormously popular: for instance, first published in 1948, by 1969 *Brown Men and Red Sand* (see image

Ethnological Society of London took place within a few years of each other. Ethnographers utilised the technology from its inception.

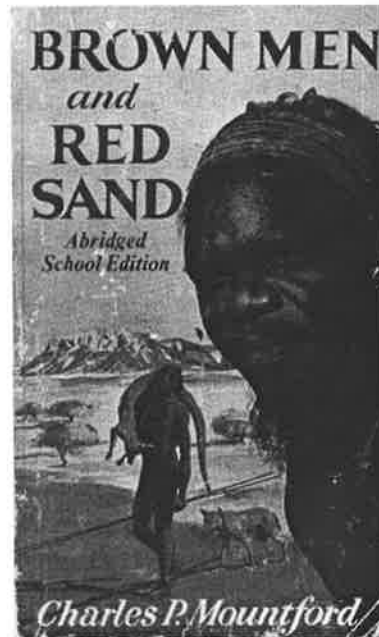
⁵ Emmanuel Levinas sees the rendering intelligible of "the Other" as the cancelling of the Other's otherness or the determination of the Other by "the Same" without the possibility of reciprocation: a conversion into knowledge which is a reduction of the Other into something we possess and will use (Levinas 1969: 124).

⁶ The exceptions to this are the Berndt's pocketbook, *The First Australians*, which is founded upon a lifetime's formal research, and *The Flight of Ducks* (Pockley, Simon. <http://www.cinemedia.net/FOD>) which is an internet site consisting of a number of separate objects such as photographic images, essays, journal entries and correspondence.

⁷ In an analysis of the emergence of *National Geographic* Jane Collins and Catherine Lutz argue that the periodical represents mass culture's recapturing and revitalisation of the declining field of natural history, as well as, the successful combination of scholarly and entertainment functions in the one cultural product (1994: 132). These arguments apply to the para-ethnography.

⁸ Examples of this include *Our Living Stone Age* by Ion L Idriess and Charles Mountford's *Brown Men and Red Sand*. Simon Pockley notes that Mountford chose to travel by camel in an area that was traversed with roads, and that he photographed Aborigines without clothes, even though many of these Aborigines were employees in the pastoral industry and would normally be clothed. (Pockley, <http://www.cinemedia.net/FOD/FOD/0259.html#Notes>)

below) had been translated into seven languages and had been republished 18 times (including a special expurgated edition for schools).



A picture paints a thousand words: the face of popular ethnography

making the modern

While Aborigines appear as the primary subject of para-ethnography their representation is always determined by the over-riding presence of three closely related concepts - the nation, the primitive, and the modern. Especially important to this discussion are the concepts of the primitive and the modern. Marianna Torgovnick (1990) argues that imagining primitives is inseparable from the self-identification of moderns. The primitive is the negative term that valorises modernity. The para-ethnography, as a device designed to facilitate a visualising of the

primitive, is therefore deeply involved in the self-construction of modernity as the privileged position from which others are graded and rendered intelligible.

While for para-ethnography the concept of “modern man” appears as a chronological category (in other words, its difference from the primitive is articulated as a difference of evolutionary time⁹) John Frow (1997) argues that modernity is primarily a spatial category¹⁰. According to Frow, modernity is “a periodising division with geopolitical functions” (1997: 2). Synonymous with the West - which itself, as Frow stresses, is not “a stable geographical or cultural location but a geopolitical myth” - modernity is an imaginary point, which is “the condition of possibility for a number of strategies of power”. Of particular relevance to an understanding of para-ethnography are the strategies of primitivization, which are able through the deployment of concepts of the evolved and the developed to justify and maintain hierarchised relations between the West and its Others, and the strategies of idealisation or

⁹ In *Wide Horizons* (1937), R.H. Croll, writing of his trip to the tribal homelands of the Loritja people, epitomises this chronological structure: “we had done well to travel in four days the twenty thousand, fifty thousand, one hundred thousand - who shall say how many? - years that separate modern civilised man from these people” (Croll 129).

¹⁰ Frow’s argument is influenced by Naoki Sakai’s work on the grand periodising divisions of the West: “This series - premodern-modern-postmodern - may suggest an order of chronology. However, it must be remembered that this order has never been dissociated from the geopolitical configuration of the world. As is well known by now, this basically nineteenth century scheme provides a perspective through which to comprehend the location of nations, cultures, traditions and races in a systematic manner.” (Sakai, 1988: 475)

nostalgification which seek to render Others benign through consignment to a sentimentalised category comparable to childhood.

Para-ethnography is complicit in the production and circulation of the hierarchised structure - modern/non-modern, or modernity and its Others. The texts recite and promote meta-narratives of the modern through the creation of an Other, the quintessentially non-modern, the primitive. Para-ethnography is a discursive form that appropriates the non-modern, which is synonymous with the non-West, and inserts it into the category of the pre-modern (that which came before, that which has been superseded): the Other is denied temporal equality or contemporaneity. An imperialist modernity, committed to a geopolitical monopolising of the present, seeks legitimacy by representing domination as the natural outcome of discrepancies in evolutionary time.

In the imperialist space of para-ethnography author and subject are never co-present. For instance, in *Our Living Stone Age* (Idriess 1963) the Aboriginal is rendered intelligible as an instance of arrested development. Idriess carefully constructs a textual environment in which onlookers may read the Aborigine like “a page from a living past” (Idriess 101). Of course, the page that the onlooker reads is inscribed by the hand of his own culture, a leaf from a well thumbed text whose themes of civilised/uncivilised, primitive/modern, developed/under-

developed reveal more about the discursive politics of domination than the (pre)history of humankind.¹¹

primitives, savages or demigods?

The para-ethnographer assumes the role of natural scientist collecting and cataloguing specimens of a living prehistory for the sake of posterity. This is especially true in the case of Idriess, Croll, and Mountford. However, at the same time as employing the temporalising discourse of progress and development, para-ethnography may express itself in the more overtly racist discourse of civilisation and savagery. Idriess for example, often resorts to terms such as “barbarous” and writes of being disgusted by certain Aboriginal ceremonies (Idriess 100), and Marjorie Gartrell, author of *Dear Primitive* (a memoir of her time as a nurse in Central Australia) writes of “natives made savage by their fear” (Gartrell 79). Although the term primitive and the term savage are both densely inscribed with value judgement they operate in slightly different arenas of evaluation. The primitive tends to function as a judgement of intellectual, technical and cultural sophistication while the savage is always a judgement of behaviours believed to be grounded in ‘nature’ or inherent

¹¹ Frow argues that binaries such as civilised/uncivilised, primitive/modern find contemporary form in pairs such as first and third worlds, developed and less-developed which function to normalise or justify intervention by the former in the internal affairs of the latter (Frow 1997). These terms, while not appearing to carry the same derogatory connotations as civilisation and savagery, are nevertheless hierarchised pairs with a political function.

disposition. Primitive is the other of modern¹² while savage is the other of civilisation. Primitive is a product of the Enlightenment's emphasis upon progress and development whereas savage is an instrument of the Christian discourse that Enlightenment thinking ostensibly supplanted. However, for all intents and purposes they are identical in one respect: they are both instrumental categories of colonialism, declarations of distance - temporal, technological, intellectual and moral - that function to vindicate displacement and erasure.

Deploying principal signs of savagery¹³ that characterise Aboriginal societies as abhorrent, as well as assuming quasi-scientific discourse to construct Aborigines as humanity's prehistoric past, the para-ethnography may also utilise the idealising language of nostalgification. For example, the work of Charles Mountford is particularly notable in that it attributes Aborigines with a naturalness, nobility and grace beyond that of "modern man". While Mountford's work is not significantly influenced by the notion of savagery many popular ethnographers (Idriess, for instance) may deploy the racist discourse of savagery and the idealising discourse of nostalgification within the one text. Para-ethnography is characterised by this concurrence of seemingly

¹² In the words of Joseph Fabian, "[the] term *primitive* ... is not (only) temporalising qua lexical item. It is the key term of a temporalising discourse." (1983: 82)

¹³ These signs include - 'the witch doctor', mutilation of the body, cannibalism, violence, radically different sexual mores, and so on. Such signs do not emerge or circulate in a moral vacuum. They are of interest because of their capacity to evoke feelings of abhorrence.

conflicting approaches, simultaneously interpreting and idealising that which it finds repellent. In *Textual Spaces* (1992: 24) Stephen Muecke argues that within available discourses on Aborigines there are basically three “well worn tracks”: the Anthropological, the Racist, and the Romantic. He stresses that these three discourses are rarely found in isolation but continuously cross over and are in contact with each other. For instance, a single text may take as its object of study the transcendental concept of ‘mankind’ (Anthropological) and at the same time utilise categories such as barbarism and savagery (Racist) while celebrating the natural grace, spontaneity and openness of ‘natives’ (Romantic).¹⁴ Typically para-ethnography combines these three discourses with a particular emphasis on the racist and romantic.

“god’s first humans”

Ernestine Hill’s *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1948) is a memoir of a career as a journalist in Central and Northern Australia. The text is a belated inscription of the colonialist trope of “the wild frontier”, a world of

¹⁴ Muecke uses Daisy Bates’, *The Passing of the Aborigines* as an illustration: “Her book is a combination of the Racist, Romantic and Anthropological discourses. The Romantic and the Racist are separated by only a thin line of difference. Neither articulates knowledge (that is the domain of the Anthropological); each is a displacement from any desire to know. The Racist discourse is either dismissive or silent in the face of racial difference, or it allows free rein to the obsessions of the speaker, as in exaggerated descriptions of ferociousness or cannibalism. The Romantic justifies an irrational involvement with a people on the basis of ‘love’ or ‘concern’. One of its techniques is to mythologise the Other People. To speak of a utopian past or faraway place is to nostalgically mystify the present”(31).

topsy-turvy where civilisation is a work in progress. Hill's approach to her subject matter is epitomised in her dedication: "to all who take up the white man's burden in the lonely places" (Hill 8). While the book assembles the usual array of frontier topics - law and lawlessness, the harshness of daily life, the tough and tenacious character of pioneer stock - it is also significantly concerned with the representation of Aboriginality. Aborigines are a presence throughout the book, several chapters are devoted exclusively to them, and they are the text's primary photographic subjects. "God's first humans", a chapter title from Hill's text, refers not as might be expected to Aborigines as the most ancient of peoples, the ancestors of all humankind, but to Aborigines as the earliest, and therefore least sophisticated, of human prototypes: it is a primitivising denotation. The text is an intermingling of Muecke's "three well worn tracks". It is anthropological to the extent that it represents Aborigines as an object of study through which 'we' can widen our knowledge of humanity. However, its representations are primarily anecdotal, extremely racist and influenced by a degrading sentimentalism grounded in the belief that Aborigines are in the twilight of their days. In Hill's text the expansion of the modern, while always delineated in terms of progress and development, is also understood as exhibiting a force that is overwhelming or enfeebling indigenous cultures:

The aborigine [sic] keeps on dying at an alarming rate. By the end of the century there will be no full-bloods left. (174)

This belief in the imminent disappearance of Aboriginal people is repeatedly lamented and functions to justify as well as ennoble the numerous judgements and pronouncements that Hill makes of “these children of the sun” (173). It also adds to the dense atmosphere of nostalgification (evident in the following example) that permeates Hill’s representations:

‘The earth is his bed and heaven his canopy,’ wrote William Dampier, that globe-trotting journalist of the seventeenth century. Many a time has the beautiful and poetic phrase been levelled at them in contempt, yet it expresses a sylvan ideal of which we, with our lifts and wall-beds and umbrellas raised in a shower, have fallen far short.

Generous to a fault, here is your true Socialist. With no sense of acquisition, no ethics of selflessness or sacrifice, the Australian is content with the fullness and the sunshine of today. Nationhood he does not know. Emulation strikes no note in his consciousness....Had we white-skinned, adopted Australians been wiser and more tolerant, eager to learn instead of teach, we might have gained much that is of value, a comprehensive knowledge of his life and his languages, his arts and his inmost thoughts, that were never more than half-articulate and that are now irretrievably lost. (174)

Hill is open about the historical origins of her double-edged eulogising of ‘natural man’ it is the seventeenth century. Interestingly, her seventeenth century source, William Dampier, is less well known for his poetic idealisation of Aborigines than for a rather vociferous vilification.¹⁵ In this

¹⁵ In his book, *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697), which was something of a best-seller in its day, Dampier popularised the caricature of the Aborigines as a degraded race who were not fully human. Arguing that they were the most miserable people on earth

passage, modernity - represented by lifts, wall-beds and umbrellas - is identified as lacking the pure relationship to the natural world that characterises the world of the Australian indigene. Credited with extreme generosity, contentment, innate fairness, “a naïve immediacy of unselfconscious Being” (Frow 1997: 2), (s)he is all that we are not. *Their* passing, an unsupported postulate, is mourned and represented in anthropological terms as an irretrievable loss of potentially valuable information. Of course, lack of information does not preclude racist presumption, and Hill can feel confident in likening Aborigines to marsupials and ascribing inherent brutality and inferior conceptual fluency:

In the great race of civilisation he is an outsider. Stone Age man, a savage at heart, it is scarcely fair to blame him for the faulty vision of eyes that cannot read sense into our complex codes.

Horror and beauty mingle in all the rites of the aborigine [sic]. Harmless and likeable for the most part as a ‘possum, he suffers surprising reversions to the sheer savage. Even when acclimatised to the white man’s ways and the white man’s tucker, he is still essentially a primitive. Between his sanity and insanity there is no margin. So benighted is his mind that it has never grasped the science of life and death. (174)

Seemingly in direct opposition to romantic discourse, racist discourse functions to designate a people as rather less than ideal. Muecke argues that racist discourse does two things:

Dampier wrote, “And setting aside their Humane shape, they differ but little from Brutes” (312). Hill shares Dampier’s fondness for racist excoriation. She underscores her identification with the British buccaneer by referring to him as a *fellow* journalist.

It utilises a series of metaphors that displace the designation of people away from adult humans to children, animals and inanimate objects, which are subject only to laws of nature. The other feature is that of essentialism, or geneticism. This structures discourse in such a way that social conditions, or whatever is going on, are seen as the effect of people's genes, their essential racial difference. (Muecke 32)

In romantic discourse, if Aborigines are represented as ideal it is because they are represented either in terms of the desire invested category of human immaturity (childhood) or they are included along with animals in the non-human category of 'nature'. Viewed in this way, the sentimental idealisation characteristic of romantic discourse far from precludes racist representation; it may well rely upon it. Hill's efforts in extolling the virtues of Aborigines depend upon these metaphoric displacements to categories of the non-adult and the non-human - they are possum-like in their loveliness and child-like in their happiness and carefree approach to the future¹⁶. However, for all of their amiability and cheerfulness they remain "essentially" savages at heart, a condition that does not alter with changing conditions: it is in the blood and will express itself "even when acclimatised to white man's ways and white man's tucker"(Hill 174). This is quintessential racism, as is Hill's attribution of an inherent "uncomprehendingness of life's complexity" (173), an incapacity that she uses to explain a purported failure to make sense of "our complex codes". Which returns us to the real point, the designation of their simplicity,

¹⁶ In Hill's words - "Happy and thoughtless of to-morrow as children" (173).

whether this is delineated in anthropological terms, romantic terms, racist terms, or by a combination of all three, necessarily and most importantly implies 'our' superior complexity.

simplicity: a complicated matter

In the writings, photography and cinematography of Charles Mountford, Aborigines emerge as the embodiment of ennobled simplicity. A founding member of the Anthropological Society of South Australia and a member of the Board for Anthropological Research at the University of Adelaide, Mountford nevertheless stands outside of the field of academic anthropology as one whose approach, while distinguished by enormous enthusiasm, was resolutely romantic. Widely known as a collector of Aboriginal myths and legends¹⁷, he also wrote over thirty books of travel and anthropological observation, including *Brown Men and Red Sand* (1948), a narrative and photographic account of a journey to Central Australia undertaken in the 1940s. The book opens with a statement of the purpose of the journey he is about to narrate:

Since 1925 I had been carrying out research into Aboriginal art and legend. I had been a member of six previous anthropological expeditions into Central Australia, and my research on these journeys had shown me that the culture of the Australian aborigine [sic] became progressively simpler the

¹⁷ In the 1960's Mountford collaborated with the painter Ainslie Roberts to produce two books of these legends: *The Dreamtime* (1965) and *The Dawn of Time* (1969). They were enormously popular, *The Dreamtime* was an immediate best-seller and rapidly went through four large print runs.

nearer one approached the central deserts. I estimated, then, that if I could reach the arid centre of the aborigines' country, and live among them for any length of time, I should find *a people whose art and culture would be the simplest in the world*. This we found to be abundantly true. (1 my italics)

In the discursive schema layed down by Mountford simplicity is what 'we' no longer have, history (progress) having rendered 'us' complex (modern). The Pitjantjatjara, on the other hand, are endowed with this lost simplicity by virtue of the fact that they are understood as the past within the present. Assertions of temporal distance repeatedly relegate Anangu¹⁸ to the past (conceived as 'our' past) as in the following reflection on witnessing an Anangu man painting a picture:

Surely what we saw that afternoon was unique; there a naked brown-skinned man painted a primitive symbol, which was comparable in both style and technique with those produced by our forefathers of the Old Stone Age in Europe twenty thousand years ago. It seemed as if the hands of time had been turned back through all those many centuries. (75)

Of course, in positioning Anangu in pre-history, Mountford positions himself in a uniquely privileged position to interpret their culture. To be situated in modernity in relation to pre-history is to be firmly situated in a position of authority whose basis is a logic of transcendence. This facilitates an activation of false tenure in that 'our' past, which we can be said to rightfully possess, is extended to incorporate their present.

For Mountford, simplicity is an unrivalled goodness, a transcendental quality that he venerates and aestheticises, and *Brown Men and Red Sand* is shaped as much, if not more, by this than by the large body of information on Anangu that his expedition gathered. The dictates of the aesthetics of simplicity override all ethics of faithful rendering to the point where Mountford quite matter-of-factly intervenes in order to engineer representations that will satisfy his penchant for the elemental. For instance, the nakedness of Anangu is an absolutely essential component in Mountford's aesthetic:

Day after day I had watched the beautiful unclothed bodies of the men as they strode alongside us. They were a continuous delight to the eye, their skin shining with health, their rippling muscles and regal carriage. (146)

Mountford's enthusiasm for Anangu nakedness approaches the immoderate, however, not all Anangu are as sold on nakedness as Mountford so obviously is, a fact that he finds problematic. One woman's insistence upon wearing a dress threatens the integrity of his photographic vision and Mountford orchestrates a plan to return her to her 'natural' state: "I did not say anything to her about it, for after all it was her dress, but made plans to buy it from her somehow or other" (106). With a supply of boiled sweets, dried apricots and prunes Mountford is able to acquire the offending garment and thus "remove an ever-present danger to the photographic records" (106).

¹⁸ The peoples of the Western Desert refer to themselves as Anangu. Anangu people

While praised for his literary skill and “extraordinary outgoing sympathy towards all human phenomena” (Harris, 1967: viii), Mountford was more than a little prone to idealisation. The following extract well illustrates the discursive practice that perhaps most characterises Mountford’s texts:

the older aboriginal [sic] men impressed me with their natural dignity, a dignity which is the outcome of the structure of their society. In an aboriginal community there are no social grades among the men of the same age. There are no patricians and commoners, no rich and poor, no leaders and followers; nor are there any chiefs to oppress and rob the people, for there is no organised warfare, therefore no armies to lead. The responsibilities, as well as the powers of government, are in the hands of the experienced, well-informed old men. It is small wonder, then, that the elders should possess a mental poise and a balance that belongs only to the best in our own civilisation (146).

This is indeed an exalted, some would say utopian, view of Anangu society, and one that is not without its critics within the field of anthropology¹⁹. In the introduction to the first edition of *Brown Men and Red Sand* Mountford anticipates and responds to such criticism:

It may be contended by some that I have painted an idealistic picture of the aboriginal [sic] people.

speak a number of languages including Pitjantjatjara. Pitjantjatjara speakers tend not – as we do – to refer to themselves by the name of their language.

¹⁹ Foremost among these critics were R.M & C.H. Berndt, exponents of the ostensibly more objective or scientific approach to the study of anthropology, functionalism. In the foreword to their influential work, *The World of the First Australians* (1964), they write, “it [their book] is for people who wish to go beyond the facile exoticism and sentimental half-truths which are becoming a part of the European-Australian folklore in regard to Aborigines (1964: viii).

Perhaps I have; but my impressions were based on the study of their culture, their relationship to each other, and the many courtesies and help that we received at their hands. It was an unforgettable experience to have lived among a people whose laws are so kindly and well balanced that there is no need of warfare to maintain social equilibrium (*xiii*).

Muecke (1992: 31) defines romantic discourse as an attempt to “nostalgically mystify the present”. Mountford’s nostalgic mystification functions to obscure the real character of his relationship to Anangu. His exaltation of traditional Aboriginal society, combined with the representation of himself as gentleman adventurer and benevolent emissary, masks elements of colonial plunder inherent to his expeditions. Extravagant praise and adulation conceal a far from benign impassioned enjoyment²⁰ of Anangu culture expressing itself as an ethically unrestrained collecting, gathering, stockpiling and circulation of Anangu belongings in the form of fables, artefacts and records (photographic, phonographic, cinematic, and lexographic) of the minutiae of Anangu life. Mountford’s repeated professions of admiration and respect for Anangu culture are finally rather difficult to reconcile with his casual disregard for the values and wishes of Anangu people. For example, in 1982 the Pitjantjatjara Council was forced to resort to legal proceedings in order to gain possession of photographic material that Mountford had gathered on

²⁰ According to Levinas (1961: 111) the essence of enjoyment is “the transmutation of the other into the Same”. Davis (1996: 43) provides a clarification of this by emphasising that “what Levinas calls enjoyment [is] the exhilaration of the self in its possession of the world. In food, for example, energy to be found in something outside the self is transformed into my own energy.” Levinas is clear, however, that while the other (which

a 1940 expedition into remote areas of the Northern Territory. The images, mainly slides, depicted sacred and secret material. The Pitjantjatjara Council were able to show that an obligation of confidence had been placed upon Mountford at the time he took the photographs and that he had breached this confidence by publicly circulating the images²¹. The court declared that “the property in and ownership of the slides, photographs and negatives be vested in the Pitjantjatjara Council for and on behalf of the Pitjantjatjara, Yankuntjatjara and Ngaayatjara peoples”²². The Pitjantjatjara Council were also able to stop further publication of a book that Mountford had written about the 1940 expedition entitled *Nomads of the Australian Desert*. In the book Mountford included images and information of deep religious significance, which had been revealed to him in absolute confidence.

Mountford’s romanticism invests his journey with the character of an epic journey. Of course, the facts reveal something rather more mundane. His odyssey through simplicity’s heartland has a

may include the possessions of *the Other*) is consumable in this way, ultimately *the Other* as living subject remains utterly resistant to such consuming (Levinas cited in Davis, 41).

²¹ Eric Michaels (1994: 2-3) provides some idea of the seriousness of such an offence: “Traditional Aboriginal Australia does not maintain a free speech ethic. Rather, as may be the case generally in oral societies, speaking rights are highly regulated. Knowledge is a form of property here, and violating the highly structured rights that restrict general access to information is regarded as theft. Aboriginal Law, like common law, identifies and penalises blasphemers, slanderers, plagiarists and the obscene. But it identifies different contents and specifies different performance settings as subject to sanction. Lest anyone question the seriousness of the matter, however, it should be remembered that the most extreme punishments of Aboriginal society are reserved for people who violate these traditional restrictions on the communication of cultural knowledge.”

²² “Archive Legislation” [August 1997] *Our Culture Our Future* 6.8. [Online] Available: <http://www.icip.lawnet.com.au/part2-3.html> [1998, April 28] .

counterpart in reality in which Mountford emerges as a rather diminutive Odysseus. The author's stated aim - to go where life is simpler - is redolent of the tourist's nostalgic longing for a destination free of the complications of modern life. What Mountford rather grandiloquently narrates as a journey of discovery to the (wholly imaginary) "centre of the aborigines' country" (1) closely corresponds to a modern holiday or tourist jaunt consisting of train trips, drives, camel rides, picture taking and souvenir hunting. However, while lacking the valorous quality of Odysseus's celebrated journey, Mountford shares with the Homeric hero the fact that his wanderings were finally always homeward. Setting out not to encounter the Other but to return again and again to the certainty and safety of the Same, Mountford departs Ithaca (in this case Adelaide) not to discover an Other negotiating its own distinctive path through modernity but to witness itself on the way to modernity²³. Mountford's nth degree of cultural simplicity is a temporal projection of the Same.

"know the wild man's heart"

Brown Men and Red Sand and Idriess's *Our Living Stone Age* (1963)

utilise the same model of encounter between modern complexity and

²³ This argument is derived from Davis's discussion of Levinas: "Levinas's point about Western philosophy is astonishingly simple... [it] has been characterised by its failure to think of the Other as Other. The history of philosophy has been like the story of Ulysses who 'through all his wanderings only returns to his native island' (Levinas, 1949: 188). Levinas prefers the story of Abraham: 'To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we would like to oppose the story of Abraham leaving his country for ever to go to a still unknown land and forbidding his servant to take even his son back to this point of departure' (Levinas, 1949: 191). Philosophy has always sought to return to familiar ground (Being, Truth, the Same)" (Davis 33).

primitive simplicity. They differ in that Idriess's text, rather than a record of a single professional ethnographic expedition, is a prospector/drover's personal memoir of decades spent in remote regions of Australia. However, as can be seen in the following poem used as an epigraph to *Our Living Stone Age*, they utilise the same hierarchised temporal logic:

A fire mist and a planet
A crystal and a cell
A jelly fish and a saurian
And caves where cavemen dwell:
Then a sense of law and beauty
And a face turned from the clod
Some call it evolution
And others call it God.

This poem would function well enough as an epigraph for a number of para-ethnographies. According to the logic of the verse development and divinity are synonymous. God proceeds first through biological and then through cultural and technological developments - to develop is divine.

The book's title, *Our Living Stone Age*, reveals a great deal about the world-view that informs it. Firstly, the *Our* precludes the possibility of conceiving of the subjects of the publication as an independent cultural sphere. The *Our* involves the appropriation of the subjects into a subset of the pre-defined categories of nation and of humanity. They are subsumed; they become a small part of something much greater. Secondly, they are positioned on a continuum that is founded upon a misconstrued Darwinian logic. This series - stone age, bronze age, iron age, machine age, space age - defines movement

through time according to a presumed primacy of technological complexity. Of course, there is nothing in the Darwinian theory of natural selection that assumes that complexity of adaptation equals superiority of adaptation: such interpretations are always ideological, but implicit in this division of time according to localised, technological variations is a logic of progression and obsolescence. To be modern (to be Western) is to exist on the forefront of a “natural” progression, to fully inhabit the now, and to possess the future as a field of freedom and possibility. To be designated “stone age” is to exist relative to this time, to inhabit obsolescence, to be denied a fullness of presence and an unmapped future. There is also a sub-text of astonishment to Idriess’s title: relative to the Western present the stone age exists as a kind of death. It is an extinguished way of life, hence the perceived necessity to emphasise that the subjects possess, in part at least, a contemporaneous existence - they are a *living* stone age.

Idriess is perhaps better known for his novels of colonial adventure than for ethnographic writing, and indeed, *Stone Age* operates more within the formal conventions of literary realism than ethnographic realism, a fact that Idriess himself makes clear in the preface:

This has not been written as an ethnological book....
I have tried to write this so that you will *know the*
wild man’s heart, and the heart and life of his
woman and baby, before they quite vanish away.
(xviii my italics)

The insistence upon the non-scientific nature of his project calls for scrutiny. On the one hand, the statement appears to diminish its claim to truth through an admission of a deficiency of objectivity or method - 'this is not science'. On the other hand, it lays claim to a greater truth by extending its field of inquiry to include the "souls" of its subjects: "I... write so that you will know the wild man's heart". Sharing many of the aims and assumptions of ethnology and anthropology, the text continues the ethnographic project of writing the Other but professes a knowledge of inner essences. Through a way of writing - literary realism - Idriess claims to represent the interiority of his subjects. But the "souls" of his subjects are not a reality that can be brought into presence²⁴ - as is the assumption of this way of writing - nor is this the principal function of the text. Instead the text comprises a series of re-statements and reaffirmations of pre-existing interpretations of the shape and composition of reality.

The tactics of realism - discursive claims to the representation of an objective 'reality' existing, ostensibly, independent of any regime of textuality - are described by Roland Barthes (1982: 3) as "the major gestures of Western discourse". In *Empire of Signs* (1982) Barthes inverts these "gestures of Western discourse" by incorporating commonly circulating signs of Japan into a fictive system that claims to stand for

²⁴ Japanese critic, Takeuchi Yoshima (cited in Sakai 501), sees the will to bring everything to presence as "the will essential for modern subjectivity".

nothing other than the signs themselves. By removing signs from their original context in the language of realism, a context in which signs acquire the dubious authority to reflect an actuality, and then arranging them in a context that foregrounds its textuality, Barthes foregrounds the arbitrary relationship of sign to referent. In so doing he resists the force of realism and avoids compromising real places and the real people who inhabit those places. Idriess, on the other hand, presuming a direct and unproblematic relationship between sign and referent, and taking as his referent “the wild man’s heart”, cannot avoid compromising Aboriginal reality. For Idriess, the existence of Aborigines furnishes a situation for writing²⁵, or rather an occasion for citation and recitation of prevailing cultural texts. Idriess keeps in motion certain known ‘languages’ of the modern and of the primitive: Joseph Conrad, Edgar Rice Burroughs and to a lesser extent Rousseau. In his claim to represent the interiority of a subject Idriess simply reproduces a discursive object.

The primary strategy of *Stone Age* is the primary strategy of popular ethnography in general, and that is the insertion of a temporal division in the category “mankind”. Two fields are formed analogous to *then* and *now* - with *now* appertaining to the norm, the dwelling place of the West, and the *then* signifying the aberrant, the home of the primitive. Investing the *then* with mystery he assumes the authority to interrogate,

²⁵ This paraphrases Barthes who writes, referring to himself in the third person, that Japan “has afforded him a situation of writing”(1982: 4).

theorise and render intelligible. This is particularly evident in the questions he raises in response to witnessing a women's initiation ceremony:

What queer, often frightening thoughts must have stirred man's mind *back there* in the first dim ages of mankind! From whence did such thoughts come? (100 my italics).

In passages such as this it is most clear that Idriess is less involved in the representation of a subject than in the formation of a strategic object. Idriess is engaged in processes of attribution and production rather than disclosure and revelation. The Aboriginal interiority, or "wild man's heart", that he produces is a locus of inscrutability, a site where reason - the guarantor of meaning - is not at home or has yet to take a foothold. Any threat that the inscrutable may pose to reason is annulled by its insertion in redundancy - *back there*. If Idriess had seriously addressed this question as to the origin of "queer" thoughts, focussing upon his own thoughts rather than upon what he imagines others are thinking, he may have asked himself why he repeatedly thinks of people who are right there with him as being "back there in the first dim ages of mankind". If Idriess had been seriously interested in the origin of thoughts, rather than in the attribution of "queer" and "frightening" thoughts to others, he may have noticed the relationship between thoughts, social relations, and dominant social practices, or the connections between knowledges and the interests of dominant social groups. He may have asked why the practice of appropriating another's space (colonialism) is accompanied by

knowledges (anthropology and ethnology) whose primary strategy has been to locate those others in another time.

In Idriess, the practice of appropriating space and the strategy of temporal relocation of its original occupants were closely intertwined. As a mineral prospector, Idriess surveyed and layed claim to a geographic interior thus supplying the resources necessary to the continuing expansion of the modern. As a para-ethnographer Idriess laid claim to the interior landscape of the non-modern subject, thus furnishing the material necessary to the reproduction and circulation of various discourses of the modern. Para-ethnography and the expansion of the modern exist in a relationship of symbiosis. Because para-ethnography's subject is believed to "vanish away" under the overwhelming force of modernity, the para-ethnographer must observe, interpret, interrogate, collect and record. The logic is that the modern, which for the West signifies a continuous process of desirable transformations, a march of progress that is natural and therefore unassailable, spells annihilation for the non-West. *Our* time is seen necessarily to involve the destruction of *their* time. Firstly *they* are allocated a time that is understood as already superseded - our pre-modern past - and then *they* are denied their own future.

"I was a primitive blackfellow"

In *I, the Aboriginal* (1962) the articulation of the temporal and technical distance between modern and primitive is given an Aboriginal voice of

approval. Written by Douglas Lockwood, at the time a journalist for the Melbourne *Herald*, the text is narrated in the first person from the perspective of Philip Roberts, an Alawa man from the Northern Territory. Although the narrative is fashioned, in part at least, from the raw materials of conversations and interviews with Roberts - and many Aboriginal autobiographies are produced with a non-Aboriginal in the role of transcriber - it is difficult to read Lockwood's text as Aboriginal autobiography. Roberts is not credited with authorship and Lockwood's involvement is more than an editorial or transcribing role. Lockwood selects Roberts not simply because he wants to tell the story of an Aboriginal man but because he wants to tell a particular story of an Aboriginal man: the story of a smooth and uncomplicated transition from tribal primitive to fully assimilated modern. Roberts functions as exemplar and advocate in the delineation of the real subject of this text, modernisation. The primitive is constructed as a futureless stasis alongside which the modern is made to appear as the only way forward²⁶. Using select details of Roberts life, Lockwood establishes the text upon a before and after division, the before pertaining to Roberts' tribal education and the after pertaining to his training as a medical assistant. The following passage, Lockwood's rendering of a conversation between

²⁶ James Clifford (1988) identifies this as a recurrent construct in ethnographic writing: "...whenever marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination.... Their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly "backward" peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it" (5).

Roberts and Dan Sprigg, a Territory policeman, illustrates the pivotal moment when Roberts is forced to choose between moving forward (the modern) and remaining the same (the primitive):

Then he [Sprigg] said bluntly: "Look you can't go on living like a blackfellow all your life."

"Like a blackfellow! I am a blackfellow," I said, perhaps with a little asperity.

"You know what I mean," Sprigg said. "The colour of your skin can't change. You'll always be a blackfellow in that respect. But there is something inside you that can change: you can begin to work and live and think as an intelligent man instead of a primitive."

I wanted to ask him, "Is that desirable?" but forbore to do so because I could see that he was genuinely interested in my welfare.

Instead I asked: "How and where do I start?"

"Doctor Langsford wants a driver-mechanic," he said....

"Doctor Langsford is a man who started at the bottom and is now at the top in his profession. Be like him. Learn from him. Once you start on the road never look back. Never return to the tribal ways. Read and work. If you remember that and keep the laws, then one day you may be famous. You may even have your name in print."

That possibility seemed remote. I was still a tribal aboriginal [sic], an obscure black man whose name had been written only in the footprints around our bush camp." (184-186)

Roberts' decision to work for Dr Langford is constructed as the initiation of a movement from the static confines of the primitive to the dynamic possibilities of the modern. The rightness of this decision is validated by his arrival in print - "you may even have your name in print" - which signifies a departure from darkness, a journey out of the obscurity of the bush camp to the celebrity of the textual subject, a celebrity founded

upon his status as a primitive trained in modern medicine. In *I, the Aboriginal* Western medicine and its practitioners function to represent all that is deemed best in the modern: technological sophistication, calm rationality, care for the suffering. The book features three white doctors, like three wise men bearing gifts, who embody the excellence of the modern and act as gatekeepers facilitating Roberts' passage to modernity. This is most succinctly expressed in the captioned photograph below of Dr A.H. Humphreys (Lockwood 49).



"But for his help I might still have been a primitive tribesman"

Roberts' story contrasts the "goodness" and effectiveness of Western knowledge - represented as modern medicine - with Indigenous medicine which is represented as an often-malevolent "mumbo-jumbo" (Lockwood, 233). The book opens with Roberts' tale of being poisoned as a child by a vengeful medicine man with "a deadly mixture of putrefaction: red ochre and white clay kneaded with dogs' excrement and perhaps a little powdered glass" (12). Years later when Roberts has become a medicine man of another sort, a fully trained medical officer, he sees an opportunity for revenge in the greater knowledge he now possesses:

Throughout the years I worked with scientific medicine I had often thought of the possibility that one day I might meet a Dr Blackfellow on equal terms. I yearned to demonstrate my superior skill, not only for the sake of healing but also because I was determined to demand tribute as a reprisal for the indignity inflicted upon me in my youth. (231)

Of course, the opportunity to pit the superior scientific power of the modern against what emerges as primitive superstition soon arises, and with the use of penicillin Roberts is able to cure a "Dr Blackfellow" and his wife and children of blood poisoning:

He was a Medicine Man who had treated hundreds of his people. Some may have been cured, for faith is a great healer. I could not doubt that his people regarded him almost as a Dreaming in whom they believed blindly.

But he could not cure his son. He could not cure his wife. He could not cure himself. For that, while still trying to dissemble, he had to submit to a dispenser of other drugs ... taken from herbs and bushes and bark and Mould! ... in whom three white doctors had reposed a certain faith.

The wheel had turned. (235)

The wheel that has turned is the magnanimous wheel of modernisation, effacing the power of traditional knowledges through healing. However, in the final chapter, in which the Aboriginal subject's embracing of the modern is rewarded with the granting of citizenship, Roberts is emphatic that his culture and traditions remain unaffected by his being made modern. While the vigour and resilience of Aboriginal cultures cannot be denied, one is unaccustomed to seeing the impact of modernity represented so uncritically. In *I, the Aboriginal* the modern does not

supplant or erase, it improves and heals, it is a necessary and welcome complement. The “primitive blackfellow” has journeyed out of darkness and is grateful. The Aboriginal voice provides comforting reassurance that Aboriginal Australia has been subject to the influence of a humanitarian progress rather than the force of imperialist dispossession. Lockwood has represented the divided and contested field of a racialised colonial state as a simple separation between superior and inferior knowledges: a problem of development whose solution is a relatively straightforward matter of making primitives modern.

‘eye’ the Aboriginal

Photography has played an enormously influential role in the primitivising subjection of Aboriginality. The vast power that resides in technologies of visual representation – especially as it relates to Aboriginality – is the theme of Wim Wenders’ 1995 film, *Until the End of the World*. In this film, Wenders constructs a society that lives in the constant presence of visual recording technologies, a world devoted to visibility. Set in the foreshadow of impending apocalypse (precipitated by a malfunctioning communications satellite) the film examines a world consumed with and consumed by technologies of visual representation. The film examines what Naoki Sakai (501) describes as “the will essential for modern subjectivity” - the will to represent everything. Wenders’ world is the world of Paul Virilio’s *Vision Machine* (1994): a world that ends not with a satellite collision but with absolute visibility, with the development of a

machine that takes visual information straight from the brain and projects it onto a screen. The film depicts a modernity that has culminated in total visibility: dreams, fantasies and memories have entered the realms of the spectacle.

Largely set in Central Australia, the film depicts the involvement of Aboriginal people, under the direction of a European scientist, in the development of dream recording technology. Regrettably, Wenders relies upon either an incomplete understanding or - and this is more likely - a convenient interpretation of the mythos of Aboriginal people to communicate his vision. The film utilises the word Dreaming, as it is used in relation to Australian Aboriginal cosmology, as if it directly translated to common Western usage of this term. When Wenders depicts the walkout of Aboriginal people because they refuse to participate in a project that can exhibit a people's dreams "on walls like paintings" he communicates an inaccurate and reductive view of the Dreaming. Firstly, Dreamings are already exhibited on walls as paintings, and secondly, places and other beings are the locus of the Dreaming, no less so than oneiric interiority. Yankunytjara man Yami Lester has this to say in relation to this common error:

In the *wapar* [the Dreaming] the land was made. Our culture, the language, the land we live in, our relationship with people and the religious system that controls our everyday life, comes from the *wapar*. Learning our culture is learning about the *wapar*. *The land is full of the stories*. It is difficult for Europeans to understand what *wapar* means to us. The word 'dreaming' is often used to translate to '*wapar*', but the word dreaming suggests that the

wapar is dreamt up. For us the *wapar* is not dreamt up. (Lester, 1981: 22)

"The land is full of the stories". This is meant quite literally. The *tjukurpa*, the marks left by the ancestral beings as they travelled across the land, are actual markings in actual places and can be read:

[In Dreamtime cosmology] every location, every feature of the visible landscape [is] inhabited with mythical, mystical and totemistic beings, places where mythical events occurred, where wandering ancestors rested, and (of vivid importance to individuals) spots where the quickening occurred which first identified them as [the living and longing to be born]. (Elliot xxx)

In order to gather and exhibit a people's Dreaming the kind of dream technology depicted in Wenders' science fiction is unnecessary - a Box Brownie would suffice. As Eric Michaels notes, "in insensitive hands photography can be a weapon of considerable destructiveness to Aboriginal tradition" (1994: 9). From the perspective of traditional Aboriginal Australia a simple single reflex camera can carry the same harmful power that Wenders attributes only to his "dream machine".

picturing the primitive

According to Heidegger "the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture" (1977:130). A strategy for grasping and a means of mastering, *picturing* is a way of knowing grounded in the

primacy of vision and visibility. The story of modernity is the story of domination by pictures (Rorty, 1980:12-13).

According to Donald Lowe (1982) different epochs can be defined by the privileging of different senses and the technologies that are developed to improve and intensify them. Following Lowe, Richard Dyer (1997) traces the privileging of sight in the modern period to the fifteenth century and to certain technologies that appeared at this time:

It is printing (making the seen word more widespread and available) and perspective (emphasising verisimilitude in imagery and a notion of knowledge through looking rather than from revelation or authority) that begin to move the (bourgeois, Western, white) world towards an emphasis on seeing as the epistemic sense *par excellence* (Dyer 103).

As Foucault has shown, the relationship of seeing to knowing is also a relationship of power: that which is visible is not only knowable but also manipulable. In the paradigm of the panopticon disciplinary power imposes an inescapable visibility that ensures its dominance. The supreme technical expression of the principle of knowledge and power through seeing is unquestionably photography: "photography appears as the final culmination of a Western quest for visibility and scrutiny... the apotheosis of a Western civilisation grounded in ocularism" (Pinney 74). Nowhere is the role of photography as controlling knowledge more evident than in ethnography. Harnessed to the description and classification of people, the ethnographic lens, like Bentham's panoptical

tower, delivers the Other into a situation of constant visibility - subject to interpretation, typification, endless scrutiny and examination - while the ethnographer remains completely invisible behind the camera (Edwards 1992).

Para-ethnography is visual knowledge. This does not mean that the textual component simply supports or adorns what is essentially a photographic project: text and image visualise together. Through language as well as film the aim is to manufacture and transmit a picture of the primitivised Other. Dense with ocular metaphor, the language of para-ethnography, no less than its photographic content, seeks always to render visible. The following passage from *Brown Men and Red Sand* is typical:

A shaft of *light* from the late afternoon sun, coming through a gap in the hills, *illuminated* that pavement with all the *brilliance* of a powerful *spotlight*, leaving everything else in deep *shadow*. In the middle of the scene like actors on a stage, were twenty or more naked brown-skinned children, their bodies almost *luminous* in that *brilliant light*. (Mountford 18 my italics)

According to Levinas (1988: 47-8) light “makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us”. Saturated with signifiers of light the above passage renders intelligible through a nostalgic projection of modern desires. It creates a world for the Western subject to inhabit, a primitivist idyll fashioned from an idealising metaphoric light. An Other lit by sentimentality is offered for consumption. This is no less true of the

book's photography. Mountford's photographs communicate his primitivist vision every bit as effectively as his writing. Through light and point of view Mountford successfully creates images of romantic nobility. The photograph of Anangu woman, Numidi, captioned "for she was the brightest and most willing of the aboriginal [sic] women", is typical. "Numidi" is a projection of Mountford's vision rather than a reflection of Anangu reality. Of course, this particular image required not only a manipulation of light but also a manipulation of matter: Mountford purchased Numidi's dress so as to ensure the nakedness essential to his primitivist vision.

light goods

The camera may be purposely used to communicate specific ideological perspectives, such as primitivism, but it comes ready equipped with its own ideology of consumption. Most apparent in its use in tourism and tabloid journalism, the camera is a technology of visual consumption that allows its users to possess environments and others in ways previously unimaginable. This aspect of photography is explored in detail by Susan Sontag (1979). For Sontag the camera is first and foremost an instrument of commodification:

Whatever the moral claims made on behalf of photography, its main effect is to convert the world into a department store or a museum-without-walls into which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item of aesthetic appreciation. (110)

Using photography to capture and consume fragments and instants of Others' realities, popular ethnography discloses the characteristic procedure of Heidegger's *ge-stell*: "...the attempt to enclose all beings in a particular claim - utter availability and sheer manipulability" (Krell 309). *Ge-stell*, usually translated as enframing or shelving, is an ordering of beings as *bestand* (stock, resource or supply). *Ge-stell* is an ordering of beings for ends beyond or antithetical to the interests of those beings. *Ge-stell* is a technologised ordering that demands "nature report itself in some way or other" (Heidegger in Krell, 328). As a way of perceiving *ge-stell* is concerned above all with that which may be visualised:

Violating the preserve of the visible, enframing [*ge-stell*] is a mode of perception which reduces the horizon to a collection of objects available for total comprehensive control. (Levin 76)

As a technology harnessed to the ordering and control of the world as a reserve of information and object of consumption, photography embodies *ge-stell*. Through being photographed beings become part of an ever-expanding store of information:

The photographic exploration and duplication of the world fragments continuities and feeds the pieces into an interminable dossier, thereby providing possibilities of control that could not even be dreamed of under the earlier system of recording information: writing. (Sontag 156)

Advances in micro-processing technologies have brought information as commodity into the foreground as never before. However, as Sontag notes, mass-market information commodities have been in existence at least since the emergence of commercial publishing. This market in information was, however, greatly enhanced and expanded with the development of economically viable methods for mass-producing photographic images, and the subsequent emergence of a mass market in picture books, posters, postcards and picture magazines.

The commodifying actions of photography are nowhere more conspicuous than in Sun Books' *Blackfellows of Australia* (1936?)²⁷. Although this publication is surprisingly replete with text, like most modern magazines it relies heavily upon the photographic image. Its primary mode of communication is through pictures. The cover photograph is fairly representative of the images to be found on every page including the outside back cover²⁸. The cover print is one of J.W. Lindt's studio portraits from the 1870s. Lindt's portraits were extensively recycled in various forms well into the twentieth century. Roslyn Poignant (1998) notes that this particular image was used as late as 1942 as a

²⁷ The publication date is the Australian National Library's estimate. The magazine is part of a series constructed to represent the idea of Nation; others in the series include: *Butterflies of Australia*, *Birdlife of Australia*, and *Wildflowers of Australia*. Effectively the series denies Aboriginal Australians human subjectivity through inclusion in a category of flora and fauna assembled for reasons of nationalism.

²⁸ I made a decision not to include this image because of the possibility of offending some people.

frontispiece to represent “vanished tribes” in N. Bartlett’s broadly sympathetic booklet.

In the late nineteenth century Lindt’s portraits were to be found in most European anthropological archives and were regarded as respectable anthropological evidence. However, by the time of this magazine’s publication their respectability had diminished somewhat. It is characteristic of much popular ethnography that it is inordinately reliant upon a recycling of archaic objects to provide evidence for meanings that as the twentieth century unfolded became both less certain and more difficult to sustain. In its original late nineteenth century context this photograph was firmly situated within a process of construction of a modern, civilised self through contrast with a primitive Other (Street 126). Over six decades later *Blackfellows of Australia* is immersed in exactly the same strategies of primitivization. Of course, in order to do this it engages in a process of subterfuge through selectivity and omission. The majority of photographs feature naked Aborigines bearing traditional weapons and tools, and although many of the photographs are as much as 60 years old, none of the images are dated, thus creating an illusion of contemporaneity between viewer and subject. In respect of the cover photograph this deception is doubled when one factors in the layers of fabrication involved in Lindt’s manufacture of his ostensibly realist representations. Lindt was an unabashed devotee of “compositional artifice” (Jones, P 1997). This photograph is taken in an urban studio and

yet the sitters are unclothed. In other Lindt portraits the sitters are surrounded by carefully placed artefacts and what are, assumedly, potted plants. The obvious falseness of his settings was either unrecognised or considered unimportant by contemporary reviewers, who praised his work for its beauty and truthfulness (Jones, S. 5). His ability to “capture, frame and throw light upon his ethnographic subjects” won him a gold medal in the Philadelphia International Exhibition of 1876, in which ‘native’ commodities were exhibited alongside other colonial produce (Jones, P. 1997).

Viewing Lindt’s portraits today one wonders how it was that these images were ever received as realistic portrayals and anthropological facts. Jane Collins and Catherine Lutz (1994) provide some insight here. Drawing upon currently influential work on the realist tradition (Bourdieu 1978; Tagg 1988), Collins and Lutz draw attention not only to characteristic stylistic features of a medium that is commonly received as an unproblematic reflection of actual worlds, but also to the realist image’s dependence upon cultural expectations. In other words, in order for an image to be received as realistic it must *above all* be consistent with dominant beliefs about the photographic subject:

When we speak of photographic realism, “we must historicise the spectator” - that is, we must consider to whom and under what conditions photographic images will appear “realistic”(Tagg, 1988: 156). Or as Pierre Bourdieu (1978: 109) has noted, “if the photograph is considered to be a perfect inscription

of the visible world, it is above all because the selections that it makes completely conform to the world's logic". (Collins & Lutz, 140)

Roslyn Poignant (1992) sees Lindt's photography as the technological corollary to the sideshow display of colonised peoples. She cites the headshot of man and woman (the cover photo) used by the publishers of *Blackfellows of Australia* as a horrifying example of subjugation by camera:

An aura of lethargy and anomie pervades these images, which are visual metaphors of death. With their weapons laid aside and their wildness neutralised by the studio ambience the sitters have been transformed into specimens. (Poignant 1992: 54)

Recent postcolonial approaches to the interpretation of ethnographic photography are inclined to emphasise an element of resistance to the apparent anomie and lethargy of Lindt's portraits. According to Brenda Croft (1997) the gaze of the sitters is a gaze of resistance, a reading that is considerably at odds with interpretations that emphasise the manipulability of photographic subjects:

the same gaze, the same stance, the same resistance is echoed in images of Indigenous people from every place and every time. The collective pain, anger, resignation, tired patience, sense of loss and displacement is echoed in contemporary 'shots' of angry, urban Indigenous people of colour in their determination to keep resisting. (Croft 13-14)

Viewed in this way Lindt's photograph, rather than signifying an enormous disparity in power relations between colonisers and colonised, serves as evidence of an unflagging refusal to succumb to colonisation. By acknowledging the mark of a determined and successful opposition to the forces of imperialist modernity, the power of the technological to effectively subjugate and erase is challenged, and relations between colonisers and colonised are shown to be more complex than a simple model of domination can accommodate. Postcolonial interpretative approaches disclose the fact that despite the enormous power that imperialist modernity invests in sight and its related technologies, there remain other ways of seeing, multiple gazes that refuse subsumption into panoptical space.

The postcolonial impulse to review and reinterpret the ethnographic record is very powerful, extending not only to a reassessment of archival materials but also to actual reconstruction (Lumby 1992). For example, Adelaide photographer Alan Cruickshank has used digital manipulation to reconstruct Lindt's studio portraits (see overleaf). Substituting the sombre faces of the Bundjalung and Gumbaingirr people with the faces of Europeans, Cruickshank, enacts a reversal in which the observer becomes the observed and the target of interpretation and theory. However, as Philip Jones (1997) rightly points out Cruickshank has also erased the gaze, which may always have been the most appropriate and effective response. Jones points to a very real

danger of postcolonial re-interpretations. In an attempt to redress the balance and amend the inaccuracies of the archival record the postcolonial theorist/practitioner may inadvertently efface or obscure the subtle nuances of the stories of the colonised, and in fact dissimulate “the tremendous complexity of (post)colonial space” (Spivak 1989: 276)²⁹.



Alan Cruickshank: remaking the archive

Of course, ethnographic photography does not always invite or necessitate a gaze of resistance or digital reconstruction; control of the

²⁹ Koorie artist and photographer, Rea, in a work entitled *Untitled Resistance 1*, avoids this pitfall through digitally recontextualising, as opposed to altering, archival materials. Rea utilises the optical technologies of modernity to deconstruct and examine a problematic construction of history in which that very technology has played a significant role (Howe 1993). In a reversal of ethnographic practice she gathers Christian icons and uses digital technology to create a photographic image which shows Christ submitting to an Aboriginal family whose “fracture was predicated on, and legitimated by, Christian discourses” (Howe 24). The photograph of the family remains untouched and occupies the center.

photographic process is not always as much in the hands of the photographer as it so obviously is in Lindt's studio portraits. For example, Axel Poignant's photographs of the Tiwi taken in the 1950s at the campsite called Nagalarramba (see *Encounter at Nagalarramba* by Roslyn and Axel Poignant) are born from a situation of cooperation, mutual understanding and respect (see image below).



Angubarrabarr, Anbarra singer, seated with his young kinsman (photo by Axel Poignant)

The photographs represent Aboriginal people with a grace and dignity at a period characterised by entrenched marginalisation and negativity. This

is achieved without descent into primitivist idealisation; the images communicate more complex truths. Elizabeth Edwards (1994) argues that this collection cannot sustain a reading that emphasises the command of the white photographer who intrudes and appropriates images and experiences:

There is a subtle, understated interaction with the camera that is fundamental to the viewer's response, without it one would indeed be reduced to voyeurism. Subjects are allowed to create their own contexts, giving something of themselves to the photographer, as exemplified by the Tiwi man who paused mid-dance to enquire, "Getting any good pics Ax?" It is this intensity, the value of social action, that is communicated. (Edwards 1994 122)

wish you were here

Lindt selected his models from the remnants of the tribes of the Clarence River district of northern New South Wales. Consequently it may be assumed that the couple in the *Blackfellows* portrait are Clarence River people, but the magazine does not supply this information³⁰. From the perspective of the magazine's producers all of the necessary information is there. They are generic commodified primitives standing in as evidence of an imagined comprehensive control of all that stands in the field of vision of the nation, of the technological, of the modern. The sixpenny

³⁰ In another print of the image circulated as a 10 by 8 card, apparently designed for framing, the subjects are named: the man, "Coontajundra" and the woman, "Langingubble". They are said to be of the 'Worki tribe' of the Northern Territory. It is possible that this information was added to the print at a later date and the image is in fact one of the hundreds of photographs of Bundjalung and Gumbaingirr people that originated in Lindt's Grafton studio.

price in the lower left corner emblazoned across the woman's shoulder, naïvely but no less alarmingly discloses the commodifying forces at work here. Lindt extensively exhibited and marketed his Aboriginal portraits both nationally and internationally; they won him prizes and, most importantly, made him money. They came to be circulated not just as ethnographic evidence but also as postcards and *carte de visite*. Their eventual emergence in postcard form seems inevitable, an almost natural progression. The postcard is a mass-production commodity born from the intersection of closely related arenas of visual consumption - tourism and photography. Of course, Lindt's portraits are products of a third domain of visual consumption (anthropology) whose history has been closely tied to the other two. The fact that the invention of photography, the establishment of the Ethnological Society of London, and Thomas Cook's first-ever large scale tour, all took place within four years of each other (1839, 1843 and 1841 respectively) is evidence of an emerging discursive practice of visual consumption, of which these three domains are both symptoms and agents (Crawshaw & Urry 180).

According to Frow (1991:150) "the product sold by the tourism industry in its most general form, is a commodified relation to the Other". Postcards embody this relation. This is especially evident in the case of Lindt's postcards and the thousands like them that exploit the sign value of Aboriginal bodies by depriving them of human dimensions (their names, their origins, their histories). Such postcards are a form of para-

ethnography in which the ethnographic object is used as a device for the transmission of personal experience. They function as a story, not of the Other, but of the subject who claims witness to the Other. The narrative, which has as its starting point the exotic or the primitive, is supplied by the purchaser of the card who, while never actually having borne witness to the card's subject (the primitive), in the act of inscription and transmission confirms its existence and ensures its continuation (Stewart 138).

Julie Marcus (1993) analyses a well-known ethnographic postcard (featuring an anonymous Aboriginal man poised with spear) that has been in circulation for over fifty years: the card was first produced in 1940 and was still readily available in Alice Springs at the time of writing. Deprived of a history, a name and a meaningful context the man in this postcard has been reduced to a primitivist sign. Marcus stresses that the effacement inherent to popular commodities of this sort is far from unrelated to the practice of formal ethnography, which has itself become "a circulating system of signs detached from a referent" (391). Recovering the man's name (Johnny Tjambitjimba) and fragments of his history, Marcus initiates a restoration of the human dimensions denied by the reifying effects of western knowledge allied with the commodifying practices of tourism. Nevertheless, she remains aware of the insufficiency of this belated knowledge:

So who is he? That "native" standing so unmoving at the beginning of time, circulating steadily through a global tourist market since the 1940's? Will his

name tell us who he is? Where are his mother, sisters and daughters? Would he speak if we had spoken to him? With "Alice Springs" engraved across him, what would he say of his childhood on what is now Mt Denison station, his life at Yuendumu and his 14 years spent gardening for Miss Pink in Alice Springs until his death. Would we listen? (Marcus 392)

The image below is of a postcard widely available in South Australia at the time of writing. Captioned "Aboriginal, Camel, dog and Lubra at Ayers Rock"³¹ the card reduces the Other to a collection of equivalent objects: exotic people, exotic beasts, exotic rocks. An almost total effacement of human subjectivity is achieved by the separation of the man and woman into discrete categories which are then inserted into a sequence in which the woman is placed after "Camel" and "dog".



"Aboriginal, Camel, dog and Lubra at Ayers Rock"

³¹ The postcard is published by Barker Souvenirs of Alice Springs.

The people have been converted into signs of something other than themselves. Prior to purchase they function as signifiers of a tourist hot spot; after purchase they will function to validate personal journeys. Significantly, Uluru (Ayers Rock), the object that they are made to signify, is not at all visible in the photograph. Its presence in this context would be pure redundancy, the exotic is a category of largely interchangeable signifiers, and in the case of the Centralian exotic every Aboriginal may connote "the rock". Postcards furnish the photographic evidence that help to maintain the myths upon which the tourism industry depends - the primitives, the exotics, the pristine elsewheres yet to be contaminated by the West's corrosive expansion. Of course, photography can never furnish proof of what are only discursive objects. However, as this postcard so concisely unconceals, the absence of an actual monolith in no way prevents its continued reproduction.

the photographable

Tourism shares with para-ethnography the strategy of seduction through an unfulfillable promise of encounter with the Others of modernity. The camera has a central role in these artful enterprises of deception and endlessly deferred satisfaction. Carefully composed and largely standardised images are used to communicate an imaginary temporal distance between the West and its Others. This abstraction is the model

that precedes the photograph and determines what is “photographable”³². A gathering of images around generic motifs is executed by acquisitive photographers whose search for “the representative”, understood as a quest for the truthful, conceals the ideological underpinning to their ethically unrestrained accumulations. The following passage, taken from Marjorie Gartrell’s *Dear Primitive* (1957), reveals something of the rapacious disregard that may accompany the reproduction of motifs of the primitive.

Our arrival always showed a few stragglers hurrying into clothes, even if only a shirt or an apron improvised from an old sweater. Once we ran over a couple of dogs, and their infuriated master bailed us up with his spears and provided me with one of the best colour-slides of its kind that ever came out of my camera. (Gartrell 99)

This is a troubling passage, doubly heartless in its callous indifference to both animals and people. The chance injuring of family pets affords a situation for photographing the grief stricken owner in the height of his distress, and Gartrell is able to acquire a prized possession: the para-ethnographer’s dream photo - the spear-wielding native. Gartrell’s violent intrusion into the Pitjantjatjara camp enables her to procure “evidence” of savagery and distinguish her collection with a particularly choice item.

³² Discussing the role of the camera in anthropology Elizabeth Edwards (1992) argues that through photography “...creations of the mind became concrete, observed realities, recorded in the mechanical eye of the camera. Through photography... the ‘type’, that abstract essence of human variation, was perceived to be an observable reality (Edwards 1990). The inevitable detail created by the photographer becomes a symbol for the whole and tempts the viewer to allow the specific to stand for generalities, becoming a symbol for wider truths, at the risk of stereotyping and misrepresentation” (Edwards 7).

The colour-slide is “best” because its subject verifies the model, that is, its subject is “photographable”.

For para-ethnography the Other’s home functions like a marketplace of photo opportunity: the camera converts lived moments into commodities of corroboration. In the absence of a camera Gartrell’s encounter could not have been anything other than deeply distressing, but the camera transforms another’s suffering into Gartrell’s highly valued possession. In the presence of the camera a malign incursion yields proof of the primitive. Photography, at the same time that it snap-freezes its subject, is able to function as “a moral analgesic” (Sontag 110). It carries the power to evade interrogation. Seemingly a complete and transparent reflection of the actual, the photograph carries with it a presumption of veracity and an aura of sufficiency that makes it appear like adequate knowledge. That the photographic image originates in reflected light and “is not immediately or generally distinguished from its referent” (Barthes, 1993: 5) diminishes the sense of the photograph as a narrowly selective interpretation. But the photographer’s struggle for the right light, the right angle, the right event or the right facial expression is nothing other than the struggle for preferred meanings: the selection of the photographable. Not that the meaning of a photograph can ever be permanently fixed: context is forever a determining factor in the reproduction of meaning³³.

³³ ³³ Referring to her husband’s portraits, Roslyn Poignant, has this to say on the role of context in the production of photographic meaning: “These portraits are embedded in the

However, once the image is provided with an enduring context - inserted into a collection such as the museum archive, the gallery exhibition or the para-ethnographic text - and definitively catalogued, categorised and most importantly, captioned, then the potential diversity of signifieds may be severely restricted.

captioning the primitive

The power of the caption to restrict the exercise of interpretation cannot be over-estimated. As Sontag (108) argues the caption is an exemplary case of words speaking louder than pictures. This can be well illustrated with reference to the para-ethnographic text. Arthur Groom's *I Saw A Strange Land* (1950) includes a photograph captioned "bewilderment is on the face of many native children new to the mission"³⁴. The caption defines the image as an instant of first encounter between primitives and moderns: the result being the mystification of primitives. The viewer is encouraged to conclude that these children, seemingly mesmerised, have recently wandered in from the wilderness and now gaze upwards at the wonders of the modern. The caption allows only one interpretation

historical processes that constituted the cultural movements of the period; they do not illustrate, but they can be summoned as witness in the sense that they are open to question like any other document. The photographer's ambivalences of practice are locked into their structure and are part of the message which requires decoding. But from the moment the photographs pass into circulation, no matter how limited, and particularly once they pass through the editorial screen, they escape their originator's intentions. They are not only open to interpretation but reinterpretation" (Poignant 1991).

³⁴ This is an extraordinary photograph that I very much would have liked to include. However, the photograph is a troubling one, and the risk of causing offense to Aboriginal people was too great.

of the children's unusual countenance: they are confused and overwhelmed by the culture of the coloniser. Remove the caption and other interpretations would be possible³⁵.

The caption is only one interpretation of the children's troubled aspect but it is the one that is *forced* upon us - and the machinations of force, rather than the confusion of non-moderns, is really the dominant theme of this photograph. Densely inscribed with the mark of coercion the image is a record of a less than benign incursion. Applied to photographs such as this Sontag's seemingly hyperbolic description of the camera as "a predatory weapon" becomes salient. Similarly, Paul Virilio's grouping of the camera with military technologies of light - searchlights, lasers, nuclear weapons, all technologies which effect a transmutation of bodies into emulsion for the radiation of violence - becomes less descriptive extravagance than good taxonomy (Virilio 1989).

³⁵ For instance: Groom arrives at Areyonga mission and informs the Lutheran minister that he would like to photograph some of the children. The minister rounds up a group of children and, in order to hide their nakedness, forces them into any rags or articles of clothing that may be lying around. Faced with the sudden unacceptableness of their unclothed state the children are possibly a little perplexed. They are then forced into a group with the minister and other mission officials standing behind them so that they don't run away. The children obviously feel coerced. Groom, almost as bad a photographer as he is a writer, positions himself in front of the children, with the power of the midday desert sun behind him, and tells the children to look into the camera. The children, virtually blinded by sunlight, squint and look up at the no doubt ludicrously clad stranger who has interrupted their normal daytime activities. The intensity of desert light reflecting from the children's faces results in the characteristic spectral white-out that could create a sense of the lost soul on the face of even the most self-possessed and purposeful.

Stamped with the mark of colonial force this image is, nevertheless, inscribed with other forces that carry the potential to produce other meanings which can override the determinative force of the caption. In *Camera Lucida* (1993), Roland Barthes develops a distinction between two categories of response to photographic images: The *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is a “generalised enthusiasm” for photography as such, rather than for a particular photograph that may affect a distinctive and possibly highly personal response. The *studium* is entirely culturally determined. It is derived from a kind of informal training in seeing. In the case of the *studium* we know what it is that we are supposed to see: it is a learned response, it is what the photographer means for us to see, it is the photographable. Any emotional response that is elicited by the *studium* requires “the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture” (Barthes, 1993: 26).

On the other hand, the *punctum* is an element that exists outside of the scope of the photographer’s intention. The *punctum* takes the form of a wounding or piercing impact upon the viewer. Its origins are in particular details, what Barthes calls “partial features”, rather than in the general subject of the image. The *punctum* attests to the fact that the photographer “could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object” (47). In other words, a persistent co-

presence of heterogenous elements obstructs the photographer's will to construct a unified and complete picture. The photographer fails in an attempt to produce a totalising image because of elements within the picture that escape the photographer's attention and intention, refuse exclusion or simply cannot be hidden: the *punctum* pierces or ruptures the *studium*. Barthes illustrates this phenomenon with several examples including a photograph from the 1920s captioned "Idiot Children In An Institution" (see below).



*"what I see is the little boy's huge Danton collar,
the little girl's finger bandage" (Barthes 51)*

This is a disturbing photograph, not one that viewers might tend to linger over. However, for Barthes the dominant meanings of this captioned image are undone from within the photograph by details that escape the photographer's control:

"I...hardly see the monstrous heads and pathetic profiles (which belong to the *studium*); what I see [is] the little boy's huge Danton collar, the little girl's finger bandage". (51)

The photographer has attempted a normalising documentation of the aberrant (this is the dimension of the *studium*), but this recedes in response to an over-riding co-presence (the *punctum*), an intrusion of ordinary *everydayness*, the minutiae of the mundane: an extravagant collar and a little bandage (What did she do to her finger?) annul a repetition of the myth of sub-humanness.

Groom's photograph does not invite a lingering examination. Perhaps because of this, on first viewing my response was situated firmly in the domain of the *studium*. I saw what I was supposed to see, what was intended, and what I was encouraged to see: I saw confusion and fear on the faces of children. However, closer inspection reveals that a child in shadow (front-row second from the left) is smiling. In fact this appears to be much more than a smile, it is the mirth of recalcitrance. Actively resistant in the shadows, hidden from the gaze of officials and photographer, this face (the *punctum*) silences the *studium*: I now see nothing else. What really amounts to a recitation of primitivising myth is unravelled from within by a face. I now see that Groom has used a caption, a camera angle and the expression on the face of a single child (the child at the very back) to reproduce the narrative of the mystifying moderns. Groom has attempted to construct

a single face in a single moment as widely representative, as characteristic of a type. He attempts to superimpose a single face, a face of confusion, atop of the multiplicity of faces that make up any group of people. Nevertheless, despite a considerable investment of energy to produce the desired pre-modern face, in the shadows another face tells another story. Through the eyes of this child's face the absurd grandiloquence of the lens of modernity is exposed. This face refuses translation into a surface for modernity's projections and resists the subjection of the meta-narratives into which it has been inserted.

caught in the web

The story of the meeting of primitives and moderns continues to be told. The tale of the technologically sophisticated encountering its elementary other³⁶ against the dramatic backdrop of an alien wilderness retains its narrative power. Four elements - the enlightened, the benighted, technology, and uncolonised space - combine in a fundamentally imperialist myth in which the coloniser assumes the guise of a kindly superior ushering in the future. More recently this narrative has appeared in hypertext form. Simon Pockley's *The Flight of Ducks* (<http://www.cinemedia.net/FOD/>) is an account of a 1933 scientific

³⁶ This evaluation of the indigenous Other in terms of technological development is a remarkably resilient construct. For instance, in October of 2000, Philip Ruddock, the Australian Aboriginal Reconciliation Minister, commented to the French newspaper *Le Monde* that, "they [Australian Aborigines] were hunter gatherers ... they had no knowledge of the wheel" and unlike Native Americans they had failed to master "the

expedition to Central Australia. Described by its creator as an “online documentary” the site began as an exercise in the digital preservation of materials³⁷ from the expedition. The expedition consisted of seven physiologists from Sydney University under the leadership of Dr H. Whitridge Davies. Also accompanying the expedition were T.G.H. Strehlow, author of *Aranda Traditions* and renowned collector of Aboriginal artefacts, as well as the well-known painter of Central Australian landscapes and peoples, Arthur Murch³⁸. The expedition’s main aim was a comparative study of water absorption and retention, and used Europeans, mission Aborigines, and so-called “wild Aborigines” (Aborigines still living a traditional nomadic lifestyle) as test subjects. The study involved following nomadic Aborigines, keeping an accurate record of all water consumed, and then scrupulously weighing all bodily wastes using a piece of technical equipment referred to as “the Haldane”³⁹.

techniques of agriculture” (*Canberra Times* 04/10/200 ‘PM Backs Ruddock On ‘Wheel’ Comments”, Emma Macdonald).

³⁷ These materials consist of the journals and photographs of John Pockley (the expedition’s cinematographer and father of Simon Pockley) as well as “digital surrogates” (digitised images) of various artefacts, including tjuringa (a stone or sometimes wooden object inscribed with symbols of sacred significance), that were collected during the expedition.

³⁸ Murch is regarded by Geoffrey Dutton as one of the first realist painters of Aborigines, his work apparently unspoiled by either romanticism or caricature (Dutton, 61).

³⁹ Apparently the response of Aborigines to this invasive scientific study was one of hilarity (which would seem to be an appropriate response). There is some indication, however, that the laughter of the Aborigines was an expression of extreme embarrassment. Ria Murch, wife of the painter Arthur Murch who accompanied the expedition, gives a more detailed account of the invasiveness of these tests: “Given the sensitive nature of the tests and the difficulty of communicating with their subjects, they devised methods probably less than ethical. During the night, to get a little sleep, they tied their hands to their subjects, so if they moved they would know the minute ‘nature called’ and would be there with the tin can specimen collector”. (FOD/FOD0480.html)

The subject of the *The Flight of Ducks* - an expedition to Central Australia and the encounter with Aborigines still living a traditional nomadic lifestyle (the meeting of primitives and moderns) - is the quintessential (popular) ethnographic theme. The site might be viewed as a belated form of the works of Mountford, Idriess, Groom, Finlayson, Hill and others: Hill, in fact, met the *Ducks* expedition and reported their arrival in "the interior" in *The Adelaide Advertiser* (9/1/33). These popular ethnographers and the *Ducks* expeditionary party were contemporaries participating in and recording what was in effect the final stage of the colonisation of Australia.

the saving power?

Like the expedition that it documents, *The Flight of Ducks* is fundamentally an exercise in the deployment of modern technology. In 1933 with cameras, "the Haldane" and a selection of technical instruments the lifeworlds of the Warlpiri, the Pintubi, the Loritja, and the Aranda became objects of utility and sources of data - set upon, made to yield, converted to a resource for modernity's expansion. The expedition is an archetypal instance of what Heidegger (1977: 100) has called "the utilisation of human material" in a "struggle for unlimited exploitation of the earth". In the case of *Ducks*, technology (in the form of cybernetics) is used to order and assemble, to preserve, to keep alive a memory, to contribute to an interminable discourse, and all - much like the expedition - for ends exclusive of the people that it objectifies.

According to Heidegger the ordering of the earth as stock ('stuff' for use), is both the essence and the supreme danger of technology, because all other ways of seeing the world (the poetic, the aesthetic, the philosophic) are concealed: "[ordering by technology] blocks the shining-forth and holding sway of truth" (1978: 333). But Heidegger's vision is not entirely bleak. He concludes *The Question Concerning Technology* with lines cited from Holderlin:

But where danger is, grows
The saving power also.

Heidegger's argument is that the unfolding of technology contains within it a force of *poesis*, a power that may rescue the world from the oppressive, derogation of modern technology's ordering. Taking the Greek etymological foundation of technology - *techne* - Heidegger notes that the word referred not merely to the instrumental but to "the revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearance" (1978: 339). Art, poetry and philosophy were once also part of this essential process (now dominated by the technological) of bringing the earth into unconcealment.

In respect of *The Flight of Ducks* Heidegger's critique forces the question: Is there within the new technologies of information and communication (cybernetics) a "saving power", an avenue of escape

from the subjection and circumscription imposed by the technological? Certainly a number of theorists of cybernetics and hypertext have hinted at such a possibility. Gregory Ulmer (1990), George Landow (1992) and Donna Haraway (1991) have all discussed the emancipatory potential of new technologies of writing in which the distinction between readers and writers is blurred, and a freedom to construct idiosyncratic knowledges is promised: “[The] essence of hypertext is that users are entirely free to follow links wherever they please” (Landow 169). The freedoms of access, the ability to participate, contribute, answer back and innovate that the Internet offers points to the possibility of a saving power at the heart of the cybernetic. Nevertheless, as Cathryn McConaghy (2000) notes, for Indigenous people it is freedom that resides in great danger:

For Australian Indigenous peoples, the Web has significant potential to reproduce, rather than to disrupt, the social formations and legitimating conditions of Australian colonialism. (48)

The Internet has the potential to proliferate derogating representations and contribute to a continuing “commodification of Indigeneity” (McConaghy 50). On the other hand, it presents opportunities, perhaps as never before, to control the production of representations (Langton 1993). *The Flight of Ducks* forces a question: Can technology solve the problems that technology has created?⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud responded in the negative to this question, once remarking that he found it impossible to be impressed by technology (telegraph, telephone) that enabled him to communicate instantly with a friend 1000 miles away when the fact remained that if someone hadn’t invented locomotive technology his friend wouldn’t be 1000 miles away.

The Flight of Ducks consists of nearly 1000 screens of data of various kinds and is constantly expanding. This makes it an extremely difficult object to analyse and discuss in the manner that the previous texts have been discussed. Sheer volume alone makes such a task daunting but this combined with the complexity of the site, the diversity of its contents and the fact that it is always changing makes for a troublesome critical exercise. Of course, in confining oneself to an analysis of the original journal and photographic material alone, one is able to observe and comment upon the very same discursive strategies that operate in the texts discussed previously. However, these objects do not stand alone unchallenged and unannotated in quite the same way that the conventional popular ethnography appears to⁴¹. Both the journal text and the photographic material are replete with hypertextual links: to Simon Pockley's own essays on digital preservation and the ethics of Aboriginal representation; to other online material on Aboriginal representation by contemporary critics such as Stephen Muecke, Bain Attwood and Roslyn Poignant; and to a continuous record of e-mail responses to the site which includes criticism from Aborigines and other concerned parties.

⁴¹ This is an important point. At the time that the works of Mountford *et al* were written and published, a public critical discourse on racism and the representation of Aboriginality was virtually non-existent. As well as this, and this is a related issue, Aboriginal people were a virtually voiceless minority, lacking effective political representation and limited in their capacity to exercise influence and control over the various way in which they were represented. This, of course, is not the current situation. Representations of Aboriginality now enter an environment of intense scrutiny by Aboriginal people - and others who are aware of the power of representation - and are increasingly able to influence and determine the form of these representations.

In the case of *The Flight of Ducks* the criticism that one may feel compelled to make when confronted with the subjection of much ethnographic and para-ethnographic material has often already been acknowledged and discussed. However, excluding the e-mail responses, which are often quite vociferous in their criticism⁴², these acknowledgments are usually made as part of a general justification of the site's existence. For instance, the journal's record of the bizarre and invasive scientific experiments that were the expedition's *raison d'être* links to the following section of Pockley's essay on Aboriginal representation:

Some people find the story [of the Aborigines' response to the experiments] mildly amusing as an example of the absurd earnestness with which non-aboriginal culture sometimes attempts to view the 'other'. Other people see the Aboriginal laughter as extreme embarrassment. They find the story not only distasteful but also imbued with the horrors of Joseph Mengele's 'scientific' experimentation on Jewish subjects ten years later at Auschwitz. Europeans prefer to forget that the Nazi ideologies that led to these horrors had their foundation in the mainstream of intellectual thought at the time. From this perspective one can detect a way of thinking⁴³

⁴² For instance, consider the following e-mail from the Warlpiri Media Association: ATTENTION, Working at Yuendumu in Warlpiri Media, we are surprised and shocked to find this site without consultation. WMA is the primary interface between outside media and Warlpiri people, we should have been consulted. The 'for Aboriginal people' [this refers to the site's warning screens] is both ineffective and irresponsible. The accessibility of the images of passed away people and sacred sites is frankly horrific."

⁴³ Online this underlined phrase links to the following journal entry: "8 January 1933: In the afternoon Murch and I went up to the half-caste home a couple of miles north of town, at the original springs, where a person called Freeman had charge. He whistled up the inhabitants, showed us all over the place and gave us a look at the kids. There are quite a few quadroons and octaroons amongst them, the latter bordering pretty closely on white. The infants, (up to about two) show no appreciable colouring at all, developing it later, but they can generally be picked by the eyes, flattened nose and legs. Even many pure

in the journals of *The Flight of Ducks* that tells quite a different story to the one I think it is telling. A way of thinking from which most people have recoiled. But does this mean that the story should not be told? (<http://www.cinemedia.net/FOD/FOD0781.html>)

Pockley recognises that the experiments may be viewed in different ways and elaborates upon the highly critical analogy to Nazism. Although he emphasises that it is not his personal view, he concedes that the journals may be informed by such a way of thinking. This acknowledgement of multiple perspectives imbues the site with an air of reasonableness and balance which is conspicuously absent from popular ethnographies such as *Our Living Stone Age* or *The Great Australian Loneliness*. However, whatever concessions to, or acknowledgments of, other ways of thinking that the site may make they are always finally subordinate to the demands of the principle of unrestricted access to archival materials (which Pockley like most internet enthusiasts views as a supreme goodness), and to the claims of the right to freely circulate these kinds of representations. The concluding question - "But does this mean that this story should not be told?" - is, of course, entirely rhetorical given that the story has not only been told but has been thrown into broad and relatively unrestricted circulation by its posting on the World Wide Web.

Arundta babies are little coloured in infancy. The whole place appears to be neat and clean, but the standard of education is very low. When they leave, the inmates go out as stockboys and domestics around the Alice. Freeman said many interesting things about

The site invokes the rhetorics of pluralism, openness and access as an ethical foundation for its representing. This, of course, places the site in direct conflict with traditional Aboriginal Australia, which maintains very strict regulations in respect of the circulation of information. It is probably the photographic material (more than half of the 143 images feature Aboriginal people and even more display sacred objects and sites of sacred significance) more so than the journal that potentially breaches traditional regulations on the dissemination of information and presents a threat to Aboriginal cultural sensitivities. Eric Michaels' "A Primer of Restrictions on Picture-Taking in Traditional Areas of Aboriginal Australia" (1994) identifies five areas in which Aboriginal culture may be compromised and Aboriginal people offended when they become the subjects of photography:

1. Unauthorised display or transmission of secret or otherwise restricted materials. These may be rituals, songs, dances, graphic designs, and perhaps oblique references to knowledge thus coded
2. Violation of mortuary restrictions that may prohibit reproduction of a now deceased person's body, image, or voice in the presence of his (or her) relatives. Restrictions may also include his name, words thought to sound like the deceased's name, and sometimes songs, stories, designs, dances, or things associated with that person.
3. Invasions of privacy: public display of what Aboriginal etiquette deems to be private or familial (e.g., most fights, interiors of humpy camps, certain ceremonies).

4. Rhetorical narrative devices that isolate Aborigines and constitute them as exotic rather than contemporary peoples, or otherwise depict Aborigines in what they judge to be a negative manner.

5. Unauthorised speaking for another's country or business. This regards the important concern that the properly identified person be accorded primary authority for speaking about matters associated with their land or religious knowledge. For another to speak of these things may be considered a breach of Aboriginal copyright as much as etiquette (Michaels, 3).

With the exception of the fifth area, which probably applies more to speaking and writing than it does to photography, *The Flight of Ducks* threatens or potentially threatens each of these areas of cultural sensitivity. Pockley is quite clear, however, that from the very beginning he chose to regard all material from the 1933 expedition as culturally sensitive and to treat it as such. With this in mind he evolved what he refers to as the "four levels of cultural accommodation":

- The first level of accommodation is that of metadata or content description. Care has been taken not only to avoid the derogatory references sometimes found in library catalogues but to facilitate searches by descendants.
- The second level of accommodation is the use of 'warning screens' alerting anyone inadvertently stumbling on to the site, without going through the opening screen, that there are historical images of deceased people and views of sites which may (for some people) be restricted.
- The third level of accommodation is the implementation of the Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS) whereby a community can choose to have all or some images of deceased (or any other sensitivity) filtered out.
- The fourth level of accommodation is that digital surrogates of items (within the collection) which

might be considered by some interests to be restricted are protected by being contained in a secure password area. (FOD/FOD0781.html)

Seemingly, these measures represent a deployment of technology in the service of Aboriginal interests⁴⁴. At first glance these “four levels” have an appearance of sufficiency, and certainly the fact that any effort at all was made to allow for cultural sensitivities ought to be commended. However, all such measures must be considered in light of the fact that such material was posted on the World Wide Web in the first place. The digital preservation of archival materials and the transformation of those materials into a web site are not synonymous⁴⁵. Storage in the confines of a library or museum, institutions - for whom the administration of regulations and restrictions is a fairly straightforward affair - and insertion in the comparatively *laissez faire* realm of the global Internet do not carry anything like the same consequences.⁴⁶ In view of this the four

⁴⁴ It is also, of course, an attempt to preserve remnants of a technological experiment (the Davies expedition), and consequently an attempt to use technology to address problems that have originated with technology.

⁴⁵ Pockley argues that in this case they are, and this is the primary justification of what is effectively a technological experiment in the archiving of Aboriginality. The site operates on the principle that it is the engagement with memory that keeps memory alive and therefore that ease and frequency of access is essential to the aims of preservation. The interactive dimension that the site allows through e-mail is also seen as absolutely essential to the preservation function of the project.

⁴⁶ For example, the appropriation of these images through downloading is a simple matter. These images may then be used, manipulated and re-used for any number of questionable purposes from marketing to pornography to racial vilification. This is a fact that Pockley himself acknowledges: “Digitisation allows these images [images of Aborigines in general] to be removed from their closed (sometimes restricted) media, making them easier to acquire, manipulate and re-context. It is unlikely that their re-use will be accompanied by any sense of responsibility towards the cultural sensitivities of their indigenous subjects unless some form of protocol is explored. The web is not only a most accessible digital medium of dissemination, but a medium in which unrestricted

levels of cultural accommodation are analogous to shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. The effectiveness of the levels is also very much open to question. For instance, the warning screens are absolutely dependent upon the viewer being able to read English. In the case of Pintubi, Luritja, Aranda, Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri people⁴⁷ - the very people the screens are designed to protect - there is a very high likelihood that this would not be the case. The Warlpiri Media Association, who must be regarded as an authority on such matters, describe the screens as "ineffective and irresponsible" and the language barrier would no doubt be a contributing factor in this assessment. The third level, the Platform for Internet Content Selection, seems an effective solution to many potential problems, especially the possibility that someone may stumble across an image of a deceased relative, but its current inclusion as a level of cultural accommodation is more than a little misleading. The site cannot yet facilitate such a device because Netscape does not support the PICS labels and providers. Even assuming that this situation changes, the onus would be on the internet user to purchase the necessary software, assuming it were to become commercially available, and cost alone could exclude many Aboriginal

appropriation has become one of the dominant paradigms." (FOD0781.html). Pockley's defence is that print images of Aborigines have been available for more than a century and that these images have been, are being and will continue to be digitally misused, and that a refusal to post images on the web is no barrier against such practices. This is not exactly true. While it wouldn't prevent a generalised misuse it would prevent the specific misuse of the images from the Davies expedition, which, of course, would effectively protect the descendants of these particular Indigenous subjects from possible offence.

communities from this kind of protection. The problem with the fourth level is less one of effectiveness, for it would most likely be quite effective, than the fact that the only persons with the right to view these surrogates would be the rightful owners of the objects that they represent, and a situation in which such persons would have to acquire permission, in the form of a password, from Simon Pockley to view their own cultural artefacts seems less than satisfactory.

In respect of the photographic component of *The Flight of Ducks* it must be concluded that not only have mortuary restrictions and other cultural regulations almost certainly been violated, but also, the site cannot guarantee that concerned parties will be protected from exposure to these violations. As well as this, many of the photographs can be described as compromising Aboriginal culture in terms of the fourth area identified by Michaels: “devices that isolate Aborigines and constitute them as exotic rather than contemporary peoples, or otherwise depict Aborigines in what they judge to be a negative manner”. This area cannot be accommodated by any of the four levels. It is dealt with partly through maintaining that the images are not in the main derogatory, partly through an open invitation to discussion and debate⁴⁸, and partly through a curtailed or mitigated acknowledgment of

⁴⁷ There is a degree of uncertainty concerning the precise cultural identity of some of the people depicted in the images but it is thought most likely that they would belong to these groups.

⁴⁸ The e-mail access and the fact that all e-mail is finally included as part of the site means that quite scathing critiques of the images can and do become part of the site. In

the problematic status of some of the images. Some of the photographs are certainly problematic: for instance, a shot of mother and daughter, taken so as to highlight a genetic abnormality, is a troubling disclosure of the intrusive scientism of the expedition *per se*. Some steps have been taken to make the image less accessible. There is a warning screen, and the thumbnail image in the combing screen (a kind of index through which one can access the images in larger size) has been purposely blurred⁴⁹. There is also a critical examination of the image in which it is acknowledged as an instance of subjection. The following is an excerpt from that examination:

I have referred to several photographs that might be considered prime examples of an 'ethnographic gaze'. The most politically difficult example must surely be the extraordinary photograph of mother and daughter standing in the spinifex of the rocky slope of Mount Liebig. The photograph was taken to record a double nipple genetic abnormality. In arrangement, it shows the concerns and interests of a young medical student. Again it is a clinical shot. The two women are shown sided by side so that their breasts can be compared. The daughter's knee is bent and she is looking away as though she is anxious to leave... Such an image may no longer be acceptable for display when seen from the perspective of feminist politics or indigenous representation. Should it be removed or censored? Can it be overwritten with other texts in order to place it into political and ideological contexts? Does it show more about the man that took it than it does about the subjects? (FOD/FOD0781.html)

theory this means that Pockley is far from having the final word on such matters. In practice, however, one wonders whether the e-mail component is not finally condemned to the status of secondary text, something like newspapers' letters to the editor (the e-mails are also edited by Pockley).

⁴⁹ The effectiveness of this blurring is questionable. There is a possibility that the blurring actually provokes the viewer to click on the image before the un-blurred images.

Such critical reflexivity distinguishes the site from other material discussed in this chapter and it is tempting to view *The Flight of Ducks* as embracing the attitudes and sensibilities of more enlightened times. This is not, however, exactly how Pockley himself sees it. According to Pockley, “[d]iscussion about the taking and presentation of pictures has been part of a public display of *white guilt* over ethnographic appropriation since the 1970’s” (FOD/FOD0781.html my italics). The idea of “white guilt” as the real motivation for the diverse expressions of a movement towards reconciliation continues to inform attacks on what is sometimes called “political correctness”. The key to Pockley’s position lies in his use of the phrase “politically difficult”. Such a phrase subordinates the problem of the pain and offence that the display of such images may cause, to the problem of critical attacks from women, Aborigines and other concerned parties. The image is simply difficult “politically”; there is no acknowledgment of the unquestionable moral difficulties for the subjects. The problem is represented as purely one of point of view; the image is only unacceptable “when seen from the perspective of feminist politics or indigenous representation”. It is helpful at this point to turn once more to Michaels’ primer:

Every society regulates the recording and publication of images of its citizenry to protect certain human rights valued by that society... Even in the Western democracies, the “freest” of expressions is constrained by accepted cultural values that mass media are not entitled to breach. Pictures of Princess Diana drunk, runny nosed, or lying in the gutter [or displaying a genetic

abnormality], for example, would not be permissible for public display anywhere... What constitutes slander, plagiarism, or indecent or offensive displays is a characteristic specific to any particular culture, and so is likely to vary from one culture to another. To understand what constitutes a moral offense in cultures other than one's own, precise ethnographic examples are necessary. (Michaels 2)

Having dismissed discussion of the taking and presentation of pictures as part of a public display of white guilt, Pockley probably wasn't predisposed to following Michaels' guidelines. Michaels' primer is unambiguous concerning the acceptability of the display of images such as this one of mother and daughter. However, as the primer makes clear, it is finally up to Aboriginal people themselves to determine what is unacceptable, and this is why Michaels assigns the absolute highest priority to a process of consultation with those concerned. While there is evidence of Pockley going to some lengths to consult, there is no evidence that any consultation took place prior to the material being posted on the web; in fact it would appear that the material was posted prior to attempts to consult. Pockley's strategy has been to display the images and then call for discussion and debate. However, in respect of the image of mother and daughter the posing of the question "Should it be removed or censored?" is purely rhetorical, seeing as resounding responses in the affirmative have all been ignored.

Censorship is anathema to Pockley; insistence that he censor the site is simply dismissed as politically motivated. For instance,

the RMIT University⁵⁰ Human Research Ethics Committee's request that he remove the photographs and journals from the university server is described by Pockley as an attempt "to align with political movements by asserting authority through censorship" (FOD /FOD0781.html). He conceives of a highly polarised political struggle to control the past, or the right to narrate the past, in which he is on the side of pluralism, openness and access, while others - including "an industry of itinerant non-Aboriginal advisers" - seek either to exercise exclusive control over archival materials, allow only a single version of history, or to obliterate the past altogether. If such a struggle can in fact be said to exist, given that *The Flight of Ducks* continues to expand free from the forces of censorship, it would have to be concluded that Pockley, with the aid of digital network technology, has managed a resounding victory.

remember

Of course, print, photography and computing are all, in the first instance, mnemonic devices, technologies for remembering. Pockley's use of the digital is first and foremost a way of preserving, a means of sending the past into the future, a method of creating cultural memory or history. Central Australian Aborigines do not share this valuing of memory; in fact they may in certain circumstances believe it important to destroy records of the past. Through the modern's need to send the past in to the future others have been subjected to technically ordered systems (including

⁵⁰ *The Flight of Ducks* was Pockley's PhD research project at RMIT.

para-ethnography) designed to prevent forgetting or to enforce certain rememberings. Nietzsche's comments on the foundations of cultural memory seem applicable here:

...there is, perhaps, nothing more frightening and more sinister in the whole prehistory of man than his technique for remembering things Things never proceeded without blood, torture, and victims, when man thought it necessary to forge a memory for himself. (Nietzsche 42)

While violence is not a recognised component of the modern's mnemotechnics, attempts to understand the shape of contemporary knowledges need to take into account the role of force and control in their development and deployment. Writing and its new technologies may replace violence as instruments of cultural inscription but they are not without application as instruments of coercion. From the collective rise of manuscript, theology and the church, to the joint expansion of micro-electronics, cybernetics and the modern military, the partnership of technologies of remembering, organised knowledge and imperialist institutions of force is well established⁵¹.

In *Time and The Other*, Joseph Fabian explores the place of classical mnemotechnics in the formation of Western knowledge (1983: 111). Ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians invented a system of

⁵¹ Both satellite communications and digital communications began with military backed research; even the internet grew out of ARPANET, a U.S. Defence Department backed project to electronically link four major universities.

training for the memory, a topographical system, the Method of Loci, an imagery mnemonics that consisted of selecting a sequence of places that could be easily visualised and ordered in time and place. The material to be remembered is coded into discreet images and each of the images is inserted into the appropriate order into the various loci. To memorise a speech, you transform the main points into concrete images and mentally place each of the points in order at each successive locus. A fragment of discourse is now, through the attachment to topographical imagery, stored permanently in memory and available for retrieval and circulation. Fabian argues that this structuring of memory, and consequently of discourse, developed through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and came to define “the nature of any kind of knowledge that is communicated with an intent to convince, to win over an audience” (110). In Fabian’s terms, it might be said that para-ethnography inscribes graphic and lexical images of remote Australia and its Indigenous inhabitants and uses them as rhetorical topoi in an encoding of the tropology of modernity’s unfolding. The popular ethnography is a mnemonic configuration that preserves and promotes the thematics of the modern and obfuscates the viewpoint of the Other. It takes as its subject the lived space of the Other and synthesises, according to the dictates of mnemotechnics and disembodied knowledges, a utilitarian object.

In *The Red Center* (1935) by H.H. Finlayson there is a photograph entitled ‘Mootchita’. In the photograph an Anangu man,

Mootchita, poses with spears and spear thrower. In the background, on the edge of a huge expanse of desert plain, a mulga forest stretches to the foot of a mountain range in faint silhouette. This image, however, has nothing to do with either living bodies or lived space. Captioned - "An Everard Ranges man, leaving camp on a fifty mile walk, with a 'paper yabber' (message for a white man)" - the photograph communicates this message - the lived space of the Other is now coded space, inscribed with communication pathways, circuitry for the transmission and storage of Western memory - "a cosmos for Western [knowledge] to inhabit" (Fabian 111). But what exists for the modern largely as a notional, rectilinear topography, a sphere of strategic importance but little real meaning, remains for Anangu, Pintubi, Warlpiri, Luritja, Kukatja, Ngarti, Yulparitja, Mardu, Walmatjarri and Arrente a field of familiarity and concern, a domain in which time and space are an intricately fibred constellation of cultural significance.⁵²

It may seem that we have strayed far from the central ideas and concerns of the major portion of this chapter, and that we are now in rather different territory. This is not the case. *The Flight of Ducks*, while different in many respects from the previous material discussed in this chapter, is very much a product of the same constructs and forces that influenced the shape and content of the other texts. *Ducks*

⁵² Used here is Roland Barthes' definition of significance: "meaning in so far as it is sensually produced" (Barthes, 1975: 61).

represents, like the work of Mountford *et al*, a forced expansion of the modern expressing itself through the application of its own technologies (print, photography, computing) in service of its own principles and values. In Mountford, writing and photography are instruments that allow the reproduction and widespread dissemination of values such as 'science', 'mankind', 'enlightenment' and so on⁵³. In *The Flight of Ducks* these same technologies (plus the newer electronic, digital network technologies) are used to reproduce newer values of the modern such as 'information', 'openness and access', 'communication' and 'memory'. Of course, in reality there is no meaningful separation between such values and the technologies themselves. As Heidegger has argued technology is not, as it may appear, something that we bring under our control but a power that defines our values and beliefs. In the case of information processing we are seeing, as with print and photography, a technology that is seamlessly compatible with the goals and values of the West (the modern) because such technologies both embody and determine these values.

⁵³ The 1982 court action pursued by the Pitjantjatjara Council to retrieve the products of Mountford's technological gathering is a reminder that such values are far from universal.

part two

problems

race, crime, fiction

Focussing upon a relatively small selection of texts¹ this chapter analyses the representation of Aboriginality in the popular genre of crime fiction. An Aboriginality emerges that is very obviously shaped by the concerns of a genre devoted to the problematisation of otherness. The central place of sexuality in these representations is considered and correspondences in the construction of Aboriginality and criminality are noted. Special attention is paid to the figure of the Aboriginal of mixed descent in both the sexualised imagining and the politicised problematisation of Aboriginality. The place of these representations of Aboriginality and criminality in the larger dispersed field of governmentality is noted.²

¹ *Death in Dreamtime* (1993, first published 1959) by S.H. Courtier; *Bony and the Black Virgin* (1968, first published 1959), *The Barrakee Mystery* (1965, first published 1929), and *The Will of the Tribe* (1972, first published 1962) by Arthur Upfield; *Venus Half-Caste* (1963) by Leonard Mann; and the 1996 film *Dead Heart*. Included also is a brief consideration of Chauvel's 1955 film *Jedda*, as well as a discussion of the sculpture of William Ricketts.

² This chapter relies upon Michel Foucault's definition of governmentality. Foucault (1988: 18) defines governmentality as an institutional and tactical ensemble composed of "socially assembled human technologies", which include:

1. technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform and manipulate things;
2. technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;
3. technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends and domination, an objectivising of the subject;
4. technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

race and desire

The texts discussed in this chapter are characterised by their thematisation of race and desire. In these representations a racialised social order is rendered discernible largely in terms of its vulnerability to sexual desire. Emphasising the racialised order's precarious susceptibility to diffusion through desire the texts construct the inter-racial as a significant focus point for regulation, surveillance and control.

While it is widely acknowledged that racial categorisation has no scientific value, that is, that biological definitions of race based upon phenotypal variation are in fact spurious, race remains a profoundly influential and enduring concept in Western discourse (Young, L. 39). Race is *not* an empirical classification but an ideological instrument that generates "a set of imaginary properties" used to fix and endorse orders of domination and subordination in terms of "genealogies of generic difference" (Cohen 23). According to David Goldberg (1993: 211) the history of race is the history of a technology whose function has been to "naturalise difference and normalise exclusions".

The origins of scientific theorising of race are traceable to the eighteenth century but it was the nineteenth century that was to embrace this theorising most fully. In this century theories of racial difference were developed, refined and elaborated until they acquired the status of science and gospel. But as Robert Young (1995: 181) notes,

these theories were about more than essentialising differentiations between same and other:

...they were also about a fascination with people having sex - interminable, adulterating, aleatory, illicit, inter-racial sex.

Since the nineteenth century racialised Others have been constructed in discourses that simultaneously sexualise and dehumanise. Robert Young (1991) cites the example of Edward Long, the so-called father of British racism, who repeatedly compares African women to apes³, even positing a polygenist theory of race, but at the same time obsessively dwells upon black sexuality and “the sexual attractiveness of black flesh”. Racialised knowledges often constructed the Other as hypersexual (Young, 1991: 42); the mythology of the hyper-sexual black man is well known, and Sander Gilman (1985), writing about Sarah Bartmann, the “Hottentot Venus”, shows how science extended this logic of an increased propensity for sexual coupling to include the black woman. At the same time as seeking to exclude, discourses of race ascribed to the racialised Other a potent sexuality characterised by virility, fecundity and abandon; that which it sought to render repellent it also charged with eroticism.

The question of why racism and racialised theory should be so intimately bound up with sexuality and desire is one that many critics

³ The following especially repellent quote from Long is cited by many critics to illustrate the stupefying pathology of nineteenth century theories of race: “Ludicrous as it may seem I do not think that an oran outang (sic) husband would be any dishonour to an Hottentot female” (Edward Long cited in L. Young 1991: 47; Gilman 1985; Walvin 1990: 52).

have sought to answer. As might be expected, psychoanalytic theory has been a recurrent ingredient in attempts to explain this seemingly contradictory coupling. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, a text informed by Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, is often cited in support of psychoanalytic approaches to the question of racism and desire (Young, L (1996); Young, R (1995); Gilman, S (1993)). According to Stallybrass and White "disgust always bears the imprint of desire" (191). Their argument is that bourgeois exclusion of the "low Other" necessarily involves the inclusion of that construct as "a primary eroticised constituent of its own fantasy life"(5), or in other words, the bourgeois subject defines himself through the exclusion of that which is inscribed as abject or "low", but that which is socially repressed ineluctably returns as longing and fascination.⁴

An alternative (or perhaps a complement) to theories that locate the origins of racialised desire in the socio-political fact of repression is offered by Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1979). According to Ann Laura Stoler (1995) Foucault's thesis - that discourses of sexuality and specific forms of power are inextricably bound - is essential to an understanding of colonialism and the association of race and desire. In

⁴ This simultaneous attraction and repulsion, or ambivalence, which is said to lie at the very heart of racism, has been the productive foundation of Homi Bhabha's analysis of colonial discourse (Bhabha 1994). Locating ambivalence in all forms of colonial discourse, Bhabha, attempts to demonstrate how this polar oscillation effectively destabilises the power of the discourse rendering ambiguous and uncertain that which it seeks to subject and marginalise.

volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, in response to the Freudian account of Victorian prudery, “the repressive hypothesis” (the widespread belief that since the nineteenth century sexuality has been silenced, hidden and repressed) Foucault proposes a very different idea:

For many years we have all been living... under the spell of an immense curiosity about sex, bent on questioning it, with an insatiable desire to hear it speak and be spoken about, quick to invent all sorts of magical rings that might force it to abandon its discretion... But is sex hidden from us, concealed by a new sense of decency, kept under a bushel by the grim necessities of bourgeois society? On the contrary, it shines forth; it is incandescent. (Foucault, 1979: 77)

According to this view, the history of sexuality is not structured or defined by repression but by “patterned discursive incitements and stimulations that facilitated the penetration of social and self-disciplinary regimes into the most intimate domains of modern life” (Stoler 3). Sexuality is a historical construct in which “the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power” (Foucault, 1979:106). Far from being hidden sexuality is an ever-proliferating discourse, “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” endowed with great “instrumentality”(Foucault, 1979: 103).

Among the relations of power in which sexuality functions instrumentally, Foucault cites the relation between an administration and a

population, which, of course, includes the relations between colonial administrations and their populations of colonisers and colonised. Applying Foucault's thesis to Western colonialism Stoler shows that the discursive management of the sexual practices of the coloniser and colonised was fundamental to the colonial order of things. To the four figures Foucault identifies as the privileged objects, targets and anchorage points for knowledge and power centering on sex in the nineteenth century - the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, the perverse adult - Stoler adds the figure of the colonised. According to Stoler, in the nineteenth century Foucault's figures did not exist without reference to the "racially erotic counterpoint" of the savage, the primitive, the colonised (7).

While Foucault does not concentrate upon the figure of the colonised in the history of sexuality he does link discourses of sexuality with the construction of race. Beginning with the emergence in the eighteenth century of a discourse that correlated sex, the body, health and hygiene - a discourse whose racial grammar was implicit - Foucault analyses how sexuality as discourse comes to express and eventually incorporate a racist logic. In accordance with other historians and critics Foucault identifies the nineteenth century as the period in which racism acquired the modern form that was to culminate in the atrocities of the twentieth century. According to Foucault it was in the late nineteenth century that technologies of sex and questions of race became most

completely enmeshed through “scientific” focus upon the concept of “degenerescence”:

The series composed of perversion-heredity-degenerescence formed the solid nucleus of the new technologies of sex... Psychiatry, to be sure, but also jurisprudence, legal medicine, agencies of social control, *the surveillance of dangerous or endangered children*, all functioned for a long time on the basis of “degenerescence” and the heredity-perversion system. An entire social practice, which took the exasperated but coherent form of *a state directed racism*, furnished this technology of sex with a formidable power and far-reaching consequences. (Foucault 118-119 *my italics*)

This passage has specific relevance to Australia where the concept of degenerescence fuelled and legitimated “a state directed racism” which involved, among other strategies, the removal of mixed descent Aboriginal children from their family homes and rearing them in institutions run by church and state. The long-term goal of institutions such as “Sister Kate’s Quarter-Caste Home” in Perth’s southern suburbs was to “breed out the colour”⁵ through the encouragement of “correct mating”⁶. Firmly

⁵ This policy of “breeding out the colour” was pursued up until the second world war after which racial eugenics fell into disrepute. Removal of “half-caste” children continued after the war but the policy of “breeding out the colour” was not explicitly pursued. Many Australians, including a number of prominent politicians, have denied that “breeding out the colour” was ever a governmental policy. Robert Manne (2001) cites government documents from the period that demonstrate clearly that “breeding out the colour” was government policy and was actively and forcibly pursued. The crucial file concerning Commonwealth government support for the policy of “breeding out the colour” is held by the Australian Archives at Canberra, AA ACT A659/1 40/1/408 (Manne 110).

⁶ A.O. Neville, Western Australian Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915 until 1940, details his plan for “correct mating” in his book, *Australia’s Coloured Minority*: “It seems apparent with these people of European Aboriginal origin that like breeds like - two half-bloods will produce children of similar blood and not of quarter blood as many people think - and therefore it requires the admixture of further white blood to alter the ratio and

committed to the project of breeding out the colour, Sister Kate (Katherine Clutterbuck), once remarked to WA's Chief Protector that she objected to the "marriage" of two "quadroons" preferring instead that these girls married whites (Omaji & Beresford, 44).⁷



THREE GENERATIONS

(Reading from Right to Left)

1. Half-blood—(Irish Australian father; full blood Aboriginal mother);
2. Quadroon Daughter—(Father Australian born of Scottish parents; Mother No. 1);
3. Octogenon Grandson—(Father Australian of Irish descent; Mother No. 2);

"breeding out the colour" [image taken from A.O. Neville's Australia's Coloured Minority (1947)]

produce the quadroon ... the more they mix with us the more like us they become, and the less likelihood of reversion to the Aboriginal type." (Neville p68 cited in Beresford & Omaji 1998: 52)

⁷ The primary objective of these institutions, the subsumption of all signs of "degenerescence" into the greater "health" of the European social body, was pursued not only through the administration of the sexual practices of the colonised, but through an entire regime of social control that drew together techniques of spatial arrangement, domestic organisation, the ordering of time, hygiene practices, and medical knowledge to supplant all traces of Aboriginal ways of living with a white bourgeois habitus. These institutions were the quintessence of disciplinary "bio-power" as described by Foucault; for example, Sister Kate's home consisted of a collection of "neat" cottages each complete with an artificial bourgeois family structure headed by a "father" who went to work and a "mother" who prepared meals and disseminated the dogma of the "spic and span". The bodies of the colonised were subjected to a disciplinary regime that was

The theory of degeneracy secured the relationship between racism and sexuality: “[it] conferred abnormality on individual bodies, casting certain deviations as both internal dangers to the body politic and as inheritable legacies that threatened the well being of a race” (Stoler 31). The eugenicist projects of A.O. Neville, Sister Kate and Dr Cecil Cook sought to preserve and protect the white body from Aboriginal influence and to ensure the continuity of European dominance. They represent the extremes of a national social body’s drastic defense against its imagined enemies within.

The texts analysed in this chapter are not removed from the violent materiality of this state authorised racism. Far from benign entertainment they are integral components in the “socially assembled human technologies” (Foucault, 1988: 18) of a governmentality that includes, among its ensemble of defensive strategies against internal and external dangers to the body politic, eugenics, detention, vilification, brutalisation, and genocide. The texts’ status as popular fiction is secondary to their role as discursive elaborations on race and sexuality that link the governing of a colonised population to the governing of the self, and correlate the maintenance of bourgeois hegemony with personal moral conduct. Constructing the intimate meeting of black and white bodies as an originating site of danger and disorder they furnish the

effectively the micro-politics of the cleansing, maintenance and invigoration of the bourgeois social body.

symbolic scaffolding essential to the repressive governance of a colonised population. Fundamental to this undertaking is the identification of enemies within. Certain figures and positions are constructed as threatening the security of the dominant order: the figure of the potent Aboriginal man or the seductive Aboriginal woman; the figure of the Aboriginal of mixed descent; the figure of the “weak link” in the white bourgeois order including the psychologically disturbed, the morally degenerate and the pathologically criminal; and, finally, certain ideological positions - including various idealising primitivisms, cultural hybridities, progressive or reformist political agendas and Aboriginal resistance politics - that can be represented as dissipating or treacherous. Drawing distinctions between normality and abnormality, health and pathology, respectability and deviance, these texts are powerful technologies of the colonial self, which employ the concept of degenerescence in a routine policing of the borders of the dominant order.

death in dreamtime

In the annals of Australian fiction there could be few books stranger than S.H. Courtier's *Death in Dreamtime* (1959). As the book is not widely known, despite a 1993 reprint, a brief retelling is in order. The plot of *Death in Dreamtime* unfolds against the backdrop of Dream Time Land, a tourist resort and theme park featuring a series of nine realistic dioramas that supposedly depict elements of the mythos of the Aranda people of Central Australia. Focusing in particular upon ceremonies such as male

initiation the dioramas luridly emphasise the carnal. The novel opens with the suspicious death of a Dream Time Land employee. Inspector 'Digger' Haig, the detective, arrives just in time for the start of the evening tour. A coded message left by the murder victim is produced, and during the course of the tour the detective deciphers the message, but not in time to prevent two further murders. The message reads - "blackmail *atna arilta kuma*". *Atna arilta kuma* is supposedly the rite for Aboriginal girls corresponding to circumcision in boys. The initiates are "deflowered" with a stone knife after which the elders performing the ceremony "enter into them"⁸ (Courtier 74). It is soon revealed that the orchestrators of Dream Time Land, Carl Rusking and Julie Flax, have been involved in a blackmail scheme. Women guests are duped into participating in a simulated *atna arilta kuma*, which takes place in a hidden underground enclosure on the perimeter of Dream Time Land.⁹ The women are photographed and the photographs are then used for the purpose of blackmail. When the detective finally ties together all of the clues, Rusking is exposed as the blackmailer, Flax as the murderer, and the Aboriginal participant in *atna arilta kuma* turns out to be the local police constable in blackface.

⁸ According to Tolley and Moss, the authors of the afterword of the 1993 reprint of *Death in Dreamtime*, evidence for the existence of *atna arilta kuma* among the Aranda can be found in *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* by Spencer and Gillen (1899) and Strehlow's *Die Aranda und Loritja: Stamme in Zentral-Australien* (1907).

⁹ Inspector 'Digger' Haig says of this enclosure: "no place for trumpery inhibitions. In this place of primitive power and mystic experience, the trappings of civilisation must be cast aside." (*Dreamtime* 172)

The novel evokes a powerful sense of the uncanny. This is partly due to its thematising of desire for brutal and racialised sexual penetration, which must have been pushing the envelope of propriety for the subject matter of popular fiction in this period. However, the text's power to evoke the uncanny also resides in its representation of a social body, which has no Aboriginal members, and yet Aboriginality, as an assemblage of constructs with the power to incite fear and desire, is a central and determining force. Isolating signifiers from referents, and disclosing Aboriginality as technology and as an object of Western knowledge, *Death in Dreamtime* appears to anticipate insights normally associated with postmodernism and postcolonialism.

There are three aspects of Courtier's text that are especially pertinent to this chapter. Firstly, there are the dioramas themselves and what they suggest about the uses of Aboriginal representation. Secondly, there is the association of sexuality with Aboriginality and the association of each of these with deviance or criminality, or in other words, the representation of sexuality and Aboriginality as objects that call for policing. Finally, there is the place of the text itself in a larger domain of governmentality, which constructs Aboriginality and interracial desire as problems for social governance.

diorama and desire

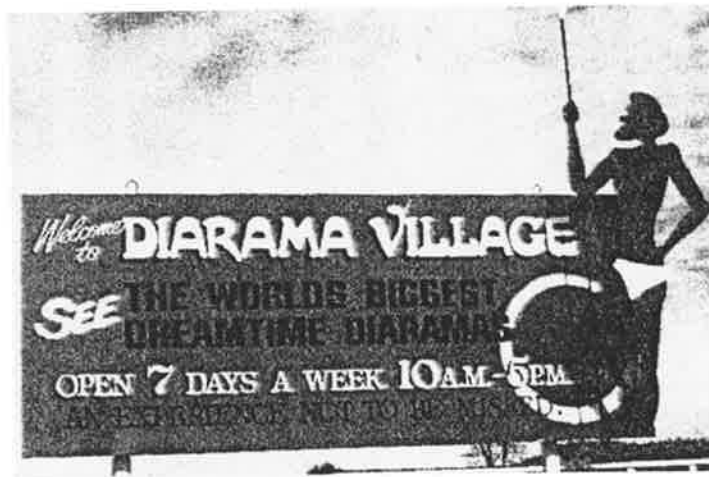
As a setting for a murder mystery a theatre of figurines has definite advantages. Like a waxworks museum - the setting for more than one

classic horror film - murder is enacted surrounded by the signifying power of the already lifeless: the proximity of the living and the dead is forever in the foreground. Certainly, the power of Courtier's novel as thriller is very much enhanced by the atmospherics of death that the dioramas evoke. Most importantly, of course, the dioramas furnish a safe means for the investigation of proscribed desires.

The dioramas facilitate exploration of ostensibly taboo subjects. In using the dioramas in this way *Dreamtime* becomes a text whose primary subject is Aboriginality as representation rather than Aboriginality itself. The novel is not immediately concerned with anything Aboriginal but with those who represent Aboriginality and those who consume such representations. Through the dioramas *Dreamtime* unconceals the representation of Aboriginality as instrumentality. Performing functions and servicing needs and desires the dioramas have a number of specific uses: they ethnographise or reproduce Aboriginality as knowledge; they primitivise or define the territory of the modern; they facilitate seeing as pleasure, as knowledge, and as power. Through techniques of miniaturisation and manipulation - but also through assimilation or denial of the other's otherness - they divest the other of its power; they incite desire and consequently petition a policing of the boundaries of the racialised order.

Dream Time Land is something like ethnography's Coney Island: sharing ethnography's aim of making others appear intelligible, it combines this with popular entertainment's aim of producing pleasure through contraption, contrivance and ease of consumption. Dream Time Land¹⁰ processes info-tainment from the raw materials of popular myth, paper mache and the *petit fait vrais* of colonial ethnography.

Ungamilia is not entirely a product of the author's imagination. Courtier based his Dreamtime dioramas upon actual Dreamtime theme parks. The image below depicts a promotional billboard for such a theme park.



ethnography's Coney Island

On the face of it the feasibility of such commercial enterprises would seem to lie in a widespread interest in Aboriginal culture. However, to view such projects solely in terms of a benign cultural curiosity leaves

¹⁰ Dream Time Land is also known by the name Ungamilia, supposedly an Aranda word for evening star. Given that the evening star is Venus, the goddess of love, this is

much unexplained, not least of which, the absence of the supreme authority on such matters, Aboriginal people themselves. The Dreamtime diorama is better understood as an attempt to make the other governable, to deprive it of its power. The dioramas stand not for the other but for the other ostensibly subjugated, rendered intelligible and manageable. They function to offset the shock of alterity¹¹ by creating the illusion that the other exists within the power and knowledge of the same.

In Dream Time Land seeing the other is in fact a form of self-reproduction. There is no return gaze, no danger of becoming an object for an Aboriginal subject because there is no Aboriginal subject; there is only a collection of Aboriginalised signs arranged according to the dictates of prevailing discourses of nation, race and sexuality. While appearing to encourage a coming together of genuinely heterogeneous elements, in Dream Time Land difference is simply that which demands assimilation:

If there is one impression I want you to take away from Dream Time Land, it is that basically the Aborigine has *the same* feelings, desires, hopes fears and aims as we have. (Courtier 113 *my italics*)

In *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993) Michael Taussig analyses the strategic use of mimesis amongst the Cuna Indians of Central America. From the

probably a reference to the erotic power of the dioramas.

¹¹ This point is made by Colin Davis (1996) in a discussion of Levinasian ethics: "The ontological imperialism of Western thought manifests itself in different forms, but the hidden purpose is always to find a means of offsetting the shock of alterity" (40).

earliest beginnings of colonisation, the Cuna, operating upon the knowledge that “in some way or another one can protect oneself from evil spirits by portraying them”, have produced figurine likenesses of “those who come in ships” - the others from the West (Taussig 12). Taussig observes how this form of representation functions to convert the threat of the strange into an affirmation of the ‘truths’ of Cuna culture. Through mimetic technology a form of possession at a distance is made possible: the unknowable becomes knowable, the desirable safely obtainable, and the other is brought into a sphere of familiarity in which its alterity is assimilated and accommodated as a productive entity within Cuna meta-narratives. With this strategy, contact with the West actually renews the structures of Cuna culture and their own regimes of truth are reaffirmed. Novelty is used by the Cuna in order to remain the same. This kind of tactical deployment of the figurine has obvious parallels with Dreamtime dioramas. Courtier’s dioramas are a way of remaining the same in the face of alterity.

The parallels between Cuna culture and the fictional realm of Dream Time Land extend to the management of longing for others. In Cuna society the erotic power of the other was greatly feared. Dreaming of sexual encounters with Westerners was regarded as an illness that must be treated. Believing that the inevitable consequence of such dreaming was community collapse the treatment for dreamers was rather drastic: “the Cuna Indians used to give poison to those who were subject to dreams of this description. Occasionally they burnt them” (Taussig

130). According to Taussig, “if the ethnographic literature is accurate”¹², the more drastic cures for dreaming these dreams were reserved for Cuna women. One imagines that Cuna women would have acquired the habit of keeping dreams to themselves. Certainly the women dreamers of Dream Time Land seek to conceal such longings, however, the plot of *Dreamtime* unfolds from the threat that dreams of this nature will be made public. Blackmail is possible because the fear of punishment is strong: a society of colonisers will have little sympathy for women whose desires are for the colonised. Ann Stoler (135) notes that in both colony and metropole bourgeois women were cast as the custodians of morality and of national character. That these guardians of the common weal should also be desiring subjects susceptible to uncontrollable, or at least uncontrolled, sexual feelings was a source of great anxiety. Consequently, discourse was enlisted to police this threat to the social body. In some places, the Americas for instance, this actually translated into legislation specifically targeting the white woman as desiring subject (Stoler 41). Elsewhere technologies of the self and technologies of sign systems were mobilised for the same purpose. Representing the anxieties that surround the desire of the bourgeois woman in a colonial setting, narratives such as *Death in Dreamtime* are integral to the technologies of racialised governmentality.

¹² Taussig emphasises the possible inaccuracy of the ethnographic literature because he notes a recurrent tendency for ethnography to project Western values on to its subject.

Dream Time Land represents the enacting of a border between same and other. Taussig thinks of such borders as a source of identity whose tangibility rests upon mimesis:

Rather than thinking of the border as the farthestmost extension of an essential identity spreading out from a core... think instead of the border itself as the core. In other words, identity acquires its satisfying solidity because of the effervescence of the continuously sexualised border, because of the turbulent forces, sexual and spiritual, that the border not so much contains as emits. (Taussig 151)

This same logic can be applied to Dream Time Land. Through representation a sexualised border is manufactured as a source of bourgeois identity. In Foucauldian terms the border invoked by the dioramas is evidence of normalising power in action. Erotically charged mimetic objects are used expressly to stimulate, incite and force the disclosure of sexuality as degenerescence. In so doing a border between normality and deviance is rendered hyper-visible, policing is summoned, enemies within are exposed, and social and self-disciplinary regimes are able to penetrate "the most intimate domains of modern life" (Stoler 3).

While Foucault might see Dream Time Land as signifying the remarkable success of bio-power, *Death in Dreamtime* is as much a manifestation of bourgeois anxiety as an expression of bourgeois confidence. Through forms of mimesis - dioramas, blackface,

The inference is that the greater anxieties concerning relations between women and

photography - alterity is represented and a border between same and other is made concrete. However, the women dreamers of Dream Time Land have not simply sought to imitate Aboriginality, but have sought initiation through penetration: They signify the much feared force of hybridity, a becoming-Aboriginal that policies such as "breeding out the colour" sought to protect the social body from. The bourgeois woman, custodian of morality and guardian of national character, is shown to be precariously vulnerable to the power of the other and to possess a sexuality that is difficult to contain. That there are in fact no Aborigines matters little; the source of anxiety is the real possibility of the other's penetration of the most influential domains of colonial life.

Dream Time Land can be understood in terms of the Deleuzo/Guattarian concept of "antiproduction" (*Capitalism and Schizophrenia*). In the interpretative schema laid down by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in relations of production a creative power of desire is always present and relations are "mutually affective". In antiproduction, however, productive relations between "assemblages" are prevented from forming: preservation of the existing order rather than transformation or mutual "becoming" is the outcome. Applying this concept to Dream Time Land one *might* say that the codes, values, conventions and habits of one assemblage (white bourgeois) are simply applied to the cultural content of another (the Aranda). The Aranda, who are absent, remain unaffected by

Others - that are attributed to the Cuna - are possibly only in the eye of the interpreter.

this relation - and the relation between Aranda and Europeans remains unchanged - while Europeans simply re-establish their territory using de-contextualised fragments of Aranda culture. Taking this view the dioramas function to impede changing relations and to prevent Europeans becoming Aranda-like.

But can it definitely be said that the Europeans are not becoming Aranda-like? After all they are passionately consuming Aranda myths and adopting Aranda ritual, language and iconography. Similarly can it also be said that the absent Aranda are not becoming European-like? They are absent from this bourgeois showspace (or are they?) but are they not also acquiring and utilising English, Christianity, German, football and so on and so on? Has each drawn the other onto its line of flight "in a combined deterritorialisation" (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 44 in Muecke 1992)? Is there a mutual becoming that Courtier's text is a reaction against?

Driving the *Dreamtime* narrative is the fear of a powerful and ultimately ungovernable other. Oddly, and yet appropriately, this is most concisely unconcealed in the form of Ungamilia's parrot - "Genghis Khan". Nomadic, destructive, thoroughly contemptuous of borders this lawless other exhibits many of the more disquieting attributes of his namesake. Severing electric cables and decimating dioramas the parrot's appetites lay bare the flimsiness of *Dreamtime's* esteemed

representations, and plunge all into darkness. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 354) note that historians have always conceptualised the nomadic Genghis Khan as the one who understands nothing - "he didn't understand the phenomenon of the city": this is the meaning of Khan for the state, this is what the nomad represents to bourgeois hegemony. In *Reading the Country* (1984) Stephen Muecke shows how this misunderstanding of the nomad, as the one who doesn't understand, applies in the relationship of Aborigines to the state. According to Muecke, it is not that Aborigines as nomads misunderstand the state but rather that they resist its formation and in so doing represent an exteriority that is truly unsettling:

For the state, nomadism constitutes a threat from the outside... The citadels of the state distrust the nomads because they don't know where this other dynamism will lead. They can't reduce the activities of the nomads to just one effect, so that they can say, finally, *that* is what they are like, *that* is what they do all the time. The nomads guard their secrets, and they move too fast for the grounded organisation of the state. (Muecke 1984: 244)

Freely traversing the smooth spaces of the exterior, entering "the citadel" only to plunder and destroy, Genghis Khan is a superb symbol of danger to the striated enclosure of Dream Time Land. But it is as *mimic* as well as nomad that Genghis Khan is able to expose the precarious vulnerability of the Dream Time Land project: "[t]he effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing"

(Bhabha, 1994: 86). Parroting the profanity of the patriarch¹³ Genghis Khan forces the recognition that the master's voice is reproducible, that its schemes are well understood, and that it too is mocked.

the suspect comes to light

According to Alison Young (1996: 89) the work of the detective of popular fiction is to "make the crime come (in)to light". In *Death in Dreamtime* "bringing to light" - the objective of all detective fiction - has meaning on a number of levels: the murderers' identities are brought to light, photography brings the transgressions of the women dreamers to light, and electricity brings to light mysteries of the Aranda. The dioramas represent a world in which the puzzling and unknown is grasped through illumination. To bring to light is to lay bare and to render intelligible. According to Levinas to render intelligible is to deprive the Other of all mystery, to dissolve all enigma:

Intelligibility ... is the possibility for the Other to be determined by the Same without determining the Same, without introducing alterity into it; it is a free exercise of the Same (1969: 124).

To become intelligible is to become knowledge *for* the Same.¹⁴ The supreme metaphor for this instrumental grasping is light. Light exposes

¹³ Genghis Khan repeats over and over - "Damn you Austin Flax" (Austin Flax being the owner of the parrot and of Ungamalia).

¹⁴ The use of "light" in relation to knowledge has a long tradition. Scripture, for instance, is highly reliant upon metaphors of light: "Let there be Light!", "Light of the World", and so on (Dyer 108). In science light as a metaphor for knowing joins up with actual light both as an instrument and as an object of study. Dyer (109) traces this to eighteenth

the unknown to the possessive gaze of comprehension. Detective fiction is defined by movements from darkness to light, from mystery to mastery. Cracking codes and gathering clues, subjecting the anomalous to the penetrating force of reason, the crime fiction detective specialises in bringing to light.

Detective fiction's illumination of the enigmatic adheres to a well-known formula (Young, A. 81). The first basic element of this formula is, of course, the appearance of the unexplained or the unintelligible. The formula then calls for a person who is uniquely able to read the evidence that comes to light and solve the mystery. This process of illumination of furnished details calls upon a number of techniques: surveillance, interrogation (often facilitated by the use of a penetrating light), rational thought, intuitive leaps, forensic science, profiling and violence. The successful enactment of these procedures is invariably followed by the instant of disclosure in which the mystery is explained to the reader (who ideally has been "kept in the dark" until this point) and to the other characters who are, characteristically, clueless or guilty. This successful processing of the enigmatic into the intelligible resulting in the condemnation of the criminally responsible is then typically followed by a

century Europe when the "intense interest in literal light [in physics, in painting, in theatre] became inextricably linked with the human possibilities of knowing and spreading knowledge" and hence the Enlightenment. Levinas sees the metaphor of light, through its associations with comprehension and knowledge, as playing a determining role in the imperialism of Western thought: "What comes from the outside - illuminated - is comprehended, that is, comes from ourselves" (Levinas, 1978: 74).

sense of resolution or adjustment in which “the moral order resumes its correct functioning” (Young 82).

In *Death in Dreamtime* this formula is presented in duplicate. The emergence of the mystery is concurrent with the beginning of the evening tour of Dream Time Land. The enigma of the unsolved crime is paired with the enigma of the racialised other. The gradual revelation of the meaning of the clues, and subsequently the true nature of the crime and identity of the villain, parallels the passage through the dioramas and the disclosure of details of Aranda culture. By the final diorama the crime has been solved and both criminal and Aranda have come to light as carnal and brutal. Through the close association of racialised otherness and otherness as transgression *Dreamtime* communicates both a criminalised Aboriginality and an Aboriginalised criminality. The actual criminals’ attempt to divert blame, through the use of a blackface disguise, to a non-existent Aboriginal figure concisely discloses the central project of the novel: the imputation of all that is Aboriginal.

As discursive objects Aboriginality and criminality are produced within comparable semantic fields¹⁵. From a governmental viewpoint both Aboriginal and criminal are repeatedly approached as

¹⁵ Notoriously, nineteenth century scientism had an influential role to play here. Through the use of craniometry, craniology and other dubious techniques associations were forged between the bodies of the criminal, the insane and the racialised other; for example, see Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985.

problems to be solved: for example, Sir Paul Hasluck, architect of Australia's assimilationist policy, took the view that there was no serious difference between reforming a delinquent and assimilating an Aborigine (Manne 79). Historically, Aboriginality has been understood as an obstacle to a desired social order, and at various times governments address "the problem" that the persistence of Aboriginality appears to present to this order with many of the same tactics and technologies that are applied to criminality: relocation, internment, retraining and enforced labour. More recently, Steve Mickler (1998) has examined the way in which the police and the news media have worked together to produce a problematised and criminalised Aboriginality. Like crime fiction, news production grows out of the desire to visualise deviance (Ericson cited in Mickler 27). In a racialised settler state, in which a police force unfortunately afflicted with racism feeds the media their crime stories, the danger is always that the deviance that is visualised is also racialised. *Death in Dreamtime* visualises a deviance that is entirely racialised.

The light of detective fiction exposes more than the finer details of a crime and its perpetrator: a whole setting is illuminated revealing an intricate web of complicity between a milieu and a moment of crisis. This is evident in the work of Raymond Chandler where the moment of crisis (usually a murder) is firmly rooted in a Los Angeles corrupted at all levels by greed (Young 89). Crime fiction indulges a will to censure and just as Chandler's texts offer the reader the opportunity to

condemn not only the criminal but also the city consumed by greed, *Death in Dreamtime*, furnishes a situation for the denunciation of a social group seduced by the power of the other. Young (83) notes that a number of the Sherlock Holmes stories do not deal with a criminal offence as such but examine disruption or degenerescence in the middle class order. While *Death in Dreamtime* deals with a number of actual criminal offences the moment of crisis that comes “(in)to light” isn’t simply murder or blackmail but a disturbance to the normalised socius in which the commonly excluded has become *uncommonly* influential. In *Dreamtime* the other has moved from the smooth spaces of the never-never to the heartlands of middle class imagining and new relations of difference and desire are forming. Dream Time Land marks the site of an emergent hybridity, the Aboriginalisation of the non-Aboriginal, a becoming Aboriginal: “abnormal” associations and “monstrous” couplings constitute the suspect in *Death in Dreamtime*.

aboriginalism

In *Dreamtime* there are essentially *two* becomings Aboriginal, one majoritarian and one minoritarian¹⁶, and Courtier demonises them both. Minoritarian becoming pertains to the women who, drawn onto the other’s line of flight, through ritualised penetration originate an obliteration of majoritarian sexual mores. Majoritarian becoming corresponds to Dream

¹⁶ These are Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts. Majoritarian refers to the perspective belonging to the majority while minoritarian denotes transformations or experimentations of desire.

Time Land itself: in both its artistic composition and ethnographic content Dream Time Land typifies the Aboriginalist character of the nationalist upsurge of the 1940s and 1950s. After the Second World War a growing desire for radical independence from Britain intersected with an increasing interest in Aboriginal culture (Aboriginalism¹⁷), and consequently, for the first time, Aboriginal art, Aboriginal language, Aboriginal iconography and Aboriginal mythology became significant elements in non-Aboriginal Australian identity and cultural life¹⁸ (McLean 1998). In *Death in Dreamtime* the hybridity that this Aboriginalism represents is furnished with disastrous consequences: Dream Time Land is Courtier's representation of Aboriginalism, and *Death in Dreamtime* his scathing critique.

According to McLean the naming of the literary journal *Meanjin* (in the beginning *Meanjin* was completely unconcerned with Aboriginal culture but the Aboriginal name was chosen as a means of signifying the Australian-ness of the publication) is a typical early sign of the emerging Aboriginalist identity. However, the most pronounced expression of

¹⁷ A number of texts discussed in the first chapter of this thesis (for instance, Croll's *Wide Horizons*, Barrett's *Blackfellows of Australia*, Idriess's *Our Living Stone Age*) are described by McLean as preparing the ground for the Aboriginalism of the forties and fifties: "Barrett and others like him imagined a spiritual accord with a lost primitivism in which non-Aboriginal Australians, much like ripping yarns heroes, achieved a higher spirituality than their decadent brothers in Europe..."(87).

¹⁸ It should be noted that while these nationalist expressions were quintessentially majoritarian (by virtue of the fact that they involve an appropriation of difference into identity) that they were in no way associated with a majority of Australians: Courtier's caricatures of Aboriginalists as bohemians, dreamers, and outsiders probably isn't far from the truth.

Aboriginalism through the medium of the literary was undoubtedly the writing that developed through the *Jindyworobak Review*. Supposedly an Aboriginal word meaning to join, Jindyworobak, was intended to convey the notion of an ideal fusion between Aboriginal and European tradition (Elliott xxvii). The “Jindys” made extensive use of Aboriginal mythos and language in a concerted effort to fashion a distinctive Australian literature. The following lines by Rex Ingamells (the founding father of Jindyworobakism) are a characteristic attempt to blend the musical sonority of Aboriginal lexis with the rhythms of European verse:

Far in Moorawathimeering
safe from wallan darenderong tallabilla
waitjurk, wander
silently the whole day long
 (“Moorawathimeering” reprinted in Elliot
(1979: 11))

Unfortunately, like Dream Time Land, Ingamell’s experiment in cultural hybridity remains precariously perched on the border between the sublime and the ridiculous (perhaps leaning more one way than the other).

Ingamells drew heavily for content and inspiration upon Spencer and Gillen’s influential study of the Aranda¹⁹. The Aranda (largely as a result of Spencer and Gillen’s work²⁰) were important figures for the

¹⁹ This was first published in 1899 as *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* and then reprinted in 1927 under the title *The Arunta*.

²⁰ Elliot (xxii) cites an earlier poet, Bernard O’Dowd, as playing a part here. O’Dowd in his “long and not always wholly unattractive poem” *The Bush* (1912) pays tribute to Spencer in the following lines:

*And Spencer sails from Alcheringa bringing
Intaglios, totems and Books of the Dead.*

Jindys in general but especially so for Ingamells. In choosing the Aranda as the subjects of Dream Time Land, Courtier singles out the Jindys, and perhaps specifically Ingamells, for his satiric portrayal of Aboriginalism. Certainly the narration in verse that accompanies the tour of the dioramas is redolent of Ingamells' work:

Apma came from earth!
 Apma came from water!
 Apma came from air!
 Earth and air and water Apma is!
 Apma, Oknirrabata! Wei!

It was probably in the field of the visual arts that Aboriginalism irrupted with the greatest influence. This originally manifested itself through the "discovery" of Aboriginal art. Daniel Thomas (1978) cites the 1940s as the period in which "Australian Aboriginal art *became* art, as far as the European-Australian art world was concerned" (cited in McLean 90). This turning point in Australian attitudes to Aboriginal art is marked by the impassioned public response to the David Jones Art Gallery exhibition of 1949 (Berndt cited in Jones 1988). In the forties and fifties Aboriginal art penetrates the showspaces of bourgeois life as never before.

Of course, the influence of Aboriginalism in the field of visual arts was not limited to the growing interest in Aboriginal art but was also a driving force in the work of many non-Aboriginal artists: most notable among these being Margaret Preston, Arthur Boyd, Russell Drysdale, Sydney Nolan and Albert Tucker. With the exception of Preston, these

artists, relying upon a recurring motif of alienated “white Aborigines”, signify a “high art” quest for Australian identity.

Not so notably, but no doubt more noticeably, Aboriginalism manifested itself widely in less elitist forms of visual representation of which the Dreamtime diorama is typical: from tea towels to garden statues Aboriginalism entered the domain of the popular in an altogether more conspicuous if less edifying manner than the identity obsessed explorations of post-war Australian modernism. But popular art isn't only commercial art and artists less respected than Australia's modernist aristocracy were to fall under the spell of all things Aboriginal. Philip Jones (cited in Tolley & Moss) notes correspondences between Courtier's character, Carl Rusking (the artist responsible for the Dreamtime dioramas) and the popular sculptor William Ricketts²¹. Like Rusking's dioramas, Ricketts' work is located outdoors, principally at a site in the Dandenongs, although there are some examples displayed in Alice Springs. Drawing extensively upon William Blake for inspiration, and incorporating both Christian and Aboriginal iconography, Ricketts' work strives always to express a spiritualised Australian hybridity. Both the quality and sentiment of the work has been vociferously attacked by

²¹ Tolley and Moss also argue that in giving Rusking the first name Carl, Courtier, was paying homage to Carl Strehlow (Carl Strehlow, father of T.G.H Strehlow, produced an influential study of the Aranda and Loritja). Given that Rusking is a blackmailer and accomplice to murder this does not seem to be much of a tribute.

Christopher Pearson (1991), who condemns Ricketts' work as "kitsch"²². Pearson's criticism (the excessiveness of which approaches the hysterical) matches Courtier's denunciation of the primitivist artist as a cash driven, ruthless exploiter of credulous dreamers. For Pearson, as for Courtier, as worthy of scorn as the art itself are those who find it meaningful. In Pearson's case these include "hippies" - who (apparently) see in Ricketts' work "a reassuring western mediation that has turned the once-exotic into pale and tawdry reflections of itself" (Pearson 334) - and "some Aboriginal people" who, Pearson suggests, don't know what they're looking at anyway.



the Aboriginalism of William Ricketts

²² Significantly, in a discussion of Aboriginality and "kitsch" Pearson includes Ricketts' work alongside dreamtime dioramas.

In opposition to Ricketts' "kitsch" (see previous page), Pearson suggests, is a notorious gargoyle from the Old Adelaide Gaol (see below) depicting an Aboriginal woman in great torment, which he praises for its "matter-of-fact quality". That Pearson prefers the imprisoned gargoyle, and its association with criminality and death, to the solemnity of Ricketts' icons, and their association with hybridity and transcendence, possibly says more about the personal tastes of the beholder than any supposedly unassailable standard of quality such as truthfulness²³.



prison gargoyle (Old Adelaide Gaol)

²³ Pearson's dislike of "sentimentality" doesn't extend to the sentimentality of the Gothic: sentimentality is only bad when it (over)emphasises goodness rather than wretchedness. But while Pearson may puzzle over just what it is that Aboriginal people see in Ricketts' "sentimentality" he surely wouldn't need to wonder why Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal prisoners, are offended by the exercise in Gothic sentimentality represented by this gaol house gargoyle.

What Pearson (331) calls “Arcadian sentimentality”, “failure to come to terms with historical reality” and “an ill thought-out sense of white collective guilt” others might call a sincere attempt to form relationships of depth, emotional and spiritual, with indigenous Australia. One suspects that Pearson’s *anxiety*, for this is the basis of his critique (this is not the emotionally detached scholarly analysis that he no doubt tells himself it is), is the same anxiety that drives *Death in Dreamtime*: the fear of the Other’s penetration of the sacred places of bourgeois life.

In order to fully grasp the import of Courtier’s critical representation of Aboriginalism it is necessary to consider the movement in light of its original political context. In a time in which non-Aboriginal Australians feared miscegenation like the plague, and an increasing “half-caste” population was viewed as the most serious of problems, an unrestrained celebration of an unassimilated traditional Aboriginality could not have been received as anything other than radical and subversive. At a time in which it was still widely believed that the so called “full-blood” Aborigine was dying out, and it was considered to be the state’s duty to ensure that their Aborigines of mixed descent became as European-like as possible, the emergence of Aboriginality as a potent cultural force within bourgeois society runs directly contrary to the political will of the day. This is why Aboriginalism as a cultural movement is often closely

associated with integrationism²⁴ as a political movement. For example, Sir Paul Hasluck, the architect of post-war assimilationism, sought to discredit the integrationist critique of his government's policies by seeking to link the critique with a trivialised Aboriginalism:

I think there is a rather romantic foundation for this [integrationism] - the same sort of thing which, with all due respect to the tradespeople who benefit, is expressed in the Moomba festival in Melbourne, in the vogue of the Central Australian painting and in the sale of factory made koala bears and boomerangs (Hasluck. 1959: 12).

Death in Dreamtime is participating in the central Aboriginal affairs debate of its day. In portraying crude stereotypes of integrationists²⁵ as corrupt, vacuous and ultimately doomed, the text is unambiguous in its allegiances. Situating Aboriginalism in a dark world of duplicity and disorder, Courtier's novel, reveals considerable anxieties concerning the integrationist opposition to assimilation, and closely allies itself with the primary governmental response to the obstacle that the continuing presence of an unassimilated Aboriginal people represented to the imagining of national homogeneity.

²⁴ In the late 1950's integrationism emerged as the major critical response to assimilationism. Its primary intent was to allow for the preservation of separate cultural identities. It was widely misrepresented by its opponents as a form of segregationism,

²⁵ Carl Rusking, Julie Flax, Delia Ashwood and Austin Flax are integrationist types. The bohemians (Rusking and Julie Flax), and the dilettante (Delia Ashwood) represent the fashionable progressiveness (trendiness) with which integrationism was originally associated. Austin Flax represents the pastoralists who, as a consequence of the pastoral industry's dependence on the labour of unassimilated Aborigines, were vociferous opponents of assimilationism: this opposition to assimilationism is represented in the

The success of crime fiction can be explained by the fact that people are threatened by crime. Textual representation appears to diminish the threat by subjecting it to the order of formal language, generic conventions and controlled outcomes. Not unlike Cuna figurines, crime fiction is grounded in the knowledge that "in some way or another one can protect oneself from evil spirits by portraying them" (Taussig 12). The evil that *Death in Dreamtime* seeks protection from is the condition in which the Other not only remains Other in the face of the Same, but also exerts power over the Same. *Death in Dreamtime* entextualises the anxieties of an assimilationist era. That this is so should not be surprising; the crime fiction form has a certain suitability for this task²⁶. *Death in Dreamtime* portrays the fears of a society bent on erasing the problem that the persistence of an unassimilated Aboriginality appeared to present to the institution of nationhood. By representing Europeans imitating and embracing Aboriginality, becoming Aboriginal, it inverts assimilationist desire. By having this unleash destructive forces the text reaffirms constructs of the dangerous Other and affirms the authority of the governmental.

didactic debate between the integrationist grazier, Doug McMahon, and his assimilationist wife, Sarah, in Charles Chauvel's 1955 film, *Jedda*.

²⁶ There are certainly a number of examples of the form performing this function: for instance, all of Upfield's Bony series but particularly *Bony and the Black Virgin*, and *The Will of The Tribe*, and, of course, Leonard Mann's *Venus Half-Caste*. More recently Aboriginal writers [Archie Weller, Mudrooroo, Paul McLaren, Eric Wilmott] have utilised the form as "... a highly effective instrument to question the uses of racialised power in this country" (Knight, 1997: 176)

never the twain

In *Bony and the Black Virgin* (1959) Arthur Upfield's Aboriginal detective, Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, takes time out from police duties to appraise the work of a local artist. His attention is drawn to one painting in particular:

In the centre of the picture, extending from foreground to background was what appeared to be a narrow fogbank. To the right was a youth in running gear, trying to reach the fogbank, but held back by gossamer threads held by a group of white people. On the other side a nude aboriginal [sic] girl was trying to reach the bank of coloured fog, and she was held back similarly by a group of her people, who had the bodies of animals and birds. The expressions on the faces of the boy and girl was of eager anticipation, and on the faces of those restraining them, either horror or despair.
(65)

Quoting Kipling, the painting is entitled "Never the Twain shall Meet". Of course, whatever the beliefs of the artist "the twain" not only meet but meet often and meet variously. Most obviously, in Upfield's novels they meet in Bony himself: "Australia's half-caste detective" (a status that the dust-jacket blurbs always make absolutely certain the reader understands). But the dominant discourses of a racialised settler state do not encourage an imagining of the "half-caste" (even a fictional half-caste) in terms of innocent meetings of difference. In Upfield's novels such meetings are never innocent. In *The Barrakee Mystery* (1965), Bony is compelled to denounce even his own genealogy:

My mother was black my father was white. They were below the animals. A fox does not mate with a dingo or a cat with a rabbit. (*Barrakee* 104)

In racist culture the half-caste is never simply the consequence of the coming together of Same and Other: the half-caste is degenerated whiteness, a separate race, the most demonised of races. In the construction of categories such as half-caste it becomes most clear that the concept of race, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, has nothing at all to do with purity:

A race is defined not by its purity, but on the contrary by the impurity which a system of domination confers on it. Bastard and half-caste are the true names of race. (Deleuze and Guattari cited in Muecke, 1996: 249)

In quoting this passage I have chosen Stephen Muecke's own rendering of *Mille Plateaux* rather than Brian Massumi's 1987 English translation. I do this because of Muecke's selection of the term half-caste in preference to the "mixed-blood" that Massumi's translation settles upon. This is not an insignificant distinction: half-caste is *the* quintessentially Australian racist category. In the Australian context terms such as mixed-blood are predominantly removed from the history of state sanctioned racism in which the term half-caste was an essential nominal apparatus. For over half a century the half-caste, in both popular imagination and governmental administration, was the embodiment of the "Aboriginal problem", and the point of convergence for the forces that sought to eradicate this problem. In Australia half-caste signifies very much more

than similar terms that carry the same fundamental definition. Terry Goldie (1989) notes Australia's partiality for this term and contrasts it with the equally abhorrent terminology of colonial Canada:

In Canada, the valorising term has usually been...
 "half-breed", a product of debased sexuality. The
 Australian "half-caste" seems more a statement of
 the rank of that product. (Goldie 69)

While half-caste certainly emphasises rank its hierarchal logic is also, of course, grounded in the notion of debased sexuality. As Robert Young (1995: 180) observes, nineteenth century theories of race (the source of terms such as half-caste) were as much about a fascination with people having sex - "illicit, inter-racial sex" - as with essentialising differentiations between Same and Other. Behind the discourse of race lay the "paranoid fantasy" of the libidinal excess and boundless fecundity of the colonised other, and what was imagined to be its inevitable consequence:

...an ever-increasing *melange* of self-propagating endlessly diversifying hybrid progeny: half-blood, half-caste, half-breed, cross-breed, amalgamate, intermix, miscegenate, alvino, cabre, cafuso, castizo, cholo, chino, cob, creole, dustee, fustee, griffe, mamaluco, marabout, mestee, mestindo, mestizo, mestize, metifo, misterado, mongrel, morisco, mule, mulat, mulatto, mulatta, mulattress, mustafina, mustee, mustezoes, ochavon, octavon octaroon, puchuelo, quadroon, quarteron, quattralvi, quinteron, saltatro, terceron, zambaigo, zambo, zambo prieto....(Young 1995: 181).

Young argues that in the West race has been defined using the criterion of civilisation, whereby a hierarchy has been formed with those imagined as having achieved the highest degree of civilisation (bourgeois males)

occupying the top and those yet to acquire civilisation (primitives) at the bottom. In this way race functions as the defining and structuring principle of civilisation itself. Consequently, Young claims, fear of miscegenation is founded upon nothing less than a fear that the hierarchy will dissolve, that “civilisation [will], in a literal as well as technical sense, collapse” (95). In other words, the absurdly obsessive terminology of gradation, as evidenced in the excerpt above, represents a desperate attempt to maintain the discursive structure of “civilisation” in the face of a desire that discloses whiteness as a most precarious fiction.

Under such conditions the meeting of “the twain” is always a serious matter, and the progeny of such meetings (representing the very possibility of the collapse of civilisation) always the focus for anxious concern. Certainly, in the Australian context the governmental focus upon “the problem” of the Aboriginal of mixed descent has been characterised by thoroughness and forcefulness that would not have been out of place had civilisation itself literally been at stake. In racist culture the half-caste is a thoroughly problematised figure who seems to summon a multitude of corrective or strategic responses ranging from concealment, separation, absorption, assimilation and vilification.

Notoriously, in Australia the forces that problematise racial hybridity and endeavour to counteract its influence found expression at the highest governmental levels through fundamentally coercive

programs with eugenicist underpinnings. Needless to say, this pattern of problematisation/de-problematisation reverberates through all manner of cultural texts in which mixed-race is the subject: typical are Upfield's Bony novels, especially *Bony and the Black Virgin* and *The Barrakee Mystery*. These texts conform to a dominant model in which mixed-race emerges as a problem necessitating policing.

Somewhat differently, Terry Goldie (1989: 69) notes that in the literatures of Canada, New Zealand and Australia the mixed-race figure often functions to represent a much desired "indigenisation" of the settler population: in support Goldie cites Xavier Herbert's celebration of the virtues of "a created people" in *Capricornia* (1973), as well as a number of texts from Canada and New Zealand that represent racial hybridity as a new and welcome becoming. In the case of Australia, while one may certainly point to instances where the half-caste figure is more celebrated than problematised, such examples are far from typical. Published fiction more commonly correlates with a society's prevailing discourses (bureaucratic, scientific, journalistic) prosaically and predictably reproducing a dominant ethical and political culture: in its challenging of dominant views, Herbert's *Capricornia* is exceptional rather than representative. Governed by the need to uncover common themes in the literatures of Canada, New Zealand and Australia, Goldie's analysis is unable to pay sufficient regard to the specifics of an Australian

governmentality that constructed mixed-race as the most serious threat to the security of the dominant order.

Any discussion of the representation of the Aboriginal of mixed-descent in Australian fiction that does not acknowledge the influence of a discursive regime of problematisation, assimilation and erasure is essentially incomplete. In order to fully appreciate the precise nature of what is signified in popular fictions such as the Bony novels it is useful to consider the texts in light of contemporary *non-fictional* accounts of the “half-caste problem”. In *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1948), Ernestine Hill (whose writings appeared regularly in *The Advertiser* in Adelaide, *The Sun* in Sydney, *The Herald* and *Argus* in Melbourne, *The Courier Mail* in Brisbane, and Perth’s *West Australian*) devotes a chapter to this “tremendous social problem” (Hill 227). Entitled “Half-Caste - A Living Tragedy” the chapter is less concerned with the virtues of “a created people” than with the effective elimination of difficulty. In Hill’s opinion Australia faces no situation more serious than the rapid growth of a racially hybrid population:

The overwhelming problem of the Northwest and North of Australia at the moment is the steadily increasing propagation of half-breed races (226).²⁷

²⁷ The prevalence of this belief, and the grave regard in which it was generally held, allowed Western Australia’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, to ask the 1937 conference of Aboriginal administrators, “Are we going to have a population of one million blacks in the Commonwealth or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia?” (cited in Manne 40).

Hill is unequivocal in her attribution of responsibility for this overwhelming problem: "[T]he black woman understands only sex, and that she understands fairly well. She is easy for the taking... The lubra has no moral ethics whatever" (230). Somewhat predictably, Hill is less critical of the contribution made by Europeans to the creation of Northern Australia's mixed-race population, and is quick to assume the role of apologist for the "moral ethics" of the white male: "in the old remote days it had been a case of go native or go mad" (230).

Hill provides a detailed account of the Commonwealth government's attempt to limit the growth of a much maligned population, and cites Dr Cecil Cook, eugenicist, Chief Protector of Aborigines for North Australia, and leading advocate for the forced removal of Aboriginal children of mixed descent:

The problem of these half-castes can quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of its progeny in the white. The Australian is the most easily assimilated race on earth... the quickest way out is to breed him white²⁸. (Cook cited in Hill 225)

²⁸ As Robert Manne (2001) and Raimond Gaita (1999) have repeatedly shown there can be no doubt that such a program constitutes the crime of genocide. The widely held view that the "full blood" Aboriginal was dying out - this is "the complete disappearance of the black race" that Cook is referring to in this excerpt - combined with a concerted effort to biologically absorb their progeny is nothing other than an attempt to eradicate a people. While this program of biological absorption was quickly replaced by a program of cultural assimilation after the second world war, the authors of *Bringing them home* (the report of the Wilson-Dodson inquiry into the stolen generations), convincingly demonstrated - relying upon United Nations definitions of genocide - that the forced transfer of the children of a group for the purposes of re-education - (whatever good intentions may be expressed) constituted an attempt to eradicate that group.

Hill gives a thorough description of this “vitally interesting ethnological experiment” including the forced removal of children (“the gathering in of half-castes”), the internment (“the herding”), enforced labour (“vocational training”), and the encouragement of “correct mating” through the apparatus of Darwin’s “matrimonial depot” (Hill 226). While Hill is not without reservations her concerns are not ethical concerns. The efficacy of Cook’s eugenics, not the morality, is the cause of her misgivings:

Is there a throw-back to the Australian black?...
There are times when I fear, that for all the
apparent watertightness of his theories, Dr. Cook
may be propounding a domestic problem of the far
future, with almond eyes and a coal-black
complexion, that will be very difficult for highly
respectable wives and mothers to explain away.
(232)

Hill’s passage prosaically discloses the real significance of this “overwhelming problem”. While Hill expresses some concern for the welfare of Aborigines of mixed descent, the marginalised socioeconomic status of the mixed-descent population is not the real substance of the so called “half-caste problem”. What the problem represents is the fear that the white population will be Aboriginalised. This fear reaches a paranoid intensity in speculations over the possible trans-generational capability of Aboriginal genes. The destitution of an outcast population is secondary to the stability of the bourgeois domestic domain and the reputations of “highly respectable wives and mothers”.

Cast as protector and nurturer of bourgeois sensibility (a sensibility inextricable from its imperialist and racist underpinnings) the “respectable wife “ is a common focal point for racist anxieties (Stoler 135). Such anxieties less frequently manifest as a fear of the disruptive potential of atavism and more often appear as a fear of the sexual power of the black man: a fear that respectable women will succumb to the sexual appeal of the other. Of course, prevailing standards of sexual propriety have often rendered this subject unsuitable for exploration in popular fiction. Rather judiciously in *Death in Dreamtime* Courtier explores the subject implicitly by substituting Aboriginal characters with simulacra: this allows a depiction of the disruptive power that such interracial encounters represent to the bourgeois order minus the obvious moral difficulties that would have been involved in portraying realised sexual encounters between “highly respectable” women and Aboriginal men. In *The Barrakee Mystery* Upfield employs a similarly indirect strategy of exploring the impact of the Aboriginal male’s infiltration of the bourgeois domain. In this novel the Thorntons, owners of Barrakee Station, have an adopted son: the boy’s biological mother was the station cook (an illiterate white girl who died in childbirth) and his father was King Henry, “the very finest *specimen* of an aboriginal [sic]”(24). Only Mrs Thornton, usually referred to as “the Little Lady”, is aware of the boy’s Aboriginal lineage: as she lay dying the boy’s mother reveals to Mrs Thornton the father’s identity and confides, “he was so magnificent a man that I became as putty in his hands” (308). Taking advantage of the

lightness of the boy's skin Mrs Thornton conceals the father's identity from all (including her husband) and determines to rear him as her own. But two factors threaten to expose her subterfuge: firstly, when the boy reaches adulthood his skin begins to darken, and secondly, King Henry returns to the district after many years away and proceeds to blackmail her. Compelled to conceal the Aboriginity of her son's father, and subject to blackmail as a consequence, the "highly respectable wife" is cast in a role that would not differ significantly had the son been the product of an illicit union between Mrs Thornton and King Henry. The darkening of the son's skin, like the myth of atavism, functions as a morally innocuous representation of the infiltration of blackness into the arena of bourgeois respectability: a cautionary tale can be told without violating the sacrosanct status of the middle-class matriarch.

While Bony enters the text ostensibly to investigate the murder of King Henry his real function is the exoneration of the bourgeois wife. In his investigation the death of the Aborigine is clearly secondary to Mrs Thornton's reputation. Despite discovering beyond a doubt that it was Mrs Thornton who delivered the fatal blow to King Henry, Bony concludes that her only real crime was the concealment of paternity from her husband:

I would find it utterly impossible to tarnish the character of so great a woman ... If she, and not the poor Empress Josephine, had been the beloved of the Emperor Napoleon, today the nations of the

earth would be a peaceful and prosperous World Federation. (319-20)

The sheer grandiosity of this statement reveals much about the importance of the morally fibred bourgeois wife to imperialism *per se*: only with her at the helm can the imperialist project attain its fully realised form in "World Federation". In light of such beliefs Mrs Thornton's brutal slaying of King Henry can only appear politic: a severe but eminently sensible management of the empire's domestic front. The novel is unambiguous; in the context of a racialised settler state there are crimes worse than murder. In fact, as Mrs Thornton indicates, there is some doubt as to whether the killing of an Aborigine can be considered criminal at all: "It would be no crime to slay a black, would it?"(299). In having Bony conclude that Mrs Thornton's only real crime was the concealment of paternity Upfield seems to confirm what is presumably a rhetorical question.

In the Bony novels the inter-racial is always a police matter: it is this that is the primary focus of the law. As the police detective it is Bony's role to render deviance visible and to ensure that the moral order resumes its correct functioning. Ordinarily this would involve bringing a criminal to justice but *The Barrakee Mystery* does not resolve in this way: it is enough for Bony to uncover the events that precipitate the crime. Bony's detective work reveals that the violent disruption to order at Barrakee unfolds from illicit race relations. By the conclusion of the novel

three deaths have ensued from the proscribed relationship between King Henry and the station cook: the cook has died in child birth, King Henry has been murdered, and Mrs Thornton has taken her own life. If the story could be said to have a moral it is never the twain *should* meet: a moral which is supported by Bony's likening of black and white unions to the mating of a cat and a rabbit or a dingo and a fox.

Although written in a later period (*The Barrakee Mystery* was first published in 1929, whereas *Bony and the Black Virgin* was first published in 1959) and clearly influenced by significant changes in attitudes to Aborigines, *Bony and the Black Virgin* draws much the same conclusions as *The Barrakee Mystery* regarding the intimate meeting of black and white. Although in this text the twain do finally meet (after a fashion) the circumstances of this meeting are anything but a vindication. The main protagonists of this text - Eric Downer, a university educated pastoralist's son, and Lottee a young Aboriginal woman (the "black virgin" to whom the title refers) - fall in love, but as the title suggests the relationship is never fully consummated. In this respect Upfield again defers to standards of propriety, and in so doing constructs a sanitised and idealised version of the kind of relationship which has more commonly existed between pastoralists' sons and Aboriginal women. In Upfield's terminology Eric yields to "The Spirit of the Bush": a weakness that the novel furnishes with the most tragic of consequences. Concluding

with the couple's suicide Upfield makes it absolutely clear that the twain meet to their own detriment.

Despite frequent glimpses of Upfield's admiration for Aboriginal people the Bony novels are never less than emphatic on one point: black must yield to white, and for partly assimilated Aborigines, or Aborigines of mixed descent such as Bony himself, blackness (*The Spirit of the Bush*) must surrender to whiteness. Occasionally Upfield includes characters that give voice to an altogether different point of view. For example, in *The Will of the Tribe* (1962), Captain, an Aboriginal stockman, vehemently opposes all pressure to assimilate. He tells Bony that "civilisation must be defied as long as possible" (88), but Bony is the custodian of truth in this story and he compares Captain to King Canute vainly attempting to hold back the sea of white civilisation. Bony is never less than adamant that it is blackness and not whiteness that must be resisted. He advises Tessa, a young Aboriginal woman reared by a pastoralist couple (the Brentners), that she must learn to regard her Aboriginal heritage objectively and not succumb to the primal call to return to her people:

I am only half black, and yet I, too, have felt the pull towards my mother's race. It's tremendously powerful, as its effect on so many promising aborigine (sic) scholars witnesses. The strongest weapon I have to use in defence is pride. (68)

The Tessa character seems to have been based upon Jedda from the Chauvels' 1955 film of the same name. There are many similarities

between the two characters (even their names are alike). Raised in the homes of white pastoralists both are presented as shining examples of assimilationist success: the triumph of nurture over nature. On the verge of womanhood both grapple with powerful instinctual urges to return to the tribal ways²⁹. In each case this is precipitated by the sexual allure of young tribal men. In the Chauvels' film Jedda is lured into the bush by the charms of Marbuk (played by Robert Tudawali), a transcendently masculine tribal renegade who performs a form of magic against which Jedda is powerless and compelled to follow. The couple flee into breathtakingly beautiful wilderness pursued by white authorities and by Aborigines whose law Marbuk has also transgressed by taking a wife of the wrong skin³⁰.



Jedda receives the "call of the wild"

²⁹ Both the Chauvels and Upfield resort to a crude and extravagant primitivism in representing this urge to return. The famous scene from Chauvel's film (see overleaf) - in which Jedda is shown playing the piano and gradually descending into a frenzy as she is possessed by the rhythms of a tribal chant - possesses a frenetically melodramatic quality redolent of silent films. In *The Will of the Tribe* this tribal summons is given a "call of the wild" quality, and is represented by Tessa running, ostensibly to escape Captain, and gradually shedding her clothes (so as to run faster?) until she is finally completely naked in the wilderness (as nature intended?).

³⁰ This does not indicate a colour prejudice: in taking Jedda as his wife Marbuk has violated the laws of his tribe's moiety system which divides all people, regardless of skin colour, into skin groups.

While *Jedda* has been rightly criticised for its racism, its primitivism, and its inventive approach to Australian history (Langton 1993: 45-49), it is nevertheless a more sophisticated and open-ended work than *The Will of The Tribe*³¹. A fusion of melodrama and documentary, the Chauvels' feature films are noted for their essay-like quality (Cunningham 1991), and *Jedda* unfolds like an essay on the subject of assimilation. Early in the film a didactic debate between Jedda's adoptive parents, Doug and Sarah McMahon, introduces the two positions to be explored: Sarah takes the assimilationist position (an especially condescending form emphasising an obligation to civilise "natives") and Doug argues for cultural autonomy. In the examination that follows what is interesting, and perhaps even commendable given Charles Chauvel's open support for assimilationist policy, is that the film renders both of these positions problematic: the McMahons fail effectively to assimilate Jedda, and the worlds of the pastoralist and the tribal Aborigine are shown to be far too deeply intertwined for any notion of complete autonomy ever to be achievable. It is also worth noting that Marbuk, despite the licentious primitivism informing his construction³², is nevertheless an exceedingly powerful Aboriginal figure who effectively defies white law: even his ultimate demise seems more a testimony to the

³¹ The film's complex ambivalence possibly explains the quite divided responses that the film provoked. Stuart Cunningham (1991: 159) notes that *Dawn*, "the magazine for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales", praised *Jedda* for instilling racial pride, while *Overland* branded it "a thoroughly bad film" which "peddles the worst kind of racist nonsense".

³² Langton (1993: 48) sees the "wildness" of Marbuk as deriving from the same fantasies that inform Tarzan.

power of traditional Aboriginal law (and magic) than to the power of white law, which appears to have failed on every count.

The Will of the Tribe concludes rather differently. In Upfield's novel Bony pursues the fleeing couple and persuades them to return to the homestead. He assures Captain that he will serve only a very short prison sentence, and arranges for the local constable to marry the couple. The reader is left to conclude that Tessa continues with the Brentner's plan for her to become a school teacher, and that Tessa and Captain will come to regard their people objectively by pursuing Bony's recommendation to write a history of their tribe. The order that is restored is the white order: white law has prevailed and is shown to be just, the couple are married according to white law, and assimilation is shown to be inevitable and desirable. All are engulfed by the benevolent tide of white civilisation.

The Bony stories effectively function to affirm the status quo and conceal all that is difficult and problematic in the history of Aboriginal/settler relations. Of course, this is true not only of the Bony narratives but also of the Bony characterisation. Stephen Knight (1997: 182) sees Bony as "a vanishing point of tension" in black/white relations, an "ideological foreclosure" of the racism that has characterised governmental approaches to the administration of a dispossessed population. Upfield's blue eyed, university educated, police detective is an

assimilationist exemplar, a figure informed more by the hopes and desires of the dominant groups of a racialised settler state than by the daily reality of Aboriginals of mixed descent³³. As the one who polices, rather than the one who calls for policing, he affirms rather than challenges the legitimacy of the dominant order. He is the perfect embodiment of assimilationist ideals. In Bony black and white coexist through a complete subordination of all black characteristics to white³⁴. This is especially evident in the repeated descriptions of his physical appearance³⁵. Continually drawing attention to his blue eyes, his Romanesque nose, his grooming, manners and couture, the aim of these passages is always to emphasise a much-desired proximity to whiteness:

...when Inspector Bonaparte was presented the next morning...He was wearing a tussore silk suit, and Mr Long had just relieved him of a panama hat. Mrs Long found herself being bowed to, and looking, while trying not to reveal astonishment, into the clear blue eyes of a dominant personality (*Bony and the Black Virgin* 59).

Bony's appearance is always met with pleasure and satisfaction: his presence confirms the legitimacy and logic of both cultural assimilation and assimilation through biological absorption. He is a manifestation of the desires driving Dr. Cook's "swift submergence" of blackness in

³³ For instance, Bony the graduate's appearance in literature precedes the first actual graduation of an Aboriginal person by forty years (Donaldson 1991: 342)..

³⁴ The casting of non-Aboriginal actor, Cameron Daddo, as Bony in the Channel Nine television series, though derisible in some respects, does in fact, as Stephen Knight observes, accurately reflect Upfield's prioritisation of whiteness in the Bony characterisation. (Knight 182)

whiteness. Bony is the product of a Manichean conflict in which the light has effectively subdued the dark. If the twain can truly be said to meet in "Australia's half-caste detective" it is a meeting circumscribed by a hegemony of white dominance.

problems, problems

The Bony characterisation is in accord with the dominant form of news media representation of Aboriginality of the post-war assimilationist period. According to Mickler (1998: 20), at this time the news media typically visualised "the Aboriginal problem" as a problem under control: a relatively straightforward matter of Church and State continuing to assist Aborigines to become more like non-Aborigines. This process of assimilation was rarely conceived as being especially problematic and was characteristically represented in terms of its victories and successes. In a discussion of newspaper representations of Aborigines, Ted Docker (1964), cites a number of articles of this kind from the early post-war period. One example from Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* (Docker 13) concerns the opening of a new "station" at Lake Cargelligo on the south coast of New South Wales. Infused with a spirit of great optimism the article emphasises progress while, "photographs showed a number of half-caste families conspicuously clean and neat, waving gaily at the camera, confidently anticipating the future". Another reporter after a visit

³⁵ Physical appearance seems to assume an exaggerated importance in the representation of the Aboriginal of mixed-descent. This is particularly apparent in Mann's *Venus Half-Caste* which is discussed later.

to the settlement at La Perouse describes his pleasure at seeing “white and dark children running along hand-in-hand”³⁶.

In the period of post-war assimilationism the press assumed the role of visualising an emerging society of unity and fairness. Of course, in order to do this they had only to follow suit: governments themselves, both commonwealth and state, published a large volume of material promoting the idea of a nation united by justice and equity. Mickler (96) cites a series of educational publications commissioned by the Federal Minister for Territories: *Our Aborigines* (1957), a thirty two page booklet with photographs, was followed by *Assimilation of Our Aborigines* (1958), *Fringe Dwellers* (1959), *The Skills of Our Aborigines* (1960), *One People* (1961), and *The Aborigines and You* (1963). The cover photograph of *Our Aborigines* shows an Aboriginal stockman sitting on a fence pausing for a smoke; his horse by his side he gazes purposefully into the distance. As Mickler notes, the image signifies something more than a hard-working man enjoying a well-earned rest: “the front cover of *Our Aborigines* constitutes a spectacle of idealised relations of power between non-Aborigines and Aborigines” (96). A position of labour within relations of production is offered as evidence of

³⁶ The press were also in the habit of focussing upon Aborigines who excelled at traditionally European cultural practices: Harold Blair the opera singer, Philip Roberts the medical officer, Albert Namatjira the water-colourist and so on. Common also were stories that introduced “the first Aborigine” to do something or other: sit in parliament, go to teachers college, write a novel, etc. (Langton 1993). Bony the graduate and police sergeant is a fictionalised version of this.

assimilationist progress, but this poorly paid position has been delivered in exchange for the country that was once his: a country in which he is now denied citizenship. The cover of *One People* (1961) shows Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school children gathered around a world globe while their white male teacher draws attention to Australia. The image communicates the idea of Aborigines and non-Aborigines happily sharing both classroom and continent. Like the Australia of Upfield's imagination these representations are more notable for the inequity that they effectively conceal than for the idealised relations they seek to visualise.

In his analysis of the news-media's representation of Aboriginality Mickler traces a shift from this period in the early 1960s - when Aborigines were a peripheral area of concern for the news media and typically represented as a marginal problem that was being effectively addressed - to the 1990s when Aborigines are major figures of news media problematisation: appearing frequently and variously as victims of racist injustice and police brutality, as a potent political force demanding recompense, as ostensibly privileged citizens in receipt of benefits not available to "ordinary Australians", as a problem for policing and social governance, as mis-managers and mis-appropriators of government funding, and (especially with the institution of native title) as a threat to the security of the pastoral and mining industries. But even as early as the 1950s, while assimilation was widely represented as a

positive policy response to a problem well in hand, failings in the government's administration of Aboriginal affairs were rendered visible in the press, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, as well as Aborigines themselves, were increasingly appearing as problematised subjects in the news-media.

Docker notes that as early as 1949 the press was assuming the role of champion of the underdog, exposing Aboriginal poverty and disadvantage and pointing a finger at the failings of government and bureaucracy. He cites a number of articles from the 1950s that expressed serious concern for the social, economic and political predicament of Aboriginal people: these include a three page story from the *Sydney Sun* describing the "agonies of discrimination suffered by Coffs Harbour's half-caste social lepers" (16), a series of articles from the Melbourne *Argus* of March 1951 featuring stories of slave labour and Aboriginal women being used as "black chattels" (8), and a series from the *West Australian* of 1952 (entitled "Not Slaves, Not Citizens") vociferously condemning Western Australia's record in the administration of Aboriginal affairs (15). Docker is rightly critical of the emotionalism of this reportage, but he also questions its veracity, pronounces it at odds with "responsible public opinion", and even attributes a nefarious political motive:

In publicising the cause of the aborigine [sic], no political party puts the press so much to its own purposes as the Communist party. "Denial of political rights", "economic victimisation", "colonial

laws", "racial discrimination": these are but the familiar terminology of the revolution. (Docker 15)

In fairness this is not *quite* as reactionary as it first appears: Docker is also critical of reporting that conceals the more troubling realities of the social, economic and political predicament of Aboriginal people through over-emphasising Australia's 'enlightened' approach to the treatment of its "native" population. The main point that Docker claims is that at this time, when it comes to the reporting of Aboriginal issues, Australia is being inadequately served by a press that is more concerned with sensation than with complex and difficult truths. However, Docker is unduly provoked by articles that highlight the culpability of governments, and in associating the visualisation of Aboriginal disadvantage with the "red menace" - a public enemy of mythical proportions in cold war Australia - he typifies an emerging perception of the disgruntled Aboriginal petitioning for justice and equality as (like communism) a threat to the status quo - an enemy within. These fears were to greatly intensify in the mid sixties with the upsurge in Aboriginal political activism.

While sections of the press blamed the state for the failings of assimilationism (a policy apparently intended to deliver equality) the state pointed the finger of blame elsewhere. In 1959 the Federal Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck - in a public address entitled "Are Our Aborigines Neglected?" (cited in Mickler 99) - claims that impediments to

assimilation's success lie partly in the minds of Aborigines and partly with the non-Aboriginal community:

Are we neglecting our aborigines [sic]? Get out of the habit of firing that question at your government and leaving it to find an answer or take the blame. Shoot the question at yourself. Are *you* neglecting our aborigines [sic]? What are the needs of those in your district and what have you ever done to help them?

According to Mickler it was out of this new discursive triangle in which the non-Aboriginal public was problematised along with the Aboriginal population that the self-assuredness of the assimilationist agenda began to erode:

The vision of a culturally uniform society into which Aborigines were expected to be absorbed under a grand assimilation policy had rapidly begun to fragment by the early sixties... the late-modernist vision of a kind of functionalist utopia of unvarying values and standardised behaviour also began to disintegrate. (Mickler 107)

With the emerging recognition of the failure of assimilation Aborigines began to appear as a new kind of difficulty. While Aborigines had always been problematised by the state, by the media and by the public they were now appearing as a problem resistant to solution. The anxiety produced by the sense of an uncontrolled population was compounded by a mounting Aboriginal activism in which Aborigines began to appear as a threat to white interests: demands for equal pay and equal rights, and protests such as the freedom rides, were widely represented as communist agitation. Of course, this newly problematised Aboriginality

had another dimension emerging from the growing awareness, both domestically and internationally, of the unacceptable social, economic and political predicament of Australia's indigenous population. For Australia's non-Aboriginal population Aborigines increasingly became a reason to feel guilty. Whether as evidence of governmental failure, a threat to the security of the pastoral industry, or a thorn in the nation's conscience Aborigines in the atmosphere of a declining assimilationism were beginning to appear as unsettling as their discursive ancestors of the earlier colonial period³⁷.

While Upfield produced Bony novels throughout this period no sense of Aborigines as an aggrieved population threatening the security of the status quo enters the stories: white racism appears as something of an anomaly, poverty and discrimination hardly warrant a mention, and assimilation is represented as unshakeably secure, just, progressive, and above all, triumphant. What does enter the stories, however, is the idea of communist agitation as the true origin of the expression of Aboriginal dissatisfaction. In *The Will of the Tribe* (1962) the murder victim is a communist infiltrator who has entered Australia's north from Indonesia. Schooled in Aboriginal languages his mission is to manufacture discontent and recruit Australia's indigenous population into the worldwide Marxist conspiracy for global domination. In Upfield the threat

³⁷ Docker notes of press reports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that "the aborigine (sic)... was most often pictured as an inherently treacherous savage without moral feelings or the finer sensibilities" (Docker 9).

(both to the status quo and to the national conscience) posed by the presence of a seriously and justifiably discontented population is concealed, in part by displacement onto ideological enemies, and in part by the fiction of Bony himself: happily assimilated, highly educated, deeply satisfied.

assimilation problematised

A more condemnatory portrayal of assimilationism and the Aboriginal predicament is to be found in Leonard Mann's *Venus Half-Caste* (1963). Where Upfield ratifies and reassures, Mann interrogates and rebukes. In this crime novel Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations emerge as a cause for anxious concern: Mann leaves no space for self-congratulatory appraisals of progress and enlightenment. Reflexive of an emerging discourse critical of Australia's treatment of its indigenous population, Mann's problematisation of Aboriginality targets a racist and exploitative social context in which assimilation, in any meaningful sense, is beyond the bounds of possibility. Mann reveals a racialised settler state in which the racial other can only be accommodated as labour and sexualised commodity.

Mann's narrative revolves around the character of Beatrice Leddin, the Venus to whom the title refers. Her exceptional beauty attracts three admirers: Phillip Roke, an emotionally disturbed white lawyer with whom Beatrice has an affair; Steven Panner, an eminent

surgeon who employs Beatrice as his personal assistant on the basis of her exoticism; and Vic Pegram, a cattle farmer and Aboriginal of mixed descent who Beatrice eventually marries. Beatrice's charms prove fatal; by the close of the novel Panner is dead, killed by the jealous Roke, and Pegram has killed Roke in an attempt to save Beatrice from the ignominy of her associations³⁸.

Drawing upon Foucault, Stoler (97) views "bourgeois sexuality and racialised sexuality... as dependent constructs in a unified field". In *Venus Half-Caste* this is rendered explicit through Beatrice's relationship to the lawyer, Phillip Roke. Disturbed and alienated, Roke represents a "weak link" in the bourgeois order. Ignored and undervalued by his highly successful father, Roke attempts to acquire recognition via his association with Beatrice. By entering into a proscribed relationship - exploiting Beatrice as a "racially erotic counterpoint" (Stoler 7) - Roke hopes to obtain definition for an amorphous identity and acquire the attention he has been denied. While this works, in part at least, Roke is unprepared for the coercive force of the disciplinary regimes that his

³⁸ The dust-jacket blurb of the original edition contains the following rendition of the narrative, "*Venus Half-Caste* is about a beautiful and intelligent half-caste aborigine, and her fight to become accepted in white society; and about the three men who influence her life. Phillip Roke, the unsuccessful lawyer, wants to buy her exotic beauty, to flaunt before his rivals and to satisfy his sensual desires. To Vic Pegram, the bastard son of a rich farmer and an aborigine girl, she is one of his own kind, the ancient race, true heirs of the Australian soil. Perhaps only Panner, the surgeon, middle-aged and happily married, sees her as a person, recognising her deep loneliness and her fierce pride – and Panner is unable to help her."

actions incite. His descent into madness functions to pathologise the inter-racial.

Borrowing from Edward Said, Terry Goldie (1989) argues that the representation of indigenous others is confined to a limited semiotic field composed of five standard commodities:

Two such commodities which appear to be standard in the 'economy' created by the semiotic field of the indigene in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand literatures are sex and violence. They are poles of attraction and repulsion, temptation by the dusky maiden and fear of the demonic violence of the fiendish warrior [the other commodities are orality, mysticism, and the prehistoric]. (Goldie 15)

Mann's novel simultaneously makes use of these commodities (especially sexuality and violence) and condemns the consequences of their deployment.³⁹ Mann portrays the sexual exploitation of Beatrice at Stafford Motors⁴⁰, the sexual harassment she receives in the workplace, and her exploitative relationship with Phillip Roke, in a most disparaging light. While Beatrice is determined to assimilate, to enter white society as an equal, she is refused entry as anything other than a sexualised object.

³⁹ Beatrice is sexualised, Vic is shown to be brutal, and Beatrice's mother is represented largely in terms of her mystical powers.

⁴⁰ Beatrice's job involves her being on display in a motor-vehicle showroom. Each morning her duties are observed by men who gather to consume the exotic spectacle of a tightly-clad. Aboriginal girl going through the motions of polishing the display vehicles.

The gaze that fixes upon Beatrice Leddin is not concerned with assimilationist success. While Beatrice enthusiastically assumes the manners and mores of white society this is never allowed to over-ride a fetishised blackness. The following description of Beatrice is typical:

... five feet seven and a half inches in medium heels, her figure slender but not skinny, breasts significantly protuberant in the tightish, middling-expensive black frock, her face with its half abo features, coloured not brown but rather a smoky, warm dark shade got from got from the mixture of black and white and all topped by thick black curly, not tightly curled, hair. (10)

This is the black female reified by the desire of the white male⁴¹. However, the focus is less upon blackness as such as upon an interspace between black and white, and while Beatrice's appeal is situated in a fusion of blackness and whiteness – “in the smoky, warm dark shade got from the mixture of black and white” – characteristics associated with whiteness are underscored. In racist culture to stress that hair is “not tightly curled” is to emphasise a desired proximity to whiteness and a distance from blackness. The subtext of a privileging of white

⁴¹ Many descriptions of Aboriginal women do not exactly focus upon their desirability. For example, Goldie (64) cites the Australian explorer, Charles Sturt (1833) from *Two Expeditions* “the loathsome condition and hideous countenances of the women would, I should imagine, have been a complete antidote to the sexual passion”. This denial of the attractiveness of Aboriginal women is recurrent and statements such as the following from *Bony and the Black Virgin* are not uncommon: “For an aborigine she was tall, and, too, for an aborigine, she was pleasing to behold”. (57) Of course, art and life don't necessarily coincide and a large population of Aborigines of mixed descent stands as evidence of the dubiousness of such statements. Goldie suggests that vehement denials of the attractiveness of Aboriginal women may actually imply a fear of their attractions. Such fear makes the desirable Aboriginal woman an ideal subject for crime fiction.

attributes is the assumption of the improving effects of white phenotypes. While for Bony this has the consequence of increased social mobility, for Beatrice the consequence is increased exploitation. Her role at Stafford Motors is compared to 'Chloe', the notorious nude portrait in Melbourne's Young and Jackson's Hotel. She is hired as an object for voyeurs. As personal assistant to Steven Panner she is described as an odalisque, and her relationship with Phillip Roke is founded upon her exotic value. Nevertheless, such is the status of Aborigines that even these exploitative relations can be represented in terms of social advancement:

Perhaps it was because she was, in her own way, pretty, she had got on. It was obvious, she asserted to herself, she was not just a bit different, better than the few other girls in the settlement. She had risen out of their level altogether, and on that higher level, she found herself alone. (14)

Assimilation is equated with alienation. Beatrice's inroads into white society are represented as forms of exploitation resulting in isolation. This effect is mirrored in the character of Vic Pegram. Vic's pursuit of his father's values is shown to exclude him from black society, and at the same time racism precludes full entry into white society. The text provides this description of Vic:

Almost as black as a full blood in skin, his features those of the immigrant Scottish grandfather he was a point, quite alone, between the black and the white, not wanting to drift one way, not able to go much further the other, but made by the old man's hand ambitious for he did not know what. (41)

In *Venus Half-Caste* the problematising of the Aboriginal subject is extended to include a problematising of the dominant governmental strategy of dealing with the Aboriginal subject. The text is posing the question, assimilation to what?⁴² The narrative interrogates the assumption that assimilation is synonymous with increased social mobility, social justice and social harmony. Assimilation, the much touted solution to division and inequality is reinscribed as a primary source of division and inequality. Assimilation has resulted in an intensification rather than an alleviation of anxiety. John Wilson (1964) notes in a 1956 survey of white farmers that "...whereas egalitarian views were widespread in discussing the native problem, anxiety at the possibility of increased social contact with part-aborigines was common" (Wilson 158). *Venus Half-Caste* confirms this anxiety. Instead of the ideal outcome represented by a character such as Bony, the text delivers the troubled and troubling figure of the "marginal man" situated in a field of violent relations⁴³.

Goldie argues that in the representation of indigenes, violence, one of the five standard commodities, is rarely situated in an economy of social causation but is presented as inherent, the product of

⁴² John Wilson (1964: 151-3) also poses this question: "Assimilation has been commonly viewed as absorption into the white society; at what social level, or into what social categories, has rarely been specified. ... If assimilation or integration involves upward social mobility for aborigines...the outlook is not encouraging."

⁴³ According to Wilson the "marginal man" usually appears as "some unfortunate creature with feet in two worlds, belonging fully to neither. Frequently there is the assumption that this is accompanied by psychological disturbances" (162). Jimmie Blacksmith of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (Kenneally 1978) is a more well-known example of this figure. *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* (1977) also points towards this difficulty but seems to imply that it is a problem that can be overcome if Aborigines try hard enough.

a bestial nature. While the violence of *Venus Half-Caste* is very definitely located in a social context, one of alienation and exclusion that is shown to be productive of that violence, it also retains allusions to a savage nature. The exigencies of Vic's predicament to some extent determine a violent solution but the text nevertheless insists upon a predisposition for brutality. Before the murder of Roke, Vic reveals a certain appetite for cruelty:

In the street he remarked to himself that though Percy was a good bloke and a friend, he had menaced him as a matter of course. He stopped short, realizing that though it was certain Percy would not blab, he had been imagining the pleasure he would get from doing Percy over if Percy did blab. Oh more than that. Though he wanted to take Beatrice over and was certainly going to, it would please him much to give her a bashing too. (227)

Goldie (105) notes that while the female mixed-race character (largely represented in terms of the standard commodity of sexuality) emerges as no more or less sexual than "her full-blood sisters" that mixed race is shown to intensify the violence of the male indigene. *Venus Half-Caste* conforms to this at the same time as it situates the murders in a web of unequal and exploitative relations. The text exhibits a good deal of ambivalence in this regard: social critique exists side by side with an almost primitivist essentialism. Even Phillip Roke's murder of Steven Panner is represented concurrently as the product of pandemic

alienation, and the result of a ritualistic bone-pointing⁴⁴. Much of the text's power resides in the tension produced by the juxtaposition of the intelligible force of social conditions and the enigmatic force of otherness. The text realises the worst fears of Dr. Cecil Cook *et al*; 'the problem' of Aboriginality has survived both the addition of white blood and the subjection of assimilation. In an inversion of prevailing logics the conditions of assimilation, as well as the fact of mixed race, have increased rather than eliminated the threat of the Other. In comparison to certain media stories, in which Aboriginality is constructed as pitiable and white society as culpable, *Venus Half-Caste*, while continuing to produce white society as culpable, constructs Aboriginality in terms of threat and disturbance.

Taussig's study shows how certain forms of representation can be used to exert power over that which threatens. There is something about converting nature, or that which *is*, into the cultural that inverts relations of power. In representation the 'evil spirit', or the Other that threatens, becomes a known figure, an object, a productive entity within the discourse of the Same.

⁴⁴ Beatrice's mother returns to the country where she grew up and performs a ritual aimed at killing the two white men in Beatrice's life, "she at once pointed the stick in the direction of the distant city and at the man there with whom Sansa who was called Beatrice had lived, that his spirit should leave his body so without it his body should pine and die. And then, not at once, but after a long stillness, she pointed a stick at the man Panner. For a moment she felt that the pointings had also been at the whole city." (178)

The 'evil spirit' of *Venus Half-Caste* is a representation of 'the Aboriginal problem' that has been expanded to include white society, the institutions assembled to administer 'the Aboriginal problem', and the repercussions of the administrative process.⁴⁵ The text inserts this representation, along with standard commodities such as the Aboriginal as temptress and the Aboriginal as savage, into the semiotic field of criminality. In comparison with *Death in Dreamtime*, which reaffirmed constructs of the dangerous Other while affirming the authority of the governmental, *Venus Half-Caste* actually implicates governmental authority in the very formation of the dangerous Other.

more problems

According to Mickler, since the 1960s the way in which Aboriginal people figure in Western Australia's news press has undergone a number of significant transformations. In this period, Mickler argues, Aborigines went from being "...a marginal problem to a major public threat; from powerless objects of policy to powerful agents upon policy, from oppressed sub-proletarians to a 'privileged' 'elite' group" (Mickler 100). Broadly speaking, in public discourse the category of Aboriginality continues to be produced as a problematised category.

⁴⁵ This representation contrasts sharply with the representation of the Aboriginal problem that prevailed in the Bony novels. Upfield's translation of the Aboriginal problem is located entirely within the body and soul of the Aboriginal person. It is a primal force that the Aboriginal has the responsibility to resist.

While subject to periodic variation, construction as either an impediment or a threat to order appears to be a constant in the representation of Aboriginality. In *Venus Half-Caste* the racism and indifference of white society are shown to form part of the threat, so too the failings of an assimilationist approach to Aboriginal affairs, but the text also keeps in circulation the original prototypes of the Aboriginal as threat - the savage male and the dark siren. Beneath the concerns for social justice that shape this particular 1960s representation of the Aboriginal problem there remains a fear of the Other.

Obviously, the problematised Aboriginal of 1990s press reports is a very different figure from the “inherently treacherous savage” of 1920s press reports (Docker 9). Informed by very different political realities the Aboriginal problem of the 1990s is likely to be defined by Aboriginal people themselves and to be articulated in terms of dispossession and disadvantage, racism and governmental failure. While such reporting may be far removed from the “treacherous savage” of 1920s press reports it is easy to see, from the perspective of non-Aboriginal Australia, that this kind of representation of Aboriginality may ultimately be just as disturbing as the reportage of less enlightened times. In addition to earlier configurations of the threatening Other, such as the savage and the seductress, there are newer configurations, in many ways just as unsettling. These figures include: the Aboriginal political activist, the Aboriginal as privileged citizen, the Aboriginal as accuser, the

Aboriginal as victim of white (in)justice, and the Aboriginal juvenile offender. As Mickler says, in the 1990s the Aboriginal (re)appears as a major public threat. Of course, the threat is not without history. It has a traceable genealogy of anxiety invested configurations beginning with the “inherently treacherous savage”. While these earlier configurations may no longer be foregrounded they continue to have narrative power and continue to influence the shape and content of later configurations.

These points may be illustrated with reference to the 1996 film *Dead Heart* (Parsons 1996). Set in the fictitious central Australian Aboriginal community of Wala-Wala⁴⁶, *Dead Heart* is informed by a number of notable developments in the problematisation of Aboriginality. The most significant of these are the procedure and findings of the Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody, the introduction of native title legislation, and the emergence of a widespread belief in the notion of Aboriginal privilege⁴⁷.

Focussing upon the violence and conflict in a community divided against itself the film seems to summon desire for a harmonious

⁴⁶ Based upon the Northern Territory community of Kintore.

⁴⁷ This belief in the privileged status of Aboriginal people is the focus of Mickler's study. Mickler writes: “The idea [of Aboriginal privilege] is remarkable for how readily it is imagined in the face of prodigious counter-evidence that Aborigines are the most disadvantaged people in Australian society. We know from our weekly news intake that they are the poorest, least healthy, have the highest levels of unemployment, are the most under-housed, under-educated, over-jailed and youngest-dying social group on the continent. That such routinely damning facts are commonly affirmed and routinely the source of national scandal and moments of remorse sits, to say the least, oddly with the prevalence of claims of how better off they are” (Mickler 13).

homogeneity (one nation?)⁴⁸ where, to paraphrase the pastor and community liaison officer played by Aboriginal actor, Ernie Dingo, there are no "blackfellas" or "whitefellas", just "fellas". This plea for a dissolution of difference is only sensible when viewed against the background of the aforementioned developments in the problematisation of Aboriginality, in particular the RCIADIC⁴⁹.

In its problematisation of Aboriginality *Dead Heart* lays claim to a privileged position. Presenting itself as a tale told by an Aboriginal man to other Aboriginal men, when in fact it is a tale told by a non-Aboriginal man about Aboriginal men⁵⁰, the film performs a sleight of hand that imbues the narrative with an illusion of veracity⁵¹. In other words, the film obscures its actual status as a fairly representative non-Aboriginal version of events through the use of an Aboriginal narrator. The power of this device cannot be overestimated. It allows ways of

⁴⁸ It is perhaps significant that the film's release was concurrent with the emergence of One Nation, the right wing political party led by Pauline Hanson, whose primary platform - aside from anti-Asian immigration - was a call to end the privileges that Aboriginal Australians were imagined to receive.

⁴⁹ (Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody) Described by Mickler as "the nation's forensic investigation into itself as measured by the circumstances of its Aboriginal population", the Royal Commission appeared to place non-Aboriginal Australia on trial.

⁵⁰ *Dead Heart* is very definitely a tale about Aboriginal men. In the film Aboriginal women are virtually invisible and absolutely silent.

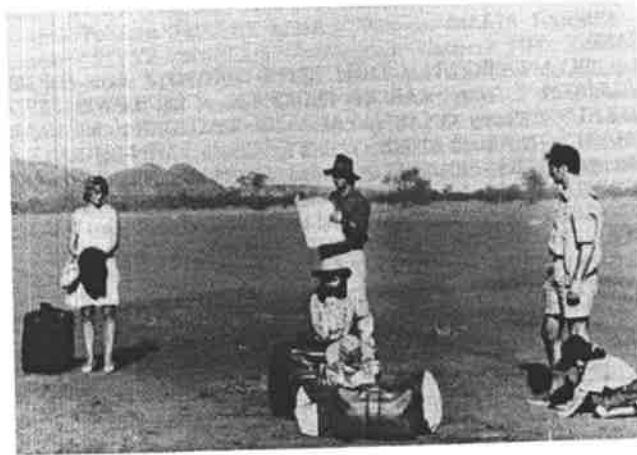
⁵¹ This is not to suggest that an Aboriginal viewpoint would in itself be more accurate or reliable but only that it is an entirely different matter when an Aboriginal person claims to have done such things as extract money from the media for a less than accurate deaths in custody story, which Poppy the narrator of *Dead Heart* does, than if a non-Aboriginal person suggests that this is what could be taking place. The former is admission or disclosure whereas the latter falls into the category of suspicion or conjecture. In a hierarchy of 'truth statements' admission outranks conjecture.

showing that would appear highly questionable were their actual source less concealed. The utter dubiousness of representing an Aboriginal community leader – also a media informant in a deaths in custody story and a witness at the trial of the accused police officer - as manipulative, dishonest and self-serving is somewhat diminished by the illusion that this is a self-representation: that Poppy (the community leader) is portraying himself in this way. It is, however, this area of the film where plausibility appears most strained. Two nagging questions arise: why would Poppy represent himself as brutal and avaricious, and why, if we are seeing things from an Aboriginal point of view, does Senior Constable Ray Lorkin emerge as both an accomplished detective and an heroic martyr?⁵²

Poppy is the inherently treacherous savage reinscribed and contemporised. Murderous, completely immersed in the ways of Realpolitik, pointing an accusatory finger at white society at the same time that he skilfully milks the system it has assembled, an altogether insidious force, Poppy is a debased representation of Aboriginal leadership. He is the product of a reactionary desire to demean the increased effectiveness of Aboriginal politics, which under the leadership of figures such as Eddie Mabo and Pat Dodson had culminated in

⁵² In *Film as Social Practice* (1993) Graeme Turner writes about cracks or divisions in a text through which we can see “the consensualizing work of ideology exposed” (147). The questionable bias of a narrative’s dominant meanings is foregrounded by such divisions. These cracks often appear as a point at which the story becomes unconvincing; i.e., the portrayal of Lorkin or Poppy.

developments such as the introduction of Native Title legislation and the RCIADIC.



white people driven from their homes: Dead Heart taps into Mabo paranoia

While to many Australians both Native Title and the Royal Commission were seen as long overdue, this was by no means an across the board view. In fact, national opinion polls as early as 1985 had been showing that average Australians saw Aborigines as already well compensated, and that attempts at forms of compensation for dispossession and mistreatment were likely to be viewed in terms of “white guilt”.⁵³ The use of the concept of “white guilt” as an explanation for why governments had begun to self-scrutinise and redress past wrongs (as evidenced in Native Title and the RCIADIC) is common enough (as anyone who listens to talkback radio could confirm), and its influence upon the shape and content of *Dead Heart* is marked. This is confirmed by comments made

⁵³ Australian National Opinion Poll, 1985, p14.

by Nick Parsons, (the writer and director of *Dead Heart*) in a *Sydney Morning Herald* review of the film:

Most films on the subject have been lectures designed to make whites feel guilty about what they have done.... But let's get it right. Most whites haven't done anything. You can't visit the sins of the fathers on the sons. I find that morally rather primitive. And besides, this is not a film about race relations. It's a western.⁵⁴

Of course, most films on the subject of Aboriginality and race relations have not been "lectures designed to make whites feel guilty". However, it seems clear, both from this statement and from an analysis of the film, that Parsons writes from a position of feeling blamed. *Dead Heart* is a film on the defensive, a reactionary response to the climate of critical self-examination that surrounded MABO and the RCIADIC. It attempts to counter the mood of self-scrutiny in two main ways: firstly, it foregrounds a less than innocent Aboriginality⁵⁵; secondly, it casts various institutions involved in the administration and representation of Aboriginality - the media, academia, Aboriginal bureaucracy, school education - as weak or

⁵⁴ "The Lore Breakers", *Sydney Morning Herald*, (Metro), 22/1196, p9.

⁵⁵ It achieves this largely through characterisation - the violent and ruthless Poppy, the disrespectful and delinquent Tony, the ambitious and duplicitous Dave - but it also thoroughly overplays the brutality of traditional Aboriginal law. The melodramatic 'payback' scene is constructed so as to contrast sharply with the seemingly simple case of neglect involved in the lock-up suicide. The penalty of death passed upon Tony by the elders functions to make the coercion and confinement of white law appear humane. The heavy-handed juxtaposition of a death in police custody with the distressing cruelty of payback and the killing of Tony says nothing less than a defensive: "But what about them?"

deluded, dishonest or self-serving.⁵⁶ Somewhat like *Venus Half-Caste* the problematisation of Aboriginality is extended to include associated institutions but where Mann's problematising comprises white racism and the failings of assimilationism, *Dead Heart* extends the Aboriginal 'problem' to incorporate a range of institutions under the influence of an ostensibly feeble and misguided liberalism.

As with the murder investigation of *Death in Dreamtime* Lorkin's detective work uncovers something more than the killer's identity. The light of detection brings to attention details of a disruption to the social order in which the ordinarily excluded has assumed inordinate power and influence. While Poppy is the very embodiment of this movement from exclusion to dominance the film provides the supreme metaphor for the ascendancy of the Other with Tony's seduction of Kate. Lorkin's investigation establishes this relation, complete submission to the Other, as the initiatory event of crisis and collapse in Wala Wala.

⁵⁶ The television reporters are shown to be unconcerned with the truth, the anthropologist emerges as an insipid moral relativist (particularly in the scenes which rather heavily-handedly contrast him with Lorkin), the school teacher is made to appear completely out of touch with what is really happening, and Dave, the quintessential Aboriginal bureaucrat is clearly compromised by his ambition and divided loyalties. The anthropologist, the teacher, the doctor are made to stand in for a certain section of the bourgeois intelligentsia that conservatives might label - 'trendy liberals'.



Tony and Kate: violating sacred ground

The sex scene is pivotal in the film's rendition of contemporary Aboriginal affairs. It eclipses the death in police custody and provides further opportunity for censorious display of traditional Aboriginal justice. It is also composed in such a way as to compel the viewer to censure an intimate association of racialised bodies. While the viewer is persuaded to condemn the couple's violation of the Aboriginal sacred, a sexual encounter between a black man and a white woman portrayed in terms of transgression and corruption appeals to racist interpretations, and certainly the film does more to assist than dissuade such readings. Enacting the encounter on Aboriginal sacred ground supplies a link to meanings, such as desecration and depravity, which would always be implicit in the context of racist culture. The cuts to mongrels rutting in church are excessive to say the very least, functioning to further define penetration by the Other as the enemy within, and producing a troubling resonance with racist concepts of miscegenation. The scene does not

present an abstract meeting of neutral bodies, nor does it offer a union of particular personalities, it manufactures a merging of bodies whose identity has been almost solely determined by the concept of race.

The scene comments upon the joining of racialised bodies. Kate is not simply woman or young woman - *she is white woman* - and Tony is black man, or more to the point Tony is 'half-caste'.⁵⁷ *Dead Heart* significantly concerns itself with an evaluation of the mixed-race subject and Tony can only be fully understood with reference to this. Making use of the commonly circulating binary of true (tribal/traditional/full-blood) versus false (urban, non-traditional, detribalised, or mixed-race) Aborigines, the film constructs Aboriginality as a space that can be occupied by the fraudulent and the illegitimate.⁵⁸ "If you're a *real* Abo you'll walk", says Lorkin after hurling Tony's car keys into the scrub, and to Dave - "You're a fuckin' white man, Dave. A fuckin' white man. I got more blackfella in me than you'll ever have." The film surrounds Tony with signs of the illegitimate unsettling his claims to Aboriginality, and

⁵⁷ The film does not use the term 'half-caste'. However, considering the 'half-caste' as a traditional construct with certain repeating characteristics it is apparent that Tony is informed by this tradition. For instance, there is a foregrounding of the elements of John Wilson's 'marginal man' (confusion; anomie, delinquency) and there is also an emphasis upon physical appearance/sexual attractiveness.

⁵⁸ This division or gradation of Aboriginality often seems to be used in response to Aboriginal political activism. Aboriginal representatives such as Charles Perkins and Michael Manson have frequently been targeted in this way. Mickler notes an example of this in an article from the Perth *Daily News* that commented upon Jack Davis's attendance of a Black Power conference. In this report Davis is represented emphatically as part-Aboriginal. (Mickler 130) The phrase, part-Aboriginal, has the clearly intended effect of diluting Davis's authority as a representative of Aboriginal people. It is a tactical attempt to invalidate an identity-based politics through assaulting the integrity of that identity.

more than this, in tracking the flows of disintegration that eventually engulf Wala Wala most paths lead to Tony: Tony brings the alcohol into the community, Tony gives the alcohol to Danny (who is found hanged in a police cell), Tony desecrates the sacred site. The characterisation of Tony is in keeping with the film's general anxiety concerning all spaces in which black and white bodies liaise and unite.

The film closely parallels *Death in Dreamtime* in a number of respects. Both narratives respond to the threat of the Other by representing as either credulous or corrupt those who defer to its power. Catering to a will to reproach, Parsons and Courtier furnish their readers/viewers with situations for denouncing the society seduced by the Other's power. In each instance the interrogatory gaze of the police detective foregrounds a web of complicity between a community in crisis and its modes of relating to and comprehending the Aboriginal Other. Courtier takes the fashionable idealising of the esoteric and the oneiric that Dream Time Land represents and casts it as fanciful and inauspiciously destined. Transgression becomes the key to the intelligibility of the unexplained and it is the role of the police detective to (re)subject all to the rational and moral order of the Same. Within this conceptual framework there is nothing outside the comprehension of the Same; there are only hidden desires and concealed motives. There are no innocent associations, the light of suspicion brings everything into

question, and Courtier's detective exposes the treachery of the seemingly benign.

In *Dead Heart* the detective role is assigned to Senior Constable Ray Lorkin. While Lorkin may fail to bring a criminal to justice the film leaves no doubt that his skilful detective work has accurately exposed the true nature and origin of evil in Wala-Wala. Like Bony for Upfield and Haig for Courtier, Lorkin is the custodian of truth in this text. Events unfold only to confirm Lorkin's predictions and judgements. For instance, during the birthday party scenes Lorkin spends his time attempting to persuade an unsympathetic white audience that they are being exploited by shrewd hunter/gatherers and that Poppy is a dangerous killer.⁵⁹ While Lorkin's diatribe is received with looks of incredulity the surrounding scenes resonate with sympathy. There are shots of hunting, of gorging, and finally, the killing orchestrated by Poppy. The film confers an authority upon Lorkin that has the effect of naturalising the regressive racial politics he represents.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The word 'savage' isn't exactly used but it doesn't need to be. Surrounding imagery such as the shot of Mannga's face, painted white and menacingly pressed against the window, and cuts to the scene of Pintubi people gathered around the campfire hungrily tearing into huge hunks of camel meat effectively convey this. Kate's story of the brutality at Haast's Bluff also supports what is essentially a deployment of the trope of savagery.

⁶⁰ Lorkin's views on matters such as the stolen generation are imbued with a sense of legitimacy that most contemporary contexts would not allow. Three times he repeats that there was "value" in the forced removal of Aboriginal children.

The crime/detective narrative structure subjects the complexity of that which has proven ungovernable, the Other metaphorised as criminal, to an order of intelligibility, capture and constraint. *Dead Heart* and the other texts discussed in this chapter extend the operational field of this popular form to include the Other metaphorised as Aboriginal. Under the discriminating eye of the law Aboriginality, both as enigma and as problematised governmental object, is rendered explicable and accountable in terms of prevailing moral and political regimes.

part three

prophets

moderns dreaming

The texts that are the subject of this chapter are concerned with spirituality or religion. Some are primarily informed by the dominant Western tradition of the spiritual, that is they are essentially Christian, while others belong to the category of alternative or New Age spirituality.

In the first chapter I identified a strategy of primitivisation in which the category of Aboriginality functioned as a means of valorising the modern. The strategy that prevails (mostly) in the texts analysed here is a form of idealisation in which a spiritualised and nostalgified Other is called upon as a means (ostensibly) of supplementing the modern: the Aboriginal is seen as having “escaped the contamination of this fallen world” (Frow, 1991: 129), and therefore possessing answers to the discontents of modern life.

Primitivism is the term that is generally used to describe the idealising or excessive celebration of indigenous others. Usually, primitivism is understood as a discrete category of representation standing in direct opposition to the category of primitivisation. According to Torgovnick (1990) there is actually no separation or opposition between these categories: idealisation of primitives and derogation of primitives are simply different strategies within the one primitivist discourse. For Torgovnick primitivism is a fluid and adaptable ensemble

of techniques “fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other” (Torgovnick 8). Emphasising that there are not and never were any primitive peoples (there are only objects of primitivist discourse), Torgovnick argues that the content of this discourse is simply determined by whatever the current needs and values of the West may be:

Is the present too materialistic? Primitive life is not - it is a precapitalist utopia in which only use value, never exchange value, prevails. Is the present sexually repressed? Not primitive life - primitives live life whole, without fear of the body. Is the present promiscuous and indiscriminating sexually? Then primitives teach us the inevitable limits and controls placed on sexuality and the proper subordination of sexuality to the needs of child rearing. Does the present see itself as righteously Christian? Then primitives become heathens, mired in false belief... In each case, the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive. (9)

In terms of Torgovnick's model the texts of this chapter, whose main emphasis is always upon Aboriginal spiritual traditions, emerge from a present that sees itself as spiritually impoverished and alienated from nature. This is abundantly clear in the following excerpt from Monica Furlong's *The Flight of the Kingfisher* (1996):

...the Aborigines remain to this day, along with a decreasing number of indigenous peoples, without complicity in the modern world. What they have instead is a knowledge of, for example, the sacredness of the natural world, an overwhelming sense of its meaning. The West no longer has this sense and it seems to me to make us infinitely the poorer, to reveal us not as the know-all we pretend, but as blinded, confused, maybe lost. (14)

In this passage the idea of modernity as a complex and superior stage of development has been subordinated to the notion of a modern world that has lost its way. Aboriginality (represented as the non-modern) functions to allow the modern to articulate its needs and desires. The modern emerges in terms of its longings which are focussed upon an Aboriginality imagined to enjoy a privileged relationship to the sacred as nature. Frow (1997) notes that the paradox of this valorising is that at the same time that the Other is exalted it is brought into the sphere of influence of its categorical opposite, "a modernity destructive of the very otherness that it celebrates" (101).

'struth

The representation of Aboriginality as a spiritualised category has a long history: it precedes the European colonisation of Australia and probably begins with the Deists¹ (Swain 12). In the seventeenth century the antipodes was a common subject for artists and writers who represented it variously as the dwelling place of monsters and of demi-gods (see image overleaf). Deists used the novel to imagine an antipodes that was the home of utopian societies governed by natural law². For example, in a

¹ Deism was an unorthodox religious attitude that emerged in Europe in the sixteenth century. Essentially it is the belief in the existence of God based solely on "natural reason" rather than dogma or Church authority.

² Interestingly, these representations, like a number of obviously fictional New Age representations (e.g. *Mutant Message Down Under*, *Crystal Woman*), were received by a proportion of their readership as factual accounts (Swain 13). According to Swain the writers went to some lengths to make their novels sound authentic. There is surely no less credible account of Australia and its inhabitants than Gabriel Foigny's *A New Discovery of Terra Australia* (1676). The Aborigines, said Foigny, were eight feet tall, vermilion in

novel entitled *The History of The Sevarambians* (1675), Denis Veiras, describes the inhabitants of *Terra Australis* as possessing a religion “depending more on philosophy and reason than on revelation and faith” (Veiras cited in Swain).



seventeenth century images of antipodeans

Veiras's Australians are defined by Deist beliefs and values: they are steeped in natural law and worship the one true God. In using representations of indigenous Australians to express and promote religious attitudes Veiras *et al* established a practice that continues until this day, and is most recently evident in New Age writing.

According to Swain, Deist constructs of Australian Aborigines had a significant influence on the beginnings of Australian anthropology. Early nineteenth century Australian anthropology was very much concerned with demonstrating the existence of an Aboriginal belief in a

colour, and hermaphroditic. Perhaps because Foigny claimed to have received this information from an explorer named Sadeur, who had actually visited Australia, many readers took the novel for truth.

supreme being. Such work seems to have been largely motivated by the idea that the existence of an Aboriginal belief in a supreme being would function as a validation of monotheism *per se*. Prominent among these religio-ethnographers was the Lutheran Archdeacon Gunther who sought to represent Aboriginal beliefs as akin to a prehistoric theology:

There is no doubt in my mind that the name *Baiami* refers to the Supreme Being, and the ideas entertained by some of the more thoughtful aborigines [sic] concerning Him are a remnant of the original traditions prevalent among the ancients about the Deity. (Gunther cited in Swain 35)

This theological preoccupation with Aboriginal belief continued into the twentieth century. For example, in the foreword to a popular selling book³ of the 1920s, Herbert Basedow writes of the great pleasure he found in the writer's frequent mentioning of the Aboriginal's belief in a deity. Basedow was far from alone in finding pleasure in the identification of correspondences between Aboriginal belief and Christian belief. The discovery of points of correspondence is pleasurable because it appears to confirm the rightness of our position. However, the pleasure we find when others' beliefs conform with our own can lead us to overlook significant points of difference or even to create conformity where there was none: difference can be assimilated through (mis)interpretation.

³ *Coo-ee talks: a collection of lecturettes upon early experiences among the Aborigines of Australia delivered from a wireless broadcasting station / by W. Robertson ("Bringga")*; ed. with a foreword by H. Basedow, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1928.

Historically, Christianity has dealt with differences of belief through the strategy of conversion. In its more extreme manifestations conversion has focused upon the body of the dissenter and has involved unbelievable brutality. While such approaches have long since fallen into disrepute Christianity continues to convert the Other into the Same. Where once force was used to efface and supplant Indigenous belief, now Indigenous belief is simply translated as Christianity. One way in which this is achieved is through deploying the concept of universal spiritual experience: such abstractions enable the attribution of the same basic values and beliefs to divergent formations. This is the main strategy of *Karingal: A search for Australian spirituality* (Cameron 1995). Published by The Society of St Paul, this Catholic text purports to explore “the deep sharing that is going on between the Dreamtime and Christianity”(11). However, while there may be a deep sharing going on between the Dreamtime and Christianity, from the perspective of *Karingal* it is far from a communion of equals:

It is Alcheringa belief that the Sacred (God) lives in the land. This is also Christian belief...The revelation of God through nature (the land) comes in a gentle voice that can be heard by anyone who listens. This is God's primary revelation. The total and complete revelation of God is in Jesus. But it is very important to receive the primary. It is not good for children to skip primary school. (Cameron 31)

For *Karingal* the Dreamtime is simply God in brackets: this is what Cameron calls “deep sharing”. The Aboriginal concept of the land is translated to a Christian concept of God revealed through “nature”. But

while the text is keen to confer an equivalence of meaning it has no interest in conferring an equivalence of status. Cameron is at pains to point out that Aboriginal understandings are more elementary, more primitive (primary school level) than those of Christianity. Of course, there is nothing new in this: Missionary Catholicism has a long tradition of comprehending Indigenous peoples in terms of the category of childhood. What is new is the valuing of Aboriginality for its capacity to signify spirituality (Christianity), and the use of Aboriginal spiritual constructs in an attempt to resurrect a declining religious attitude. In this project the old heathenism becomes a primal corroboration of Christian doctrine.

In *Karingal* the concepts of sharing and dialogue function to conceal (barely) a privileging of Catholicism. Jean Baudrillard's (1975) critique of Levi-Strauss's universal structures of human thought could equally apply to Cameron's universal sacred:

This harmonious vision of two thought processes renders their *confrontation* perfectly inoffensive, by denying the difference of the primitives as an element of rupture with and subversion of (our) objectified thought and its mechanisms. (Baudrillard 90)

Karingal glosses over essential points of difference and therefore avoids the potential for subversion of its own thought. The fact that codes and practices informed by Aboriginal Dreamings are often radically different from Judaeo-Christian models, to the point that the Church has an extensive history of involvement in their effacement, simply isn't

acknowledged⁴. Difference is not recognised in *Karingal*: its sole concern is the continuing elaboration, (re)construction and application of Catholic doctrine. The Dreaming is permitted only to confirm and promote the Christian text and never to confront or challenge it.

If *Karingal* can stand as evidence in the search for Australian spirituality, Catholicism is seriously blinkered. Rather than articulating an Aboriginal spirituality it deploys a narrow (mis)interpretation of the Dreaming within processes of Christian mythic renewal. Contrary to its claims it seeks self-perpetuation and not hybridity:

There comes a time when we need a new spirituality. In his encyclical on *Social Concerns*, John Paul II said we need a 'new spirituality for the World Church'... In modern times we live in a vastly extended awareness of the Universe. What Einstein has done to Physics, Carl Jung and his followers are now doing to Psychology. Our spirituality needs to respond to these new horizons... In Australia we are participating in one of the most dramatic cultural encounters in Church history. Jesus Christ is walking into the Ancient Dream. Far out in the Australian desert there is a vast artesian basin of good water which will quench the thirst of the modern world. (Cameron 51)

⁴ What *Karingal* calls deep sharing others have called erasure. For instance, contemporary Koori artist, Rea, makes the following comment on the impact of Christianity on Aboriginal belief systems: "My own resistance to many things which have been forced upon me gave me an initial insight into my history. As I looked at my great grandparents and nanna as a child I realised that their resistance had already been engulfed by Christianity (Koori culture/spirituality had been pushed underground). With Bibles in their hands and dressed in their Sunday best they lost all that they had ever known and so did I"(cited in Howe 1993).

In this passage we find a Catholicism imbued with a distinctly New Age flavour⁵. Citing Jung as one who *must* be responded to, using phrases such as “vastly extended awareness”, spelling universe and psychology with capital letters, *Karingal*’s “new spirituality” is an Aquarianised Christianity. The more fluid boundaries of New Age discourse function to enable a deterritorialisation of Christian doctrine and a subsequent reterritorialising upon the Dreaming. Cameron’s “new spirituality” is fundamentally imperialist: a means by which Jesus Christ can walk “into the Ancient Dream” and quench his thirst.

Karingal shows how New Age discourse can function as an apparatus that enables essentially Christian texts to appropriate elements from divergent spiritual systems such as the Dreaming. This is more readily observable in the less obviously sectarian writing of people such as James Cowan and Monica Furlong. In Cowan’s view Aboriginal tradition represents a final link to “a genuinely theocentric way of life”, and by combining an extravagant New Agism with a conventional Christian monotheism he constructs the Dreaming as a royal road to spiritual fulfilment (Cowan 1992). Somewhat similarly, Monica Furlong attempts to remedy the “lack of imaginative power” of contemporary Christianity by turning to Aborigines, who she sees as living “in constant awareness of

⁵ While officially at least the Catholic Church would see itself in opposition to New Age thought, the influence of New Age luminaries, such as Carl Jung, upon Catholics has been significant (Pacwa 1992). Although the New Age is widely understood as a dissenting response to dominant Western formations such as Christianity and science there is in fact a deep compatibility between these systems of thought.

the natural world, with the world of myth, mediated in story and song and painting and ceremony, shining through it" (Furlong 15).

In constructing the Aboriginal as the source of "a new spirituality" Furlong, Cowan and Cameron bring to mind Torgovnick's critique of primitivism:

the real secret of the primitive in this century has often been the same secret as always: the primitive can be - has been, will be (?) whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. (9)

No longer a living Stone Age through which to measure technological advancement, Aboriginality becomes a path to a kind of fulfilment that technology fails to provide.

what's new ?

A multifarious ensemble of beliefs and techniques from sources as diverse as econometrics and phrenology, the New Age almost defies definition. However, the unifying factor in this eclectic mix of unconventional knowledge and archaic practices is that like religion and liberation politics it addresses human dissatisfaction. While critics often characterise the New Age as vain obscurantism to its supporters it represents the most significant development in the history of human

thought. Marilyn Ferguson, author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy*⁶, offers the following summary of the New Age position:

For the first time in history, humankind has come upon the control panel of change - an understanding of how transformation occurs. We are living in the change of change, the time in which we can intentionally align ourselves with nature for rapid remaking of ourselves and our collapsing institutions. The paradigm of the Aquarian Conspiracy sees humankind embedded in Nature. It sees us as stewards of all our resources inner and outer. It says that we are not victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions or conditioning. Human nature is neither good nor bad but open to continuous transformation and transcendence. The Aquarian Conspirators are drawn together by their parallel discoveries, by paradigm shifts that convinced them they had been leading needlessly circumscribed lives. (Ferguson in Bloom [my italics], 1991: 7)

This short excerpt provides a representative sample of New Age perspectives and ideas. New Age is, of course, quintessentially millenarian, and Ferguson's phrase *for the first time in history* communicates this fundamental New Age concept: we are at the dawning of a new era in which we will finally transcend the constraints that have characterised the past. This change or *transformation*⁷ (the preferred New Age term) will have little to do with the social and historical forces that have determined change in the past. We are said to be "living in the

⁶ Carl Raschke (1988: 330) describes *The Aquarian Conspiracy* as being to new agers what *The Communist Manifesto* was to the First International.

⁷ Jay Rosen (1991) describes "transformation" as the key word in new age thought: "The stress on the word 'transformation' shows how the dominant model for change in new age thinking is *the wish*. In a wish the world is altered instantly according to the individual's desires; one is projected into a happier reality like a child in a fairy tale" (276).

change of change”: a tautologised assertion that is not untypical of New Age phraseology. In this new time we will understand ourselves as “embedded in Nature”, we will no longer be “limited by conditions or conditioning”, we will no longer lead “needlessly circumscribed lives”.

In the case of New Agism, unlike politics, and even religion to some extent, the main focus for change is never the social domain (society or public morality) but the self: there will be an aligning of the self with Nature, there will be a remaking of the self, the self will undergo “continuous transformation and transcendence”. In a critique of New Age thought, Christopher Lasch (1978: 6) refers to this concentration upon the self as “transcendental self-attention”. Transcendental self-attention is characterised by an indifference to the past, an obsessive focus upon one’s private performance and a “retreat from politics” (5).

While the New Age is widely understood as a contemporary form of religiosity Lasch notes that the social values normally associated with religion are conspicuously absent from the New Age. According to Lasch, “even the most radically otherworldly religions of the past expressed a hope of social justice and a sense of continuity with earlier generations”, but the New Age is concerned neither with equity nor with continuity but with personal well-being and remedies for discontent:

The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier

golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of well being, health, and psychic security. (Lasch 7)

Lasch uses the term narcissism to refer to this prioritising of the therapeutic above all else⁸. The personality that results from this condition is typically "uncertain of its outlines, longing either to remake the world in its own image or to merge into its environment in blissful union" (Lasch 1984: 19). According to Lasch this type of personality, which he calls the "minimal self", emerges in part from "the replacement of a reliable world of durable objects by a world of flickering images that make it harder and harder to distinguish reality from fantasy" (1984: 34).

The phrase "a world of flickering images" refers to the realm of the mass media, especially television, which Lasch sees as a critical influence upon the development of New Ageism. Following from Lasch, Jay Rosen (1991) notes parallels in the way that television and the New Age relate to their demographic:

Both seek to dissolve the boundary between the self and the world, because both treasure the sort of self that results - fluid, formless, open to any incoming message; in a word, a self that is weak but impressed by the strength of the forces bearing down on it, believing that they somehow "come from within." Both television and the New Age return to the audience its own inclinations, often by giving them another name. It is the circularity of this communication - common fears and desires recycled as statements about the world - that makes

⁸ Lasch emphasises that it is finally not egotism that leads to the demise of Narcissus but the confusion of that which is the self with that which is not. In other words, it is not self-love that leads to transcendental self-attention but mistaking that which has social and political causes as originating with the self.

both TV and the New Age so successfully unreal.
(272)

Rosen notes correspondences between the New Age idea of rapid self-transformation and the essential subtext of all commercial television: consume products and transcend the mundane. Despite an often expressed opposition to the materialism of the modern world the New Age movement in fact exhibits a "deep compatibility - and complicity - with consumer culture" (Rosen 277). The New Age is hospitable to consumerism and the ideology of the free market in many ways, not least of which are the importance it places upon *growth*, its obsession with removing impediments to growth, and its promotion of the merits of individualism. Consider the following quote from celebrity New Ager, Shirley Maclaine:

I was beginning to see that we each did whatever we did purely for self, and that was how it should be.... Thus in uplifting my own feelings I would uplift the feelings of my fellow beings. (cited in Gardner 200)

Maclaine's attempt to vindicate an extraordinary personal selfishness by positing the existence of a *feel good* trickle-down effect has a surprising resemblance to the "greed-is-good" rationale of Reaganomics and Thatcherism. This abnegation of social responsibility characteristic of both New Agism and economic libertarianism is carried to whole new levels in Maclaine's musings on reincarnation: both the starving and the

crippled, MacLaine informs the reader, choose their suffering for the purpose of gaining from these experiences (MacLaine 1985).

According to Rosen, followers of the New Age attempt to remedy the discontents inherent to modern consumerism with another form of consumerism. The answer to a troubled self is deemed to lie in an expansion of that self through the appropriation and consumption of the not-self. New Age emphasis upon the dissolving of boundaries between the self and not-self is likened to the ultimate goal of modern marketing:

...to erase the boundary between the product and the consumer, so that the consumer sees the product not as an object worth owning, but as piece of his subjectivity floating by. (Rosen cited in Basil, 28)

Essential to this process of promotion and consumption is the concept of newness: both the New Age and consumerism are governed by what Heidegger calls *Neugier* or lust for novelty (in which novelty denotes hollow variation rather than radical difference). As Rosen argues, for objects to achieve resonance with the desires of consumers they must have familiarity, resemblance to things already internalised, but in order for objects to catch the attention of consumers they must *appear* new. Actual difference is not required, as this cannot be easily accommodated; what is required is the old or the same repackaged. According to Rosen, while the New Age presents itself as a movement of radical alternatives it

in fact represents only slight modifications of long established constructs such as individualism, theism and even scientism⁹.

In its search for novelty the New Age draws upon a number of sources including Eastern traditions, folk traditions, antiquity and the cultures of Indigenous peoples. Increasingly Aboriginal cosmology, especially the Dreaming, is targeted in the New Age quest for quasi-solutions to the discontents of modern life. In this quest the Aboriginal Dreamtime is understood as a creative, therapeutic and originating force that is available to all.

For New Agers the creative and therapeutic "energy" of the Dreaming is sought through the appropriation of Aboriginal mythology and sacred constructs. This has been most clearly evident in the New Age appropriation of Uluru as a site of spiritual significance. For an ever growing number of New Agers from all over the world Uluru is equated

⁹ While commonly understood as the very antithesis of science, Andrew Ross (1991) notes that the New Age is "pervasively characterised by the simultaneous activities of emulating, pirating and rejecting orthodox scientific rationality" (73). According to Ross a long history lies behind the close relationship of New Age metaphysics and scientific thought: "Many of the health and parapsychological cults of today are the direct descendants of the heretical, science-loving, metaphysical movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like Magnetism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Swedenborgism, and Theosophy, or the more unapologetic medical sects of Phrenology, Hydropathy, Vitalism, Chronothermism and other allopathic disciplines. Not only were these practices grounded to some degree in the principles of empirical science and inductive reasoning, they were also caught up in the reform movements of their day, consequently appealing to a broad and popular social constituency" (Ross 23).

with locations such as Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids¹⁰ (Marcus 1988). Marcus notes that in 1987 (the year of a planetary alignment known in Aquarian circles as “the harmonic convergence”) there was a large international gathering of New Agers at Uluru. At midnight on the day of the alignment the group intended to join hands with the Anangu people of Mutijulu (Uluru’s Aboriginal community) and encircle the rock. It was believed that this would enable them to tap the harmonising energy of the convergence. However, the Mutijulu community had no interest in participating in the ritual and applications to waive the prohibition on access to the rock after dark were rejected. Many chose to ignore the denial of access in order to perform rituals in the caves at dawn.

Motivated by the vision of a universal collective consciousness, New Agers seek a unity with Aboriginal traditions, but such unity (rarely sought by traditional Aboriginal people themselves) can carry less than desirable consequences for Aboriginal tradition:

the unity that is sought is a unity which transcends all local differences and encompasses all religious traditions. In such a unification, Aboriginal Australians would, of course, lose their identity, their singularity, their difference. (267)

According to this view the New Age is a form of globalisation that subjects localised particularities to cultural standardisation. The

¹⁰ Uluru is listed in the New Age, *A Pilgrim’s Guide to Planet Earth* (Khalso 1981). Also included in the guide are Mt Fuji, the Easter Island statues, Stonehenge, the Mayan and Egyptian pyramids, and the Callanish megaliths in the Outer Hebrides.

distinctiveness of local traditions is subordinated to the uniformity of a global movement¹¹.

Informing the establishment of Uluru as a significant New Age site is the proliferation of New Age publications focussing upon Aboriginal religion. According to Marcus, New Age versions of Aboriginal religion are marked by two characteristics:

First... there is no sense of any relation between a cosmology and a particular social structure, no sense of the politics of religious beliefs, but rather, a feeling of the timelessness and essential universal truths that such beliefs offer. And second, Aboriginal beliefs are homogenized so that it is possible to speak in generalities and to use a word or concept from here and another from there, without having to consider how widespread such practices are. (Marcus 265)

The Aboriginality of New Age texts is often a pastiche of elements taken from multiple sources¹². The Dreaming is likely to be represented in terms of universal application and as articulating truths which are timeless and ubiquitous. Characterised as homologous with other

¹¹ Of course, uniformity is not the necessary outcome of globalisation. Citing Africa as an example, Jan Pieterse (1995), notes that global forces can in fact lead to the strengthening of ethnic identities. Global forces may also result in hybrid formations: given that the local also succeeds in exercising influence upon the global - either through the local receiving the global and transforming it, or through the global appropriating the local and being influenced as a result.

¹² Common sources for New Age (mis)readings of Aboriginal religion, Marcus notes, are the work of two anthropologists: A.P. Elkin and Mircea Eliade. Elkin is known for comparing Aboriginal religion to Eastern and Western religions, and for his theory that Aborigines had historical connections to 21st dynasty Egypt. Eliade's work is essentially Jungian.

spiritual systems the distinctiveness of Aboriginal knowledge is subordinated to other constructs.

little white lies

In the representation of Aboriginality New Age writers - somewhat like the Deist novelists of seventeenth century Europe - often have a flexible relationship to the truth. Despite this they are still (like their Deist predecessors) very much concerned with persuading readers of the authenticity of their portrayals. The typical New Ager's openness to all incoming messages probably makes this task less difficult than it otherwise might be. Certainly, in the case of *Crystal Woman* (1987) by Lynn Andrews and *Mutant Message Down Under* (1994) by Marlo Morgan, publishers seem to have had little difficulty in marketing rather extravagant fictions as "true stories".

As Americans writing largely for an American readership Morgan and Andrews are able to take advantage of the fact that, generally speaking, Americans know relatively little about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture. Consequently, both of these writers tend to regard Aborigines as much the same as Native Americans; for instance, there are references to Aboriginal "nations", meetings of the tribes, and Aboriginal characters are given the kinds of names more commonly associated with Native American cultures (i.e. Chief Regal Black Swan, Great Stone Hunter, Medicine Man and so on). These books are less a

representation of Aboriginality than an *invention* of Aboriginality using the materials of a distinctively American New Agism. This subordination of Aboriginality to popular American constructs is most concisely expressed in the illustration below from *Mutant Message* in which a map of the United States (in bold outline) is superimposed over a map of Australia, and an image of Morgan is drawn above an image of an unnamed Aboriginal man.



USA & Morgan - Over and Above

Andrews' Americanised Aboriginality was probably developed in her workshops and seminars on sorcery and healing entitled "Into the Crystal Dreamtime". The seminars were popular throughout America, but especially California in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Andrews has a number of publications including *Medicine Woman*, *Windhorse*

*Woman, Star Woman and Crystal Woman*¹³. Released in the year of the harmonic convergence, *Crystal Woman*, details a journey to Uluru undertaken in the company of the "Sisterhood of the Shields":

The Sisterhood is comprised of forty-four women, each representing a different indigenous culture from somewhere in the world. Our purpose is to memorize and preserve the different laws of magic and the various codes and traditions of shamanism from around the world. We believe that because these traditions are rooted in the essence of female understanding and wisdom, it is particularly important at this time of patrilineal imbalance to recognize that these ancient ways are needed to alchemize our mother earth back into a state of wholeness. (Andrews xv)

Women are pre-eminent among New Age adherents (Ross 54) and the idea of women as traditional keepers of knowledge concerning the body, health and nature is a prevalent New Age notion. *Crystal Woman* is very much a product of this characteristically New Age association of women, healing and nature. While this is often interpreted as a form of feminism, the association of women and nature, like the association of primitives and nature, just as readily finds affinity with the masculine fantasies of the West. For example, Torgovnick observes in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the ease with which the feminine is substituted for the primitive and vice versa:

The circularity between the concepts "female" and "primitive" is so complete in Conrad that it is difficult

¹³ Andrew Ross has described Andrews' writing as "a romantic neocolonialist vehicle for exotic Harlequin-like adventures, usually abetted by the appropriate technology of psychic Arabian thoroughbreds" (Ross 55).

to tell which set of tropes influenced which. Yet clearly, the feminine is perceived in the same terms used by the West for the primitive - as though all Others, like all grey cats, are alike. (156)

In *Heart of Darkness* the wildness of the primitive, nature and the feminine combine in the famous description of the unnamed African woman:

She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the the earth proudly with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high, her hair was done in the shape of a helmet, she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck... She was savage and superb, wild eyed and magnificent. (60)

Such a description is, of course, completely at the mercy of Conrad's masculine desire but this same desire-infused combination is realised in *Crystal Woman* with the Sisterhood of the Shields: magnificent, powerful, primitive women. Existing outside of the rational order, and representing a lost awareness of the body and nature, they offer solutions to modern ills. In *Crystal Woman* the feminine and the primitive function as symbolic response to modern needs and desires. The Sisterhood of the Shields function as a faithful (if distorted) mirror of the modern self. While seeming to promote traditional women's knowledge, *Crystal Woman* reproduces conventional masculine fantasies, and while claiming to articulate alternatives to the destructiveness of modernity it plunders and distorts that which it apparently lauds - the culture of indigenous peoples - in a manner that is definitively modern.

How Andrews, a native of Los Angeles, came to represent one of forty-four indigenous cultures from around the world is never fully explained but she is chosen by Ginevee, an "Aboriginal woman of high degree"¹⁴, to journey to the "Outback" because of her power as a storyteller. At a secret location somewhere in "the wilderness" Ginevee approaches Andrews:

"Stories are like spirits" she said, speaking English mixed with a few words of her Australian Aboriginal language, Koori¹⁵. "They look around for a good storyteller, someone like you, to inhabit. Stories are good sorcerers. When a story lives inside you it makes you think that the story is your idea. There is a story lurking around you. It will make its home within you very soon, yea. I will see you in Australia maybe, hmm? You will join the women of high degree in the Outback and become a clever woman." (xvi)

Andrews, as a successful if not skilled writer, is called upon for assistance by Aboriginal people. Not only is she on a mission to save the world, she is also a writer at the service of Aboriginal people who possess essential knowledge, "healing truth" for a modernity longing for therapy (265). Of course, the claim that she was approached by Aboriginal people to write the book, while possibly performing a function of verification for

¹⁴ This phrase is taken from the title of Elkin's text, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree* (1944). Despite its datedness this text, probably because of its subject (shamanism) and the fact that it details Aboriginal shamanic use of crystals, is common source material for New Age writings on Aboriginality.

¹⁵ Strictly speaking Koori is not a language but the name for a diverse group of descendants of various Aboriginal language groups from Eastern Australia (especially New South Wales).

some readers, barely conceals her excessive fictionalising of Aboriginality for personal gain.

Crystal Woman is a narrative that feeds upon child-like desires to perform the impossible: to wish away pain, to fly, and to talk to the animals. In the manner of a children's book each chapter commences with an illustration (see below) of the chapter's main theme or event: this is not a book for the informed or for those who read well.



Black swans over Uluru? New Age veracity

Crystal Woman owes much to the work of Enid Blyton, Arthur C. Clarke and Carlos Castaneda. Like Blyton it is a tale of magic and adventure with a comforting conclusion; like Clarke it is a fantasy of other beings

and other worlds; and like Castaneda it assures us that as unlikely as all of this may seem it *really* happened:

This is a true story. Some of the names and places in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved. (Andrews xv)

The claim that names and places have been changed to protect the innocent is a common strategy that one always associates with entertainment media. Marlo Morgan uses the same strategy in *Mutant Message Down Under*.

This was written after the fact and inspired by actual experience. As you will see, there wasn't a notebook handy. It is sold as a novel to protect the small tribe of Aborigines from legal involvement. I have deleted details to honor friends who do not wish to be identified and to secure the secret location of our sacred site. (1994: xiii)

This excerpt is taken from the second edition of the book. The claim that it is sold as a novel to protect the small tribe of Aborigines from legal involvement isn't correct. The first edition published in 1991 was not sold as a novel. The second edition was sold as a novel in attempt to appease irate Nyungah elders who were threatening legal action. This edition also includes a disclaimer of sorts:

I do not speak for the Australian Aborigines. I speak only for one small Outback nation referred to as the Wild People or the Ancient Ones. (xiv)

Morgan later revealed the falsity of her claim that it was "the Ancient Ones" she wished to protect from legal action when in 1996 she issued a public apology to eight Nyungah elders and admitted that her work was entirely fabrication¹⁶. Of course, it was always clear to many, especially the Nyungah elders, that the book was pure fantasy. A brief synopsis of the book would be enough to persuade most of the falsity of Morgan's work. Morgan attempts to convince the reader¹⁷ that she was kidnapped from a Perth five star hotel by a member of an Aboriginal tribe ("The Tribe of Divine Oneness Real People") and taken on a four month walk across Australia during which she was initiated into the tribe. The Real People have chosen her to pass on "the mutant message". The premise is that the Real People are the only true human beings left on earth, the rest of us being a degenerate mutant strain who have "closed off ancient remembering and universal truths" (154). The mutant message is a message the Real People give to Morgan to pass on to the mutant world:

You have been chosen as our Mutant messenger to tell your kind we are going. We are leaving Mother earth to you. We pray you will see what your way of life is doing to the water, the animals, the air, and to each other. We pray you will find a solution to your problems without destroying this world. There are Mutants on the edge of regaining their individual spirit of true beingness. With enough focus, there is time to reverse the destruction on the planet, but we can no longer help you. Our time is up. Already the rain pattern has been changed, the heat is

¹⁶ "Elders Receive Apology" *The West Australian* 31/01/96

¹⁷ If the sales of the book are anything to go by Morgan was astonishingly successful in this regard. The book has been published in eleven languages and as of 1996 Morgan had made \$1.8 million from the books sales ("Elders Receive Apology" *The West Australian* 31/01/96).

increased, and we have seen years of plant and animal production lessened. We can no longer provide human forms for spirits to inhabit because there will soon be no water or food left in the desert. (148)

Morgan creates an Aboriginal tribe that is virtually a separate species. Certainly they are totally unlike any other people. Their names are a farcical mix of the Aquarian and Hollywood style American Indian¹⁸. They live to 130 years of age at which point they chooses to die (they do not believe that death by disease or accident is natural, only death by choice is in keeping with nature's ways). They are also devoted monotheists diligently observing the rite of prayer:

The tribe begins each day by saying thank you to Oneness for the day, for themselves their friends, the world. They sometimes ask for specifics, but it is always phrased "If it is in my highest good and the highest good for all life everywhere". (52)

They heal by touch, worship the dolphin, "use no toxic chemicals" and have direct psychic access to cosmic archives that contain detailed information on the future as well as the past. Their primary mode of communication is telepathy:

It finally dawned on me why it was quiet every day as we walked. These people used mental telepathy to communicate most of the time. I was witnessing it. There was absolutely no sound to be heard, but

¹⁸ For example: Tribal Elder, Female Healer, Spirit Woman, Time Keeper, Memory Keeper, Kin to Birds, Bearer of Happiness, Peace Maker, Medicine Man, Tool Maker, and Regal Black Swan.

messages were being relayed to people who were twenty miles apart. (61)

Of course, all of this begs the question how it was that the book was *ever* received as anything other than pure fiction. Christina Thompson (1987) sees this kind of credulity as a peculiarly American phenomenon: "It would not appear that disbelief occurs to many Americans. Their world, if you like, is pornographic" (1987: 34). However, given that the book sold well around the world, including Australia, it would appear that Americans are not alone in this respect. The desire to believe in fantastic realms is widespread and entertainment media cater to this longing to believe in other powers, other beings and other worlds. This is the ground of television programmes such as *The X Files*. It is also the basis of texts such as *Crystal Woman* and *Mutant Message*. In these books Aboriginals occupy a similar category to the science fiction alien. Emerging from strange yet recognisable landscapes they are pliable products of American desire. They are benevolent beings providing short lived analgesic effects for contemporary anxieties. Morgan's Real People are a commodity targeting those who feel powerlessness and feel it intensely. Like the dream figures of childhood they overcome physical and biological restraints, they live in a world with loving elders but no authority figures, and they don't have to go to school or perform meaningless and unsatisfying labour.

Of course, the problem with Morgan's construction of indigenous Australians, as opposed to science fiction's construction of the extraterrestrial, is that while there may in fact be no extraterrestrials, there certainly are indigenous Australians whose representation - like any representation of actual Others - requires informed consideration, sensitivity and consultation. The fabrication of fantastic Aboriginalities for entertainment and personal gain contributes to an understanding of Aboriginality as a stimulating commodity. Contrary to Morgan's expressed belief, Aboriginal people live very much in the same modern world as she does and are exposed to many or all of the same influences as other groups. Writers such as Morgan are expressing a widely held, but less widely examined, belief that Others exist *for* the West.

other points of view

Not everyone is inclined to be so critical of Morgan's book, and her work has won sympathetic appraisal from what may seem to be the most unlikely quarters. For example, the second edition of *Mutant Message* includes a re-print of a supposedly unsolicited letter of support that Morgan received from well-known Aboriginal spokesperson, Burnum-Burnum¹⁹:

¹⁹ Burnum-Burnum is known world-wide for his television appearance in the year of Australia's bicentennial celebrations: coming ashore at Dover he planted the Aboriginal flag, declared Britain *terra nullius*, and claimed the British Isles for Australian Aboriginal people, thus reminding all of the unreconciled injustice of the colonial enterprise. Burnum-Burnum is also known for his coffee table book, *Burnum-Burnum's Aboriginal Australia* (1988).

I, Burnam-Burnam [*sic*], an Aboriginal Australian of the Wurundjeri tribe, do hereby declare that I have read every word of the book *Mutant Message Down Under*. It is the first book in my life's experience that I have read nonstop from cover to cover. I did so with great excitement and respect. It is a classic and does not violate any trust given to its author by us Real People. Rather it portrays our value systems and esoteric insights in such a way as to make me feel extremely proud of our heritage. In telling the world of your experiences, you have righted an historical wrong. In the sixteenth century the Dutch explorer William Dampier²⁰ wrote of us as being the 'most primitive, wretched people on the face of the earth'. *Mutant Message* uplifts us into a higher plane of consciousness and makes us the regal majestic people that we are.

Obviously, an endorsement from a *bona fide* Aboriginal with an international profile greatly assists Morgan's project of marketing fantasy as fact. However, in light of the crudity of Morgan's fictionalising, as well as her disregard for the Western Desert people that the "Real People" unavoidably stand in for, Burnum-Burnum's support for *Mutant Message* is a little difficult to reconcile with the political conscience for which he is known. Some may be tempted to conclude that his endorsement constitutes a submission to the power of publishers and their financial incentives. Such an explanation, depending as it does upon the idea of a corrupted Aboriginal subject, would not appeal to everyone. Those who opt for a less cynical view of Burnum-Burnum may be more inclined to view the endorsement in similar terms to his 1988 parodic inversion of the British occupation of Australia. Certainly it is difficult not to view the

²⁰ Dampier was actually a British buccaneer.

endorsement parodically. Deliberately mimicking (mocking?) the statutory declaration the endorsement can be explained in terms of Homi Bhabha's analysis of the role of mimicry in colonial discourse (1994: 85-92). Bhabha argues that for colonialism mimicry represents both "resemblance and menace". Its effect on the power of colonial discourse, he argues, is "profound and disturbing" representing an "immanent threat to both 'normalised' knowledges and disciplinary powers". The performance of the strategies of colonialism by someone "not quite white" ruptures colonial discourse and transforms it into "an uncertainty" (86). A performance of whiteness by the black subject defamiliarises and "subverts the identity of that which is being represented, and the relation of power, if not altogether reversed begins to vacillate" (Robert Young, 1990: 147). The act of one man claiming authority to speak on behalf of the diverse groups that comprise contemporary Aboriginal Australia mirrors the autocracy upon which Western imperialism is founded. Such a reflection destabilises as it defamiliarises. In light of these ideas, Burnum-Burnum's repetition of the strategies of Western colonialism, its modes of appropriation and authentication, can be seen as a tactical disturbance of colonial authority.

While this interpretation constructs an astute and powerful Other who resists and challenges processes of colonial subjection, it is important not to overlook the less than ambiguous meaning of the endorsement. Burnum-Burnum is quite clear: "*Mutant Message* portrays

our value systems and esoteric insights in such a way as to make me feel extremely proud of our heritage". Burnum-Burnum's support for this New Age model possibly points to the existence of a New Age hegemony operating in contemporary Aboriginal Australia. After all, Morgan's characteristically American Aquarianism is being received as an accurate portrayal of the mythos of Aboriginal people by an Aboriginal person: Burnum-Burnum is identifying with and confirming an externally generated model of Aboriginality.

That people come to agree with prevailing representations of themselves, even when it seems clear that it is not in their best interests to do so, may be testimony to the more subtle operations of power²¹. However, it is not entirely certain that Burnum-Burnum's support is necessarily at odds with his own interests or even with the interests of Aboriginal people in general. Perhaps Burnum-Burnum's acceptance of Morgan's representation needs to be understood less as confirmation of the accuracy of a depiction than as the approval of one form of unreality above another. *Mutant Message* is seen as an antidote to equally immoderate fictions such as the racism of Dampier *et al*:

²¹ As an example of this, Muecke (1992), cites a submission to the law Reform Commission from an Aboriginal representative body - the Yirrkala Council - that relies upon prevailing essentialist views concerning Aborigines and alcohol. The Yirrkala Council phrases their alcohol problem in racist terms: "Can any rules be made for those people who are half drunk, or just beginning to get drunk, to call a taxi so they can go straight home before they are half dead? This is a problem because Aborigines do not drink like white people drink. Sometimes white people get full drunk, but sometimes they just drink a little and do not disturb their families or neighbours; not like all Aborigines who drink and get drunk, frighten people, chase people, wake people up, give people

you have righted an historical wrong... William Dampier wrote of us as being the 'most primitive, wretched people on the face of the earth'. *Mutant Message* uplifts us into a higher plane of consciousness and makes us the regal majestic people that we are.

For Burnum-Burnum Morgan's dishonesty, astonishing ignorance and lack of imagination are secondary to the fact that for him Morgan's representations construct Aboriginal people as dignified and spiritually aware.

Of course, given the New Age's unreservedly complimentary representations of Aboriginal people it is perfectly natural that Aborigines *would* respond positively to New Age beliefs. As might be expected the New Age is a common ingredient in processes of identity (re)construction and cultural (re)creation that Aboriginal people, particularly urban Aboriginal people, engage in as a response to the various impacts of colonial displacement. This is observable, for instance, in Sally Morgan's autobiographical account of the discovery of her Aboriginality, *My Place* (1987). In the process of uncovering her Aboriginality Morgan evolves an interpretation of Aboriginal religion with pronounced Aquarian influences²². While it is easy to be critical of this sort of thing it needs to

worries. That is one problem that has been going on for a long time and is still a problem now (Australian Law Reform Commission 1981, cited in Muecke, 1992: 33).

²² Eric Michaels is critical of Morgan's account of Aboriginal religion in particular her conceptualisation of 'the elders': "They seem to exist in the air, almost to fly, and they assemble to exercise a protective benevolence at times of crisis, especially death. They are described as an undifferentiated class (whose elders?), and one proof of Aboriginality seems to be the capacity to be in psychic communication with them... What she uncovers

be kept in mind that the colonial predicament renders cultural reconstruction inevitable, and that the New Age (as an acentered, cross-cultural ensemble of appropriations and re-inventions) lends itself very well to this task.

New Age influences are also evident in Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love To Town* (1988). For example, Langford writes of an elderly Aboriginal woman from the region of north-eastern New South Wales where she herself was born:

Millie is a high priestess of Aboriginal culture, and with other cleverwomen and men is the equivalent of the white world's highest university-educated people. A professor of anthropology has compared the cleverwomen and men with the great yogis of Tibet. (260)

That professor is, of course, A.P. Elkin who is widely known in New Age circles for his comparing Aboriginal "shamans" to Tibetan Lamas. Elkin is also the origin of the analogy to the "highest university-educated people". Later in the chapter Langford provides a source for her discussion of Millie the "high priestess": an article entitled, "Missing Linkings - A Separate Reality"²³ published in the popular New Age journal, *Maggie's Farm*. Typical of the New Age the article focuses upon healing and magic and

... is so inconsistent with what we have hitherto understood about Aboriginal theologies that if Morgan is right, much will have to be rewritten and certain practicing elders will have to be corrected" (Michaels, 1994: 168-169).

²³ The title is a reference to the second work in Carlos Castaneda's series on Native American shamanism - *A Separate Reality*.

blends elements of Aboriginal cosmology with popularised elements from other cultures²⁴.

In the act of constructing and articulating her cultural identity Langford utilises New Age constructions of Aboriginality. That she should do this is hardly surprising; there are after all genuine points of contact between Langford's lived reality and New Age interpretations of that reality (for instance, Millie is a genuine tribal elder in possession of traditional knowledge). It is also the case that while New Age representations tend to focus upon the supernatural and paranormal - realms more often associated with fantasy than reality - they nevertheless construct powerful Aboriginal figures. While the source of such representations may be far removed from the day to day reality of the vast majority of Aboriginal people, and the consequences of such representations perhaps less than helpful for a people faced with socio-political rather than shamanic struggles, when compared to other prevalent Western models of Aboriginality - primitivisation or racist essentialisation for instance - one might expect that New Age approaches would be welcomed.

Paradoxically, however, it is precisely the kind of constructs that the New Age specialises in (representations of supposedly

²⁴ For instance, the article is keen to form associations between Aborigines and Native Americans. It suggests that Aborigines (somehow) shared the buffalo totem with

“authentic” traditional nomads²⁵ such as Morgan’s “Real People”) that can function to designate detribalised and urbanised Aboriginal people, such as Langford, Sally Morgan and Burnum-Burnum, as inauthentic or “degenerative”. As Lee Sackett (1991) observes the valorising of traditional culture may carry less than desirable consequences for Aboriginal people living predominantly non-traditional lives (ie. most Aboriginal people):

The outcome is distinctions such as those drawn between supposedly ‘real Aborigines’, i.e., full-bloods who reside in remote communities, speak an Aboriginal language, hunt game, initiate their youth and so forth, and city living ‘half-castes’, ‘the descendants of the worst of both races’ who are said to have lost their culture and now speak English, subsist on the dole, fail to look after their children, etc²⁶. (Sackett 255)

However, while it may appear puzzling that Aborigines identify with popular constructions of traditional culture, when it might benefit them most to criticise and expose their inaccuracy, it is important not to overlook the political usefulness of these models for Aboriginal people. According to Ariss (1988), in taking up these models Aborigines are not

Amerindian cultures. The title itself emphasises popular New Age constructs of native American shamanism.

²⁵ Tim Rowse (1988) describes the authentic Aborigine as “a fantastic entity, a Loch Ness monster much discussed but hardly ever sighted with certainty” (cited in Sackett, 1991).

²⁶ Marlo Morgan confirms Sackett’s point with the description she provides of the urban Aboriginal as a contrast to the ‘pure’ non-degenerate “Tribe of Divine Oneness Real People”: “The modern-day Aboriginal condition can be seen in any European city, black people living in separate districts of town, well over half on the dole. The employed ones work in menial jobs; their culture appears lost, like the Native American, forced onto designated soil and forbidden for generations to practice all sacred ways” (xiii)

so much participating in their own subjugation as employing the language of the wider group to construct their opposition to being dominated:

In emphasising traditional culture, its otherness, Aboriginal discourse establishes itself firmly in opposition to the dominant culture. It is only from this position that Aboriginal people can resist the seduction of assimilation and confidently work at rebuilding a unique identity. (Ariss 136)

While there is little doubt of the importance of traditional culture to Aboriginal resistance and cultural continuity, there are obvious dangers if the source of one's knowledge of traditional culture is derived from models that are informed by the beliefs and values of the dominant groups that one wishes to resist. Popular representations of traditional culture (such as New Age representations) are generally idealisations: that is, they are investments of the hopes and desires of dominant groups. That they would unproblematically function to serve Aboriginal interests is far from certain. According to Myers (1988) the opposite effect is at least as likely:

When we seek to show [Aborigines] freer, less violent, more egalitarian, or less territorial than ourselves, we distort their reality, defining it largely in terms immediately meaningful to our own debates, such constructions may also affect them politically. (Myers 264)

As Torgovnick observes "idealisation of the primitive has been as damaging as any other Western version and often conceals more pejorative views" (122). New Age constructs, while no doubt playing a

significant role in Aboriginal identity-building and processes of resistance, need to be subject to the same level of critical scrutiny that less immediately pleasing representations undergo as matter of course.

white faces, black masks

A recurrent motif in texts that valorise the spirituality of Aboriginal people is the concept of Aboriginalisation: the idea that through various processes - initiation, osmosis, metamorphosis - one can become Aboriginal. For example, in *Mutant Message* the author claims to have undergone tribal initiation and to have been corporeally transformed through psychokinesis:

We have touched her and changed her... You will see that her strange pale skin is becoming more naturally brown, and her white hair is growing away from her head where beautiful dark hair has taken root. (177)

Perhaps it is only to be expected that if Aborigines are represented as embodying certain freedoms and ideals then a desire to become Aboriginal would find expression, but fantasies in which the Aboriginal body is an acquired object surely represent the nth degree of imperialist desire. Of course, the claim to Aboriginality is not usually articulated in such obviously fanciful terms. More commonly the suggestion is of cultural osmosis, a becoming Aboriginal through exposure to Aboriginal people. James Cowan typifies this position:

Over the years I have worked with a number of Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. I have spoken with old men who still remember the days when the Law meant something. People like Banjo Woonamurra, Roger and James Solomon, David Mowaljarlai, Bill Idumdum, Toby Kangarle, Bill Neidjie, Woodley King, Larry Woonamurra, Nebo and Binny have all contributed to my knowledge of their culture. In the process I have become, in a sense, *Aboriginalised*, absorbing into myself a way of looking upon the world a way which is uniquely theirs. (1992: 5)

Cowan's argument is simple enough. Many years of living and working with Aboriginal people has enabled him to see the world through Aboriginal eyes, and to become, if not Aboriginal, at least very much like an Aboriginal. While there is a lot to be said for the kind of receptiveness to others that could result in such profound transformations in cultural perspective, such claims are not without consequences and these consequences may be less than benign.

Such suggestions risk diminishing the complexity and distinctiveness of Aboriginality in order to claim for oneself an extraordinary power. Going beyond a proffering of explanations, interpretations and commentary, Cowan assumes a supreme and unassailable authority. The possibility of becoming Aboriginalised denies any possibility of an unintelligible Aboriginality. Access to Aboriginality becomes unrestricted and nothing may remain hidden, mysterious or secret. In *Two Men Dreaming* Cowan revels in the power that such access bestows:

They [his Aboriginal informants] had unveiled the inner workings of nature as myth. What the Goanna men had echoed in their march towards being had in turn made Sunfly, and now me, into characters in their narrative. Through their story I had learnt how to absent myself from this world in order to experience theirs. I had become a *maparn*, a man who wore feathers on his feet, someone able to fly towards the Dreaming with the ease of my totem. (1995: 349)

As impressive as Cowan's new found ability to fly may be its consequences are perhaps less significant than the more mundane powers that Aboriginalisation would confer. For the Aboriginalised self Aboriginality is deprived of all mystery, entirely knowable, completely in hand and available for use. Cowan's usage not only assists the selling of books (although this is important) but also reinscribes and reinforces a favoured world view. Cowan can most authoritatively assure his readers that Aborigines do indeed confirm cherished New Age truths. Of course, there is a more obviously political dimension to the view that non-Aborigines may become like Aborigines. In an era of native title the evolving view of a readily available or communicable Aboriginality may carry serious legal consequences. This point is made by Julie Marcus (1988) in an analysis of the John Williamson song "Raining on the Rock" in which Williamson, in celebrating the power of Uluru, claims to be "like an Aborigine":

The statement that 'Uluru has power' is not only an expression of the widely held view that Aboriginal Australians draw power from 'the Rock' but a statement that such power really exists and is knowable to settler Australians like the singer....

The writer's intention could well be to validate, legitimate or celebrate the power of Aboriginal law or ways. Yet there is no doubt that the claim that settler Australians can be 'like Aborigines' is a very clear attempt to appropriate an identity which has now become a source of power. The same theme is presented strongly in the popular film *Crocodile Dundee*. The hero, Dundee, is shown as having access to the hidden part of Aboriginal life, and to the power that those hidden secrets convey. Within a context of struggle over land-ownership, such claims are far from benign (255)

David Tacey (1995) takes a rather different view of native title and the politics of Aboriginalisation. He sees the Mabo legislation as a "defensive and legalistic acting-out of an impulse which is refused realisation at a deeper and more challenging level" (Tacey 138). That impulse is the supposedly natural, psychological drive to become Aboriginal. In Australia, Tacey argues, the powerful forces of the land and ancient Aboriginal traditions, aided by an inherent predisposition in all Westerners, act together so as to gradually and subtly Aboriginalise all Australians.²⁷ For Tacey, Aboriginalisation is more than a possibility; it is an unavoidable and unstoppable process. Drawing upon Jung, Tacey argues that the Australian continent itself influences the unconscious of white Australians and Aboriginalises from within. His argument is largely founded upon the following statement from Jung's essay "Mind and Earth":

²⁷ Tacey's argument is basically an updated Jungian version of Russell Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958). Relying heavily upon the notion of the influence of a harsh landscape, and the bushman mythos that supposedly sprang out of this, Ward proposed a kind of white indigeneity as an identity separate from the European, which after World War Two Australians became eager to establish independence from.

Certain Australian Aborigines assert that one cannot conquer foreign soil, because in it there dwell strange ancestor-spirits who reincarnate themselves in the new-born. There is a great psychological truth in this. The foreign land assimilates its conqueror. (cited in Tacey 134)

According to Tacey this process is assisted by the fact that there is already an indigenous person within each of us - "an indigenous archetype within" - that can be activated by the Australian landscape and by exposure to Aboriginal culture:

This indigenous archetype can express itself in us in various ways: in my case it links me indirectly to Aboriginality.... Whatever latent layer of indigenous life lies buried beneath the sophisticated ego will be stirred to activity by the mythopoetic power and resonance of Aboriginal culture.... Whatever equates with Aboriginality in the unconscious of Westerners will be mobilised by the Australian experience.... Whites here need to acknowledge the indigenous archetype within themselves, to be better related to the 50,000 year old man or woman inside us. (Tacey 137)

While for some the Australian landscape and Aboriginal culture may be the source of enormous affective power, to extrapolate from this that somewhere deep inside we are all already Aboriginal calls for scrutiny. To be open to others, to allow oneself to be influenced by others, and to encourage the formation of hybridities is surely a good thing. To seek to be more Aboriginal-like in various ways - world-view, relations to kin, relations to country, etc. - is probably a most positive development. However, the question as to whether these kinds of "becomings" - in the

Deleuzo-Guattarian sense - are minor (experimentations of desire emerging out of mutually affective relations) or major (that is a capture of fragments of Others' realities by dominant groups for the interests of dominant groups) needs to be addressed. Taking into consideration the prevalence of a characteristically modern lust for novelty, and given, as Marcus has convincingly argued, that Aboriginality is an identity that has now become a source of power, all claims to becoming-Aboriginal should be received with scepticism and caution.

Perhaps a longing to become Aboriginal is a consequence of the influence of mass media entertainment: "the replacement of a reliable world of durable objects by a world of flickering images that make it harder and harder to distinguish reality from fantasy" (Lasch, 1984: 34). In its mass-production of one dimensional, interchangeable, and readily performable identities, Hollywood, and its near relatives television and advertising, have probably been quite influential in the widespread emergence of a belief in the possibility of becoming radically other than oneself.

Of course, from their inception these "industries" have participated in the (mis)representation of indigenous Others. Catering to popular desires and perpetuating misunderstanding and prejudice the mass produced images are well known: African cannibals with bones through their noses put missionaries in large black pots; "redskin" warriors

riding bareback attack simple pioneering folk until the cavalry's bugle, like Gabriel's trumpet, announces judgement day for the "savages"; uninhibited, childlike, Polynesian *wahinis* perform the *hula* by firelight for a possessive white male gaze; the Australian Aboriginal, a solitary male figure perched on one leg, gazes knowingly into the never-never. Hollywood has not been in the business of opening windows onto the distinctive dynamics and complexities of other cultures. Instead, it exploits the Westerner's deficient and distorted knowledge of different cultures to produce marketable misrepresentations, signs with no referent other than signs, signs that despite their essential evanescence and insubstantiality carry profound material consequences. This obviously unreal world is nevertheless a recognisable world, a fantasy world that for most has a greater immediacy than the lived world of indigenous peoples, of which most Westerners, including Australians, know virtually nothing. The clearly fictional world of film is able effectively to supplant more concrete realities that are both less accessible and less suitable to the purposes to which they are put.

As a child I recall watching *The Lone Ranger* and believing absolutely that Tonto, the masked man's Native American sidekick, was everything a true Indian should be: an air of mystery, a thousand yard stare suggestive of intuitive depth, acute powers of perception, an ability to read nature like a book, a fount of aphoristic and sometimes puzzling wisdom. All these combined to form what appeared to be a realistic

portrayal of the American Indian. Watching television in the early nineties my beliefs were more or less confirmed by those crazy looks from *Northern Exposure* behaving completely in character with the only real Indian I have ever known (it's so life like). Of course, having no familiarity at all with the indigenous peoples of the Americas means that I gauge the success of these performances alongside other performances. In a global mass media culture the Native American is first and foremost a role that is performed, and, at least in the case of the popular western, it is a role written and performed by people other than Native Americans²⁸.

A virtual environment has been created that is populated by identities without depth, an environment in which genuine Others are kept at bay through the manufacture and circulation of easy to perform formulaic roles. Signs confirm signs, conform to signs, and compose narratives that are told and retold with insignificant variation, such is the field of play of the popular exotic. There is no referent in this representational equation. The actual present of work, play and family life, cultural preservation and (re)creation, strategic responses to discrimination and prejudice, the very substance of the real lives of indigenous peoples have no necessary role in the (re)construction of the textual web that provides the non-indigenous consumer with his/her

²⁸ Australian actor, Michael Pate, based a Hollywood career on playing "Indians" in westerns. Bony is the Australian corollary to this phenomenon. The Aboriginal police detective was created by a non-Aboriginal writer, Arthur Upfield, and in two different television adaptations was played by non-Aboriginal actors.

stimulating encounter with indigeneity. Like minstrels in blackface tired old white ideas perform an exotic masquerade in a falsification of difference. The indigene in Western popular performance is pure sign, a function in the circulation and rejuvenation of the mythology of the Same²⁹.

Of course, the comprehending of indigenous Others through the lens of scripted performance precedes the invention of the cine-camera. In the nineteenth century, under the auspices of the new science of "man" (anthropology), the colonised Other was constructed as a performance spectacle for a metropolitan public whose appetite for the exotic was seemingly insatiable (Poignant, 1993: 39). In various international exhibitions and trade fairs, including the Paris Exposition of 1889, large numbers of exotic peoples were exhibited performing aspects of traditional life. An inquisitive public were able to witness Inuit weaving, Malays carving, Aborigines throwing boomerangs, Japanese going through the motions of a traditional tea ceremony, and so on³⁰. Authentic Others were encountered in carefully scripted, endlessly repeatable and essentially inauthentic roles. In an analysis of this

²⁹ Simon Ryan's comments on the influence of theatre on nineteenth century Australian explorers' perceptions of Aborigines are equally applicable here: "The consumption of Aboriginal culture is in fact dominated by its textual production... The domination of an event by the pre-formulated discourse of theatre, and the consumption of the event within these terms, lead to the process by which, as Edward Said (1978: 58) writes in *Orientalism*, 'a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of previously known things'" (Ryan 1994: 101).

³⁰ This live form of "info-tainment" continued well into the twentieth century. For instance, in Melbourne's "Primitive Art" exhibition of 1929, Wangkarru men 'Jack' and 'Stan' were painted, decorated and exhibited carving boomerangs for the curiosity of a

widespread practice, Roslyn Poignant³¹ uses the term “the show space” to identify the sites of these displays as significant and unique zones of disclosure in which historically specific relations of power were epitomically unconcealed and the exploitative and iniquitous character of the colonial project became acutely visible. Within this space popular culture and science could be witnessed colluding in “the objectification, commodification and consumption of *other*” and “fragments of traditional lifeways from the exotic margins became embedded in the matrix of urban modernity” (Poignant 1993: 39).

Tony Bennett (1995) - drawing upon Foucault's views on the display of power in the *ancien regime* - views the nineteenth century exhibitions as a strategic and ritualistic display of imperialist power that,

...marked out the distinction between the subjects and the objects of power not within the national body but, as organized by the many rhetorics of imperialism, between that body and other, ‘non-civilized’ peoples upon whose bodies the effects of power were unleashed with as much force and theatricality as had been manifest on the scaffold.
(67)

fashionably interested Melbourne bourgeois (Sutton, 1988: 167). To some degree the tourist industry of today continues this practice.

³¹ Poignant (1993) has uncovered the history of a group of Aboriginal people from Northern Queensland, who were captured by an agent for Barnum and Bailey and forced to “tour” North America as part of the Barnum and Bailey “Greatest Show on Earth”. In this context people become pure show pieces satisfying the desire for the curiosity and thrills of “savagery”. After America these people were then taken to Europe and exhibited in different spaces such as London's Royal Aquarium and the *Jardin d'Acclimation* in Paris. In these spaces a controlled encounter of “civilised self and savage other” was performed and indigenous people became instruments in a grand narrative of European superiority (Poignant 50).

Through a public performance of indigeneity the body of the indigene became a site for the inscription of power.

In the absence of the real bodies of real Others the theatrical simulation came into play. Simulations of black Otherness, such as minstrel shows, enjoyed enormous popularity in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century³². Actors made careers and amassed small personal fortunes as “negro delineators” constructing comic grotesques for popular tastes (Waterhouse 1990). For many Europeans their experience of blackness came via these popular theatrical simulations of the blackamoor, the native, the savage, the cannibal, and the plantation “darkie”. This, of course, meant that any actual contact with black cultures was always prefigured by an internalised text of performed blackness, the white clown in the black mask³³.

Simon Ryan (1994) in a critical examination of the journals of early Australian explorers notes the “pleasure of viewing Aborigines and their activities as theatre”. The explorer, Thomas Mitchell, in his published journal, *Three Expeditions* (1839, vol 2: 108), wrote of an encounter with an Aboriginal group: “[They] had exactly the appearance of savages as I have seen them represented in theatres”. However, as Ryan notes,

³² Blackface remained a feature of Australian performance up until at least the 1960’s. For instance, Ed Devereaux, of *Skippy* fame, donned blackface to play the role of ‘blacktracker’ in the film, *Journey out of Darkness* (1967).

[the] confirmation of the accuracy of the theatre ignores the preparatory role that these same theatrical representations have had on Mitchell's perception - the Aborigines have already been prefigured in theatre and thus their appearance (as well as a host of other aspects such as motivation, behaviour, and beliefs) is already known by European observers, including Mitchell. The theatre utilizes the codes of savagery, semi-nakedness, blackness, and so on, for the purposes of display - Mitchell's comparison of their real and theatrical appearance produces the indigenes in exactly the same way, as objects to be seen, enjoyed, and understood as confirming those generalized codes constitutive of savagery. (Ryan 98)

Colonial discourse placed the indigenous person within a prefabricated text, a text formed, in part at least, through various forms of performance, including parodic mimicry. In *Mimesis and Alterity* Michael Taussig writes that "the wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power" (xiii). In the case of the theatricalised Other of Western popular culture something more than this is taking place. One is reminded of Edmund Carpenter's comments on ethnographic uses of media: "We use media to destroy cultures, but first we use media to create a false record of what we are about to destroy" (cited in Michaels 40). Black delineation is not simply concerned with invoking through imitation the character and power of an original; it also seeks to degrade the power of the original. Blackface performance is a

³³ Of course, this practice must also have contributed to a growing sense that "blackness" or "otherness" was available to Europeans through imitation, that Europeans could become other if that was their wish.

disclosure within “the show space” of violent action upon black bodies, black subjectivity and black culture. Any who remain in doubt of this may wish to consider more recent uses of blackface such as the 1992 Bourke Police video incident³⁴.

Of course, the brutal racism evident in the Bourke Police video is not apparent in New Age mimetic performances of Aboriginality. In fact, in these imitative appropriations of Aboriginality the intention appears to be, as Marcus observes in Williamson’s lyrics, to celebrate rather than denigrate the power of Aboriginal ways³⁵. However, while the New Age may aim to celebrate Aboriginal ways it does so within the context of its primary agenda of gaining access to knowledges, to identities, and to speaking positions that are now recognised as powerful. Taussig’s definition of mimesis - “the copy drawing on the character and power of the original to the point whereby the representation may even assume

³⁴ On March 12, 1992 ABC Television news screened amateur video footage taken at a charitable function in the NSW town of Bourke. In the video two blackened police officers were shown with nooses around their necks, one saying “I’m Lloyd Boney”, the other saying “I’m David Gundy”. Lloyd Boney was a twenty eight year old Aboriginal man who had died in a cell in the Brewarrina Police station on 6 August 1987. It was widely believed in the Aboriginal community that Boney had been killed by the police, and at the time that the video footage was taken Boney’s death was being investigated by the Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody. In 1989 David Gundy, while lying in bed, had been shot dead by a member of the NSW Tactical Response Group. While the police had been cleared of culpability in these deaths Gundy and Boney had come to represent “not only to Aboriginal people, but to many journalists, human rights organisations, politicians, social critics and the wider population, an underlying culture of police violence, persecution and racism toward Aboriginal people” (Mansfield & Trees 20). The Bourke officers’ public mimicry of these tragedies shows the use of blackface as a weapon and discloses a whole culture of racism and oppression.

that character and power" - is definitely applicable here. A case in point concerns Deva Daricha of Victoria's Centre for Human Transformation. New Age shaman and former chair of philosophy at Melbourne State College, Daricha claims to have undergone an instantaneous form of Aboriginalisation when on a trip to Uluru: "his body was inhabited by 'the dreaming bodies of Uluru' who placed crystals in his body and passed knowledge onto him" (Richards 1995: 63). While Daricha denies that he has made any claims to be Aboriginal he has asserted privileged access to the Dreaming, as well as custodianship of a particular Dreaming story (the so called 'New Wanampi Dreaming'), and the authority to initiate others into this Dreaming (for a fee)³⁶. In 1994 Daricha came under the critical scrutiny of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Council for his marketing of initiation into the New Wanampi Dreaming³⁷. Daricha was offering a product composed of appropriated fragments of Pitjantjatjara culture. For its consumers Daricha's product represented the opportunity to dance, sing and think like an Aborigine. Through this process, presumably, they would gain access to the hidden part of Aboriginal life and to the power that such secret knowledge conveys. In this context Aboriginality was constructed and represented both as a resource and as an implement for

³⁵ This is not to suggest that there is not an element of derogation to New Age mimicking of Aboriginality. Imitation is not necessarily a form of flattery and the results of so-called celebrations of indigenous peoples may be, and often are, much less than flattering.

³⁶ It is Daricha's belief that the Dreaming belongs to everyone - "Aboriginal people don't expect people to have access to the dreaming without them, but its available to anyone..." (Daricha cited in Richards 65).

³⁷ An advertisement placed in *Whole Person* magazine of May/June 1994 reads - "Advanced Shamanic Training - Initiation into the New Wanampi Dreaming. Precision journeyings through Time, Space and Dimensions".

the extraction of a resource, an assemblage of techniques and procedures for "getting knowledge from the Source itself - directly from nature" (Daricha cited in Richards 62). Aboriginality was set upon as a form of equipment and utilised for the serving of an end beyond itself. Such uses of Aboriginality are characteristic of the essentially technological mode of comprehending Others that, according to Heidegger, has come to prevail in the modern world. Taken in hand and re-ordered for the power that it may furnish, Aboriginality is disclosed as an object of utility, an object of consumption, and an object of amusement.

Ryan (1994) relates an incident from the journal of coastal surveyor, Philip Parker King (1827), in which an Aboriginal man is utilised as an instrument of amusement and experimentation. King, after first demonstrating to an Aboriginal man the burning powers of a magnifying glass, directs an unconcentrated beam of light onto his own hand. The Aboriginal man, presumably astonished at the explorer's capacity to withstand pain, then allows King to direct a focussed beam of light onto his arm, thus receiving a painful burn³⁸. What is very obvious in King's (ab)use of this Aboriginal man as a source of information and

³⁸ King writes that the Aborigine "was a good deal surprised at my collecting the rays of the sun upon my own hand, supposing that I was callous to the pain, from which he had himself before shrunk; but as I held the glass within the focus distance, no painful sensation was produced; after which he presented me his own arm, and allowed me to burn it as long as I chose to hold the glass, without flinching in the least, which, with greater reason, equally astounded us in our turn." (1827, vol.2: 142-43)

amusement, and less clear in examples of those who use Aboriginal cultural material to transform their identities and see the world through Aboriginal eyes, is that an economy is created in which the burden of payment rests solely upon the Aboriginal. King's Aborigine pays, quite literally, with his hide and receives a lasting reminder of the price he has paid. When the currency is culture, rather than flesh, costs may be more concealed and less simple to calculate, but the cultural identities of the main beneficiaries and benefactors do not alter. In a world immersed in the practices of exploitation and appropriation the ideals of cultural exchange rarely apply, and the cultural capital of Aboriginality, like any other resource, can be taken and put to use in an ever proliferating complex dominated by technology and consumption.

natural remedies:

The privileged place held by "nature" in New Age discourse is well known. Situated in opposition to modernity, and synonymous with purity and authenticity, nature emerges as a quasi-solution to all manner of complaints. While the artificial is derided the natural world is rediscovered as a new source of knowledge and power. One chooses natural alternatives, seeks natural remedies, and aims always to be closer to nature. In this turning to nature the Aborigine is revered as one more intimately connected to the natural world. This connection is imagined as twofold. Firstly, it is visualised in terms of habitat: Aborigines are represented as dwelling within nature. Almost without exception this is

nature envisaged as arid wilderness: the desert, and all that it connotes, is fundamental to the popular identification of Aborigines with nature (this will be discussed in more detail later with reference to Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*). Secondly, Aborigines are imagined as more immediately connected to the body: attuned to its rhythms and privy to its secrets. Aborigines are presumed to enjoy a more natural, less inhibited physicality.

Marcia Langton observes that "increasingly, non-Aborigines want to... consume and reconsume the 'primitive'" (1993: 10). The primitive that is consumed takes a number of forms but the idea of a transcendently physical being who is free from the enervating influence of modern civilisation continues to prevail. According to Marianna Torgovnick, the primitive represents the possibility of "overcoming alienation from the body, restoring the body, and hence the self, to a relation of full and easy harmony with nature or the cosmos, as they have variously been conceived" (228). Noting that the idiom "going primitive" is never far removed from the idiom "getting physical" Torgovnick uses Freud to throw light on this common association:

Freud believed that civilisation arose to protect humans from the uncontrolled imperatives of sexuality and aggression. In return, it exacted the repression of sexuality and the control of aggressive impulses. The flip side of this theory was a widely shared, unexamined belief that "uncivilised" people - that is, primitives and certain marginal members of the lower classes - are exempt from the repression of sexuality and control of aggression. (228)

New Age Aboriginality is formed under the influence of this belief in, or longing for, a less inhibited, more primally physical other. The Aboriginal is conceived as deeply connected to the physical self, and therefore closer to an original state in which civilisation and modernity hold less sway. Of course, there is nothing new in the idea that Indigenous Others enjoy a less constrained physicality and sexuality. At least since Rousseau the West has produced representations of Indigenous people in which a free and vital sexualised body is ascendant. New Age constructions differ in that emphasis is placed less upon the increased freedom that primitive physicality implies than upon the state of wellness or wholeness that is presumed concomitant. To requote Lasch, people today prize the therapeutic and strive for "the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well being, health and psychic security" (1978: 7). An obsession with healing, rather than liberation, underpins the New Age focus upon Aboriginal physicality. Appearing as antipodal to the modern self, the Aboriginal is used to represent seemingly new remedial possibilities. Aboriginality is valued as an object that harbours resources for overcoming disjuncture, and represents potential therapeutic solutions to an ostensibly modern form of alienation. This approach to Aboriginality is encapsulated in the following lines from Monica Furlong's *The Flight of the Kingfisher*:

By the quality of their lives the Aborigines showed me something of the failure of my own. I knew what I had only suspected before, a poverty in myself. I lacked their physicality... I had suffered a

disjuncture from nature which I believe needs a kind of healing I can still only dimly imagine. (169)

There are really two ways in which Aboriginality is used by New Age writers immersed in the ideology of healing and well-being. The first is typified by the above excerpt in which Aborigines, by virtue of a more intimate relationship to nature, embody the ideal of therapeutic New Agism: a state of wholeness and connectedness (this approach, in which the Aborigine functions as a model of completeness for a modern subject understood as fundamentally lacking, will be discussed later with reference to Furlong's text). The other way in which the exponent of alternative medicine may utilise Aboriginality involves representing Aborigines as exemplars of New Age therapeutic practice. In this approach - portraying Aborigines as proficient practitioners of naturopathy, psychic healing, and holistic medicine - Aboriginality is used to validate the principles and practice of alternative health care. This is the strategy of *Mutant Message* and *Crystal Woman*. For Marlo Morgan Aboriginality furnishes an opportunity for promoting the doctrine of New Age health. After supposedly witnessing Aborigines heal a broken leg through chanting - "jogging the memory of the bone into acknowledging the true nature of its healthy state" - Morgan launches into a recitation of what could well be the anthem of the alternative health movement:

I had never been comfortable with the idea that healing comes from physicians or their bag of tricks, because I had learned years before, when I had my own health challenge from polio, that healing has only one source. Doctors can only aid the body by removing foreign particles, injecting chemicals, setting and realigning bones,

but that does not mean that the body will heal. In fact, I am certain, there has never been a doctor anywhere, at any time, in any country, at any period in history who ever healed anything. Each person's healer is within. (90)

In emphasising "the healer within" the holistic health model places unusual responsibility upon individuals for their own physical well-being. Of course, alternative medicine does not stand alone in this trend of shifting responsibility from agencies (such as socialised healthcare systems) to individuals. Andrew Ross (1991: 52) views New Age approaches to healthcare as reflecting the beliefs and values that came to prevail under the economic rationalist regimes of the 1980s. Like the idea of a self-regulating global economy the idea of a self-repairing human organism rejects the power of social intervention and relinquishes all to "natural" forces. Morgan's Aborigines are emissaries of individualism as surely as they are advocates of holism. Health through self-reliance is Morgan's mutant message.

Of course, the holistic health model does not confine itself to crediting individuals with the responsibility for getting well. Individuals are also responsible for getting sick in the first place. In *Mutant Message* Aboriginality is used to validate this basic principle of holistic medicine:

The Real People tribe believes that we are not random victims of ill health, that the physical body is the only means our higher level of eternal consciousness has to communicate with our personality consciousness. Slowing down the body allows us to look around and analyze the really

important wounds we need to mend: wounded relationships, gaping holes in our belief system, walled up tumours of fear, eroding faith in our Creator, hardened emotions of unforgiveness, and so on. (96)

There is a pronounced evangelistic ring to Morgan's belief in the pathogenic nature of "unforgiveness" and "eroding faith". The moral dimensions to New Age diagnoses reveal an approach to sickness and health that is at least as concerned with specifying "right" beliefs and "correct" conduct as it is with achieving physical well-being. In its dependence upon the idea of individuals as the origin of everything good or bad in their lives the alternative health movement can be seen to recycle elements of a Christian doctrine of salvation (Coward 1989). This is most discernible in its reliance upon the hegemonic opposition of purity/impurity. The relentless striving for a cleansed body, purged of toxins and impurities, mobilises the same forces driving Christian fixations with the purification of the self. However, as has been seen in the past, the valorising of purity may carry less than innocuous social consequences. In the words of Andrew Ross:

The perpetual, paranoid maintenance of a cleansed, purified body, immune to all sorts of external pollution, tends to feed into a social philosophy saturated with the historical barbarism of the politics of quarantine, natural selection, and social apartheid. (54)

Certainly in the case of Morgan's text distinct links are formed between the concepts of physiological integrity and racial purity. The primordial

Real People, racially and anatomically pristine by virtue of a wilderness enforced quarantine, exemplify the healthy, unpolluted New Age body. Conversely, associations are established between racial hybridity and the idea of the pathological. Morgan, herself a practitioner of holistic medicine, comes to Australia to work with “urban dwelling, half-caste Aboriginal adults” (3) who have “openly displayed” pathological attitudes. In emphasising the mixed-race status of the diseased subject a causal relation is inferred, and tacitly, in underscoring the urban as the instigative site of pathogenesis, “nature” becomes the true origin of purity and well-being. However, as Andrew Ross observes, while the New Age remains “strictly opposed to any conception of ‘nature’ as a social construct” (54), this seemingly unsullied and non-social source of health and goodness is an impure product of impure motives encompassing social agendas ranging from racialism to Christianity, and individualism to occultism.

Re-affirmations of dominant ideological forms may barely conceal authors’ apparent dismissals of such forms. For example, Monica Furlong portrays Aborigines as beings who, by virtue of an unmediated connection to the physical world, have evolved a spirituality surpassing “our own Judaic-Christian fumbings”. However, while seeming to emphasise the deficiencies of Christian thought, Furlong’s text manufactures an Aboriginality essentially informed by Christian

dualism: spirit/matter, sacred/profane, time/timelessness³⁹, God/man, and so on. Furthermore, her insistence that Christians have a reduced capacity to feel⁴⁰ - because they value "spirit above matter" (68) - finally reinscribes a form of puritanism in which the libidinous heathen reappears, but as one to be envied or emulated rather than converted or condemned. While represented in opposition to Christianity her Aboriginality promotes Christianity and relies upon strategies normally associated with missionary discourse. For instance, placing an emphasis upon the concept of pre-literacy, Aborigines are shown to be, in certain fundamental ways, like children:

...my education, like that of all Westerners, had prized words, reading, ideas above everything; it trained me to live in an inner world. Sensation - smell, touch, taste, colour, the world of early childhood in my case, but that of all pre-literate people throughout their lives - took a back seat as the fascination of reading took hold, substituting thought for observation. There was no voice to point out that there was loss as well as gain, that some essential connection with matter and with the body was in danger of being lost. (68)

Furlong's celebration of the rich sensual life of indigenous peoples has a twofold function. Firstly, it functions to suggest that this is a mode of

³⁹ Furlong borrows from Mary Durack and relies heavily upon the binary opposition "people of the clock"(Westerners or Moderns) and "people of the dream"(Aborigines or primitives).

⁴⁰ In *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978) Christopher Lasch notes - "People nowadays complain of an inability to feel. They cultivate more vivid experiences, seek to beat more sluggish flesh to life, attempt to revive jaded appetites. They condemn the superego and exalt the lost life of the senses" (11).

experience that may be more satisfying and more complete. Secondly, and more importantly, it asserts that the origins of this experience lie in a state of lesser development⁴¹. Furlong is quite blunt about this. For her the vibrant world of the senses, imagined as the everyday realm of Aboriginal experience, is synonymous with "the world of early childhood". Like infants Aborigines do not write⁴², she argues, and because of this condition of 'pre-literacy'⁴³ Aboriginal culture, by virtue of its elementariness, does not impede the senses.

⁴¹ Constructing an "us" and "them" in which the "us" is represented as lacking something fundamental that "they" possess - yet at the same time representing "them" as less sophisticated or developed - restates the pre-conditions for all (neo)colonial enterprises: a less powerful other replete with riches.

⁴² Furlong bases these observations upon a short time spent among the Kukatja at the Catholic mission of Balgo. Balgo was established in the mid 1960's and the Kukatja are often referred to as the last Aborigines to "come out of the desert". The tiny community of Balgo is one of the last places that Furlong's representation of Aborigines as "people without writing" could be even remotely sensible. According to Torgovnick the notion of "people without writing" is a common "trope" of primitivist discourse, and therefore a signifier of the shape and content of Western desire rather than the reality of the Other. Primitivism is a discourse assembled from such tropes: "To study the primitive is thus to enter an exotic world which is also a familiar world. That world is structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions of primitives - images that I call tropes. Primitives are like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces - libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free" (Torgovnick 8).

⁴³ Pre-literacy is a developmental concept whose deployment necessarily positions Aborigines at a lower stage of development; 'they' are made to represent 'our' pre-modern past. It implies not that Aborigines do not write but rather that they have not, like us, arrived at the stage of discovering writing. Not only is there a dearth of evidence to support the view that writing is a stage of human development, rather than a localised response to culturally specific needs, but it is not strictly true that traditional Aborigines had no system of writing. Eric Michaels notes that although it is probably accurate to classify traditional Aboriginal culture as oral, Aborigines were "not without resources for codifying experience and inscribing it in various media" (84). Michaels cites the example of Warlpiri graphics which he describes as a writing in the service of orality: "Warlpiri design is a form of inscription that operates quite differently from more familiar writings. It neither provides phonological symbols that combine to record speech (alphabets), or pictorial glyphs that denote specified objects or ideas (picto/ideographs). If anything, it

Furlong constructs an Aboriginality analogous to childhood in order to posit the existence of a privileged relationship to nature. But this is a construction with a shameful history. Instrumental in a politics of coercive control, it has been used to justify and authorise everything from cultural erasure to the stealing of (actual) children. Furlong is, no doubt, as horrified by this history as any other person of normal sensitivity. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Aborigines in the same category as children serves to maintain the hierarchised relationship upon which the colonial history of Australia is founded. Furlong does not seek to justify barbarisms. However, to represent Aboriginality in terms of the category of childhood conceals the challenge that Aboriginalities, in their radical distinctiveness, issue to the authority of Western hegemony. Furthermore, it mobilises a nostalgic longing for what is believed to have once, in early childhood, been ours.

In *Two Men Dreaming* James Cowan adopts the Pintubi words *yuti* and *yarrka* (seen and unseen) to articulate this nostalgic longing for a sensuous relation to the natural world believed to have been felt as a child:

poses a sort of mediation between the two. It does provide pictographic symbols that are recombined to express ideas and things, but unlike Oriental ideographic writing, and more like alphabets, it abstracts elements so combined and reduces them to comparatively few. The system relies on a fairly discrete but polysemous inventory of graphic symbols: circles, dots, lines, semi-circles... These are combined in ground paintings (made of soils, ochres, feathers, flowers), body decoration (ochres, pipeclay, animal fats), utilitarian objects and weapons, and special ceremonial objects (boards, stones, sticks), as well as being painted and carved on caves and rock faces" (85).

My landscape was made up of tendrils of nature spreading its arms wide in embrace. I was not separate, uneasy in its presence. I was the echo of a kookaburra; a division of soldier crabs marching into some nameless battle; one leg among many on a centipede's journey. We were all *yuti* and *yarrka* together. (18)

The dissolution of boundaries - between body and nature, self and other, subject and object, *yuti* and *yarrka* - is a recurring image in writings informed by primitivism. Torgovnick understands this in terms of a desire to return to "a state before there arose troubling differences" (186). Cowan represents this state without boundaries, the oceanic - a state in which an effortless acquiescence dissolves all that is disagreeable - as the other of modern life⁴⁴. The troublesome presence of difference and disorder is concealed by an imagined "oneness" of body and nature.

In *Mutant Message* the boundaries dividing the physical body of the Aboriginal and the desert environment s/he occupies effectively vanish as desert and Aborigine become interchangeable signifiers of modern desires. This conflation of Aborigine and desert landscape is also central for David Tacey:

⁴⁴ More precisely, he represents modern life in terms of a falling from an original state of grace, which he constructs in terms of the oceanic (19). That Cowan *et al* literally hanker for a dissolving of all boundaries seems unlikely. What is more likely to be desired is an extension of the self's boundaries to accommodate, through assimilation, all others, all that seems lacking, while the 'I' as controlling center remains very much preserved. This seems evident in the above excerpt which concerns itself very much with the 'I' as center and the environment as its possession - "My landscape".

The Aboriginal people can be seen as ... part of the symbolic continuum of the landscape, and so perhaps the usual Western distinction between people and land does not properly belong here. By becoming attuned to the land, one is, almost involuntarily, becoming attuned to Aboriginality, or as it were to the 'source' of Aboriginality. I was aware, especially in my early teens, that Aboriginal people had something that I lacked: an intensely mythopoetic and sacred bond with the land. For me Aboriginality functioned rather potently as an example, or an image, of a spiritual pact with the land that I wanted to achieve. (Tacey, 1995:14)

Again the Aboriginal is represented in terms of what moderns lack, and for Tacey this deficiency can be amended via the land that the Aboriginal not only occupies but is synonymous with. A kind of second phase colonialism is articulated here. The first phase having involved displacing the Aborigine to gain access to the land, now the land is seen as a means of gaining access to Aboriginality. Aborigine/Desert is understood as possessing remedial power, a cure for the psychosomatic ills and existential pains of modernity:

Landscape began to work on me soon after arriving in central Australia...While the asthmatic tightness in my sister's chest and respiratory system began to be relieved, I felt the habitual tightness of my closed ego begin to dissolve under the pressure, or the calling, of the seemingly limitless desert landscape. I felt enjoined to partly disidentify with the ego and to identify myself with, or to dissolve my identity into, the red, the blue, and purple expanses around me (Tacey, 19).

In focussing upon the desert in his search for an Australian spirituality Tacey overlooks, or at least underplays, the privileged place the desert

holds in Western spirituality. In fact, he sees Judaeo-Christian models as inappropriate to the Australian context. Australia, he argues, demands a different “archetypal style”; one that like the Aborigines’ is more feminine, more ecological, will respect “Gaia the Earth Mother”, and does not rely upon dualistic notions of spirit and matter (24). The modern psyche, Tacey claims, has overdosed on “patriarchal spirit” and needs to turn to “nature” in order to revitalise and reinvigorate civilisation. Rejecting the conception of nature as a social construct, he chooses instead to see the social and the cultural as constructed by nature:

The deep world of the psyche, which is really ‘nature’ inside us, is directly influenced by the forces of nature ‘outside’ us. In Australia, where land and Aboriginality are fused, this means that white Australians, virtually in spite of themselves, are slowly aboriginalised in their unconscious. (135)

On the surface, Tacey’s model seems opposed to that other model of representing the Australian desert and its inhabitants, the explorer’s model. In the explorer’s model the land emerges as “raw and unpredictable ‘nature’... to be conquered by structuring and ordering men” (Marcus, 1993: 383). In Tacey’s model it is the deeply spiritual power of the land that conquers and shapes the psyches of all who dwell within its influence. In the Western imagination the desert is both a site of spiritual investment and the place where adventurers conquer or perish. The biblical home of purification and renewal, yielding sacred knowledge to the chosen, in the desert the Children of Israel wandered in search of the promised land and God spoke with prophets who grappled with

demons and dined on locusts and honey. But in the Western imagination the desert is also inextricably linked to transcendently masculine categories such as crusader, prospector, pioneer, explorer and adventurer. The desert is a site where men become men through subduing otherness. However, these two models are not opposed but related. Whether for spiritual purification or masculine subjugation, the desert, always gendered female, furnishes opportunities for occupation and inscription, representing an otherness to be subsumed and an immensity to be annexed. Noting the relatedness of these two models Roslynn Haynes (1998) observes the frequency with which the colonial explorer's responses to the Australian desert are framed in the language of the spiritual:

Three of the predominant responses recorded by the explorers of the Australian desert - terror at its starkness, awe at its immensity and fascination at its wildness - align precisely with the sensations of *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinans* associated by the theologian Rudolph Otto with the experience of the numinous: 'Empty distance, remote vacancy, is, as it were, the sublime in the horizontal. The wide stretching desert, the boundless uniformity of the steppe have real sublimity and even in us Westerners they set vibrating chords of the numinous'. (28)

Like a pilgrim in the wilderness the imperialist explorer experiences the desert mystically, and the desert prophet, like the nineteenth century explorer, endures asperity in a characteristically masculine attempt to subdue nature:

Seeking spiritual enlightenment, the pilgrim strives to transcend physical surroundings and to triumph over bodily discomfort... hardships provide not only a physical test of survival, but a trial of motivation; the vast isolated expanse tests the individual's ability to overcome loneliness and stand alone before God... the desert was, and largely still is, conceptually a man's place. Thus an important part of the self-denial associated with the desert was sexual abstinence, with a concomitant rejection of women... Even when literal residence in the desert was considered impractical or superfluous, it remained a powerful metaphor for spiritual pilgrimage and a test of manhood, its very barrenness suggesting sexual abstemiousness along with rejection of debilitating 'softness', luxury and decadence (Haynes 29).

The source of both spiritual enlightenment and transcendent masculinity, in the Western tradition, the desert is situated in "an interlocking complex of belief" (Haynes 29). This is especially observable in Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* in which the desert is both harsh and dangerous wilderness, revealing its truth to disciplined and determined men, and the origin of all poetry. While noted for its romantic valorising of nomadism (Michaels 172), and for its representation of the Centralian landscape as a source of epiphany (Haynes 276), *The Songlines* is less commonly acknowledged for its recycling of a typically nineteenth century narrative of the English gentleman adventurer. Well read, well bred and well travelled Chatwin is the quintessential cultured explorer and amateur man of science. Conversant in anthropology, ethology, archaeology, biology, philosophy and literature, a taste for wine and all things fine, an amorous romantic, he is the baby boomer's answer to Sir Richard Burton.

For Chatwin, compulsively filling journals⁴⁵ like an overly enthused Victorian diarist, the desert furnishes a situation for writing for writing's sake. The Australian desert and its indigenous peoples function as a test site for grandiose theories - almost charming in their silliness and the seriousness with which they are held - of the origin of humankind and of language. Alone in the harshness of the Australian wilderness, Chatwin, with all of the pomposity of his type, pits his theories against reality, against orthodoxy, and against common sense, emerging both "enlightened" and more of a man:

All of the Great Teachers have preached that Man, originally, was a 'wanderer in the scorching and barren wilderness of this world' - the words are those of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor - and that to rediscover his humanity, he must slough off attachments and take to the road. My two most recent notebooks were crammed with jottings taken in South Africa, where I had examined, at first hand, certain evidence on the origin of our species. What I learned there - together with what I now knew about the Songlines - seemed to confirm the conjecture I had toyed with for so long: that Natural Selection has designed us - from the structure of our brain-cells to the structure of our big toe - for a career of seasonal journeys *on foot* through a blistering land of thorn-scrub or desert. If this were so; if the desert were 'home'; if our instincts were forged in the desert - then it is easier to understand why greener pastures pall on us; why possessions exhaust us, and why Pascal's imaginary man found his comfortable lodgings a prison. (Chatwin 181-2)

⁴⁵ Approximately half of *The Songlines* consists of entries from these journals, a pastiche of quotes from Pascal, Thomas Carlisle, Nietzsche, Konrad Lorenz and many more, as well as personal pontifications, hypothesising, and scientific musing on all manner of subjects.

Eric Michaels describes *The Songlines* as a fragmented and confused text that begs the question: "Just what is this book about?" (173). However, Michaels asks this question as an ethnographer in search of a cogent ethnological thesis - which Chatwin certainly leads the reader to expect. But Chatwin's text does not seek to further current Western understandings of Dreaming Tracks (songlines)⁴⁶. Rather, it utilises the connotative power of this Aboriginal cultural construct in a project of romanticising and aggrandizing personal experience. The passage above, which appears immediately after the protagonist finally encounters his authentic Australian nomad, probably comes close to a synopsis of the text. Chatwin, a recognisable type, a backpacking bohemian whose origins lie in the counter-culture of the 1960s seeks remedies to restlessness in exotic locales and exotic peoples⁴⁷. Chatwin's thesis is that nomadism is instinctual behaviour, *the* natural human state from which we have drifted, and that to rediscover our humanity we must "slough off attachments and take to the road". In other words we must be more like traditional nomadic peoples such as the Pintubi, and more like Chatwin who represents himself as a kind of modern nomad. *The Songlines* is a modern drifter's attempt at total

⁴⁶ Borrowing from Strehlow (1970) Chatwin uses the term songlines to refer to what are more commonly referred to as Dreaming Tracks. These tracks are the pathways through the desert followed by nomadic Aborigines, and believed to have been forged by Dreaming Ancestors. The path itself and points along the path are inextricably tied to Dreaming stories and as the path is followed the stories are told and preserved, and in turn, the telling of the stories is believed to preserve the path, the surrounding environs, and all living things. According to Michaels the tracks demonstrate a "complex, utterly precise knowledge between person, knowledge and place known to be at the heart of Aboriginal desert ontologies" (Michaels 172).

identification with the world's desert nomads by constructing them as the original human type from which we all derive. In order to persuade his reader of this he puts forward a number of arguments: The fact of a personal restlessness which he assumes is universal; the half articulated lessons of unspecified "Great Teachers"; and a hotch-potch of Darwinian theory, Lorenzian ethology⁴⁸, folk wisdom, travellers' tales, classical references, and biblical quotations.

Darwin and Lorenz function to assist Chatwin's project of privileging nature over culture and provide a smokescreen of seemingly authoritative science behind which lurks a rabid primitivism. The desert and the Pintubi are the nature, entirely enculturated of course, functioning to naturalise the cultural. The idea of an original, precultural state is posited through the filter of the cultural:

Thornscrub was the country into which the brain of the first man expanded: the Crown of Thorns was not an accidental crown. (Chatwin 277)

The desert is both the Garden of Eden and the place where ape became 'Man'. According to the logic of *The Songlines*, traditional nomads such

⁴⁷ In Michaels' words, "[Chatwin] embodies a personal displacement associated with the 1960's, elevated here to an icon of the archetypal wanderer" (170).

⁴⁸ Nobel prize winning zoologist, Konrad Lorenz, known as the father of modern ethology, contributed to an understanding of how behavioural patterns may be attributed to an evolutionary past. Ethology is the study of animal behaviour, but focuses upon a specific behaviour across a number of animal groups rather than on a particular animal group. So, for instance, one may focus upon 'aggression' as behaviour exhibited by a number of animal groups, as Lorenz did, or one may focus upon migratory behaviour, as Chatwin attempts to. In *On Aggression* Lorenz applied ethology to human beings, a

as the Tuareg of the Sahara⁴⁹, and the Pintubi, are in their nomadism closer to the original state of the original humans and *ipso facto* closer to nature⁵⁰. By implication, Chatwin, in his globe-trotting lifestyle, is also more attuned to nature and closer to genuine humanity. According to Chatwin's theoretical schema his wanderlust is neither personal disposition, culturally determined, nor a response to specific historical conditions, but entirely a matter of obeying nature. His claims of proximity to authentic origins are furthered by his associating Dreaming Tracks with the birth of language, his theory being that language was an adaptive response to a life of wandering in the desert, that navigating the desert wilderness necessitated naming⁵¹. As a travel writer, forever on the move and compulsively filling notebooks, Chatwin is not simply relishing

controversial move with troubling ethical and sociological implications, which led many to consider the possible influence of Nazism on the development of his ideas.

⁴⁹ Like Cowan in *Two Men Dreaming*, Chatwin, on the basis of nomadism, treats the Pintubi and the Tuareg as more or less equivalent. The enormous differences between these peoples, such as the fact that the Tuareg are transhumance pastoralists and the Pintubi were hunter/gatherers, are overlooked in service of a larger project of fetishising the nomadic.

⁵⁰ This recycles a very common primitivist trope - "people who never really changed" (Torgovnick 166). By implication moderns represent those who have travelled furthest from the place where "the brain of the first *man* expanded". Nomadic desert dwellers, such as the Pintubi, emerge as those who remained behind.

⁵¹ Chatwin provides the following summary of his Songlines theory: "I have a vision of the Songlines stretching across the continents and the ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo); and that these trails must reach back, in time and space, to an isolated pocket in the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him; shouted the opening stanza of the World Song. 'I Am!'

Let me go one step further. Let us imagine Father Adam (*homo sapiens*) strolling around the Garden. He puts a left foot forward and names a flower. He puts a right foot forward and names a stone. The verb carries him to the next stanza of the Song. All animals, insects, birds, mammals, dolphins, fish and humpback whales have a navigation system we call 'triangulation'. The mysteries of Chomskyan innate sentence structure become very simple if they are thought of as human triangulation. Subject - Object - Verb" (314).

the spoils of a privileged lifestyle but is obeying the call of the primal self, forging global songlines with the aid of a Mont Blanc fountain pen, a university education, and a visa card.

Chatwin's univocal narrative (songline) constructs a primitivist desert from a mish-mash of science, humanism and New Age preoccupations: a space where Pintubi elders provide confirmation of Eurocentric theorising, and backpackers find a primordial validation for their peripatetic pleasure seeking. Chatwin would probably have denied the charge of New Agism, no doubt preferring to see himself as a rational thinker furthering the cause of scientific understanding. In fact, at one point in *The Songlines* a public lecture given by Arthur Koestler (a figure much celebrated in New Age and theosophical circles⁵²) is described as "millenarian claptrap" (237). One suspects he protests too much. While Chatwin may not have chosen to identify with the New Age, the New Age has certainly identified with him. This is not surprising as the book, despite its rationalist content, reproduces the thematic concerns of New Age thought. He has idealised the archaic - his recreation of "man's" nomadic origins borders on the idyllic, a Golden Age from which we have fallen⁵³. Pointing to the ills of modern life - restlessness, the emptiness of materialism, etcetera - he hints at the possibility of a remedy in returning

⁵² This is as a consequence of Koestler's considerable work on Eastern mysticism (*The Lotus and the Robot* 1960) and upon paranormal phenomena (*The Roots of Coincidence* 1972).

to this original, more natural state. Identifying the nomadic as a more authentically human category, and focussing upon a people (the Pintubi) with a recent nomadic tradition, he universalises their cultural specificity and lays claim to a central cultural construct, the Dreaming Track, as a primary trope for his writing and as an explanatory metaphor for all human experience⁵⁴. Finally, he uses the Pintubi to indulge in a sentimental idealisation of the nomadic. This sentimentalisation reaches a peak at the end of the novel where the protagonist has followed a Songline to the place where three Pintubi elders have gone to die:

In a clearing there were three 'hospital' bedsteads, with mesh springs and no mattresses, and on them lay three dying men. They were almost skeletons. Their beards and hair had gone.

'Aren't they wonderful?' Marian whispered putting her hand in mine and giving it a squeeze. Yes they were all right. They knew where they were going, smiling at death in the shade of a ghost-gum. (325)

It is on this note of pure primitivism that the novel closes. An Other forged by the rugged grandeur of deserts and millenia of purposeful wandering shuffles off this mortal coil with a sense of certainty and joy. So much more natural, so much unlike 'us', so much a product of 'our' longing.

⁵³ Discussing Golden Age mythologies in the journal fragment section of *The Songlines* Chatwin writes: "One characteristic of the Men of the Golden Age: they are always migratory." (228).

⁵⁴ Chatwin writes, "I felt the Songlines were not necessarily an Australian phenomenon, but universal: that they were the means by which man marked out his territory, and so organised his social life. All other successive systems were variants - or perversions - of this original model." (314) Chatwin's universalising, unlike Morgan's or Andrews', is always delivered with an air of serious scientific authority. However, in *The Songlines* claims to universality - despite an absence of appeals to abstractions such as oneness or spirit - perform very much the same function of justifying appropriation.

in search of an end:

In *Dreamtime Politics* (1989) Erich Kolig draws attention to the relative absence among Australian Aborigines of chiliastic or millenarian responses⁵⁵ to European colonisation:

While almost everywhere else in the world a plethora of political, militaristic, religious and quasi-religious movements sprang up, holding up a promise of social redemption and seeking an end to oppression, degradation, deprivation, or whatever else may have been seen at the time as the critical issue, searching Aboriginal society for millenarian movements, cargo cults and similar phenomena expressing a longing for a new order of things, turns out to be a meagre hunting ground. Disproportionate to the vast literature accumulated on this society, and in stark contrast to neighbouring societies in the Pacific region, there is little evidence of such phenomena. (49)

In Kolig's view, given that for quite some time Aborigines have had little reason to celebrate society as it is, this dearth of millenarian political expression seems unusual and noteworthy⁵⁶. He observes that current

⁵⁵ Chiliasm or millenarianism, of which Christianity is a form, describes human social movements, usually with a distinctly religious flavour, in which a certain set of characteristics and beliefs are recurrent. These include a belief in the imminent end (a possibly violent or apocalyptic end) to current conditions which are experienced as unacceptable, corrupted or incomplete. This is accompanied by the belief that the end will be followed by a new or golden age which will be characterised by peace and harmony, justice and equality, and the realisation of human perfectibility. This new order is commonly understood as the restoration of a previously existing order, but it may also be represented as the completion of history or the beginning of an entirely original utopia. Usually, but not always, the source of this transformation of life on earth is seen to be supernatural or divine, and is often believed to be ushered in by a charismatic leader or leaders.

⁵⁶ While acknowledging that any attempt to explain the relative scarcity of millenarianism among Australian Aboriginal peoples would be empirically unverifiable, and therefore could never yield more than cogent or persuasive fictions, Kolig nevertheless speculates as to why this may have been. Reasons proffered by Kolig include - sudden divine intervention was not a part of Dreamtime cosmology (divine intervention was expected to be of a routine nature and to move along established paths); there was no

Aboriginal political expressions, even when utopian in character, do not normally draw upon supernatural and divine levels of experience but are predominantly rational, sober and realistic⁵⁷. Furthermore, he argues, while seeking an end to current social conditions, contemporary Aboriginal political action tends not to posit the (re)institution of an ideal or sublime order.

In stark contrast to the "sober", non-millenarian character of Aboriginal resistance politics stands the extravagant millenarianism of New Agism. Emphasising the supernatural and religious, and announcing an end to current conditions in the imminent birth of a golden age in which the encumbrances of the everyday will be utterly transcended, the New Age movement is definitively millenarian. However, in contrast to other forms of millenarianism, such as the cargo cults of the Pacific, New Agism has not emerged in response to the stresses of invasion and dispossession. New Agism remains, almost exclusively, a first world indulgence, a belief system embraced by members of societies whose position in the world is prosperous and secure. Of course, this does not mean that adherents to New Age beliefs are free from forces of repression and disempowerment. No doubt, in turning to the New Age the

tradition of charismatic leadership among Aboriginal peoples (such a thing would probably have been met with great distrust); the only ideal society conceivable was the strictly traditional one that existed in pre-European days.

⁵⁷ Kolig observes that even in the case of claims to land and the protection of sacred sites, which necessarily include religious elements, that the spiritual component enters the debate more as an expedient than as a determining factor in a future better society (48).

Western subject seeks an end to circumstances of frustration and powerlessness. Just how effective this response may be is another matter. For instance, New Agism tends not to envisage changes in social conditions. This is most clearly evident if one considers that the bulk of New Age literature (including *The Communist Manifesto* of New Age thought, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*) begins with the premise that the New Age has already arrived. In other words, the social, political and economic conditions necessary for personal transformation have already been provided; the New Age comes compliments of capitalist democracy and not as an alternative to. In this way New Agism affirms the rightness of the present order. It does not seek to challenge current social and political realities but instead attempts to breathe new life into traditional values and beliefs⁵⁸.

In this project of rejuvenation the idea of Aboriginality is seized upon and forced to speak. An Other, crudely fashioned from select fragments and banal fabrications, is used to validate the already known. Seeming to facilitate the imagining of a place outside of contemporary dissatisfactions, an Aboriginality is created that reiterates the wisdom of the conservative and corroborates the truth of the conventional. Paradoxically, in this respect New Agism and the

⁵⁸ New Agism is best understood in light of A.F.G Wallace's ideas on revitalisation movements (Wallace 1956). The revitalisation movement does not attempt a radical replacement or transformation of the current order but seeks to construct a more satisfying culture through a rejuvenation of traditional values and beliefs.

Dreamtime cosmology it seizes upon share the fundamentally conservative premise that the established order is ideal, and therefore the role of humankind in the scheme of things is simply one of maintenance.

In writing about the concept of Aboriginality (as it was used in the context of the education of Aboriginal children living in Australian cities during Australia's bicentennial year), Kevin Keefe (1988), concluded that Aboriginality is an ideology composed of two key themes. These are Aboriginality-as-persistence and Aboriginality-as-resistance. Aboriginality-as-persistence refers to inherited culture or a continuity of cultural practices and beliefs whose origins lie in traditional Aboriginal culture. It is founded upon the idea of a fixed body of knowledge that is passed on from generation to generation⁵⁹. On the other hand, Aboriginality-as-resistance,

... is a more active and dynamic concept in its usage by Aboriginal people, especially for the young⁶⁰. It is not only a specific set of ideological elements, but also a living set of cultural practices which are in dynamic interaction with white society, and the cultural practices that characterise it... The elements that are stressed when this aspect is dominant are such things as resistance to white authority, political struggle and collective solidarity.
(68)

⁵⁹ Keefe notes that Aboriginality-as-persistence, to the extent that it relies upon the concept of Aboriginality as a single and immutable entity located 'in the blood' and genetically transmitted, is potentially delimiting.

⁶⁰ Keefe notes the importance to young Aboriginal people of "wearing their colours" (the colours of the Aboriginal flag) as a demonstration of their resistance. He also observes the role played by various forms of protest music, such as that produced and performed by the Aboriginal bands Us Mob and No Fixed Address, in Aboriginality-as-resistance.

For the non-Aboriginal, Aboriginality-as-persistence is in every way less difficult and less threatening than Aboriginality-as-resistance. Aboriginality-as-persistence does not address you, stare accusingly, trouble your conscience, question your legitimacy, challenge your authority, display a sophisticated awareness of the source and location of power in the contemporary social order, and does not change according to its needs. Aboriginality-as-persistence can be accommodated and manipulated in ways that Aboriginality-as-resistance is impervious to. Aboriginality-as-persistence can be related to and engaged with in ways that are safe and familiar: as commodity, as ethnography, as exotica, as Australiana, or as governmental object. Aboriginality-as-persistence stands available, near to hand, and ready for use.

Of course, only a portion of what would constitute the inherited knowledge of any culture is available, accessible or even intelligible to those who lie outside of that culture. Nevertheless, it is from the category of Aboriginality-as-persistence that the New Age assembles its instrumental Aboriginality. The New Age shows no interest in encountering a dynamic and politically engaged Aboriginal subject, contemporaneous with other modern subjects and formally equal with other citizens. Even when addressing the social reality of Aboriginal disadvantage the New Age diverts attention from material and political realities and privileges the realms of the metaphysical and mythological. It is such prioritising that allows David Tacey to offhandedly dismiss the

Mabo legislation, the end result of an arduous and protracted legal/political struggle, as “relatively easy to construct piles of government documents” which are ultimately subordinate to “the more difficult claims that are being made by the indigenous archetype within” (Tacey 138). Similarly, in *Mysteries of the Dreamtime*, James Cowan imperiously insists upon the precedence of spiritual tradition over the more immediate demands of material necessity:

If Aboriginal culture is to survive at all, then it requires a far more serious examination of the Dreaming as a metaphysical reality than there has been so far. The Dreaming is at the very root of the Aboriginal heritage, and it is this that must be preserved as a living reality at all costs. Spending money on housing or medical projects, funding artistic communities or economic programmes are extremely important, of course, but must remain as secondary to the re-affirmation of the Dreaming⁶¹. The Dreaming is the *raison d'être* of Aboriginal culture. Until this is recognized and acted upon by government and bureaucrats alike, Aborigines will continue to survive in a state of fringe ethnicism, at the mercy of the more dominant European cultural values that surround them. (Cowan 1992:131)

Paradoxically, but characteristically, Cowan is arguing that the future can only reside in a preservation of the past. As he sees it the continuation of Aboriginal culture principally depends upon the conservation of tradition,

⁶¹ Keefe expresses some doubts concerning governmental privileging of the cultural above the social and material: “A diversion of energy into the realms of ‘culture’ and away from any campaign for social, economic or political equality, becomes a way of muting resistance by acknowledging the limited demands of culture and heritage at the expense of greater demands” (Keefe 75).

or at least upon that portion of tradition that he finds meaningful. Cowan is also arguing that the future of Aboriginal culture should not be left solely to Aboriginal people. If Aboriginal culture is to survive at all, he claims, an intensified governmental focus upon the Dreaming is required. Of course, given the less than distinguished record of government in the field of Aboriginal cultural preservation such a claim can only be received with marked scepticism. Aboriginal culture survives in spite of government intervention. Aboriginal culture also survives in spite of attempts by Cowan and others to impose an artificial unity upon what is in reality an extremely diverse multiplicity.

Cowan's deployment of the Dreaming as *the* defining characteristic of Aboriginal culture is delimiting to say the least⁶². It is

⁶² It is not my intention to understate the obvious importance of the Dreaming to Aboriginal Australia. However, as is evident in the work of Eric Michaels, even in the case of a highly 'traditional' Aboriginal society, such as the Warlpiri, the day to day cultural life of the people encompasses much more than can be enclosed by recourse to terms such as the Dreaming. In Michaels' work Warlpiri culture emerges as a changing and ongoing product of human agency. This includes the exploitation of new technologies, in particular audio-visual technologies. The dynamics of Warlpiri culture can be observed in the scope of audio-visual material that is both produced and consumed by Warlpiri people. For instance, the Warlpiri use video and television to record and broadcast not only aspects of Dreaming lore but also local history, sporting events, family gatherings, and a broad range of community events. In the consumption of video and television action films and AFL football are favoured. While Michaels rejects McLuhan's dictum that culture and the means of communication are equivalent, insisting instead that the Dreaming (translated as the Law) is simply reinscribed in new media, the idea that these new technologies would simply continue to circulate, in an unaltered form, the same cultural contents as traditional modes of communication seems unlikely. In adopting and adapting new technologies of communication Warlpiri culture discloses itself as activity and as movement, a fluid expression of contents in flux. This, of course, does not mean that there is an absence of continuity or dominant themes, but neither is there an inert and endangered object, of the kind imagined by Cowan, in need of government to impede its vanishing. The Dreaming, as represented by Cowan and others, is a fetish object used to invoke an aura of the numinous and of the exotic.

difficult to see how such reductive definitions can finally do anything but hinder the continuity of culture in all of its complexity and variety. It is less difficult, however, to see that such definitions yield an object which is able, with relative ease, to be grasped, incorporated, managed and manipulated by individuals and institutions alike⁶³. Restricting Aboriginality to its relation to a limited body of knowledge (Dreaming lore) also creates a situation in which a person's Aboriginality may be measured according to the degree to which s/he can be said to be immersed in this body of knowledge. Cowan's definition, founded as it is upon dubious notions of cultural purity that disregard the authenticity of hybridised and urbanised Aboriginalities, functions largely as an instrument of exclusion. Excluding the Aboriginal as active modern subject, preferring instead to conceive of Aboriginality as a bastion of the archaic, a curiosity whose relative weakness is always insinuated, Cowan's definition yields a benign object that conceals the potent fusion of resistance, resilience and heterogeneity commonly associated with contemporary forms of Aboriginality.

Of course, the concealment of Aboriginality-as-resistance has a long tradition. This is hardly surprising; to disclose Aboriginality in terms of resistance is to disclose an other who refuses both subjection and assimilation. It is also to reveal as questionable that which is being

⁶³ The management of populations relies upon definitions that respond to questions such as - Who is an Aboriginal, or rather, who is entitled to legitimately identify as an

resisted. The habit of concealing Aboriginality-as-resistance and the challenge that it issues to the legitimacy of white settlement notoriously afflicted Australian historiography, which W.E.H. Stanner likened to "a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape" (Stanner 1969). In 1968 when Stanner made this comparison he was describing a situation that was virtually pathological. From the late nineteenth century onwards detailed accounts of Aborigines and Aboriginal/settler relations were almost completely absent from Australian history books⁶⁴. More recently historians such as Henry Reynolds have been engaged in a campaign to restore Aboriginal people to their place in the history of Australia. In *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981)⁶⁵ Reynolds began to uncover something of the untold

Aboriginal? Of course, governmental definitions of Aboriginality, while also reductive, are considerably more inclusive than Cowan's.

⁶⁴ Henry Reynolds observes that this was not true of the early nineteenth century in which detailed historical and descriptive accounts of Aborigines, including accounts of resistance and conflict, had figured prominently. According to Reynolds, what Stanner termed "the cult of forgetfulness", commences at about the time of federation and characterises the writing of Australian history up until at least the early 1970's (Reynolds, 1999: 92).

⁶⁵ In *The Other Side of The Frontier* (1981), Henry Reynolds utilises the distinction between cultural continuity and cultural change, and emphasises the role that resistance to white occupation has played in Aboriginal cultural change. For instance, Reynolds notes that initially many Aboriginal groups accounted for the first arrival of Europeans by recourse to inherited knowledge, and therefore concluded that white settlers were the ghosts of dead relatives returning to their country. This is a view that at first would have seemed to explain much: the skin colour of the colonisers (white was a colour associated with the dead); the very fact that they knew the location of the country, and the fact that they came from across the sea (many coastal tribes believed that on death the spirit travelled across the sea and beyond the horizon). There was, however, much that it did not explain: why was it that the settlers were so ignorant of their country, why couldn't they speak properly, and why did they refuse to acknowledge the fundamental importance of the principle of reciprocity in all relationships? Finally, the actions of white settlers could not be adequately accommodated within existing systems of belief. The eventual recognition that Europeans were not ethereal beings, but human beings, forced amendments to Aboriginal cosmology. If unfriendly or mysterious strangers were not spirits or demons, but humans from other lands, this meant that there was not only one

history of Aboriginal responses to European colonisation, and a previously obscured picture of tactical resistance to a forceful and often brutal dispossession was unconcealed. This version of Australia's past, though well documented, was rendered invisible by the dominance of more palatable accounts that owed more to ideology than to evidence.

Producing a palatable history of Australia would require great selectivity but most of all it would require the exclusion of Aboriginal points of view. The Aboriginal outlook changes everything: explorers become intruders, settlement becomes invasion, and native aggression becomes just retribution. Evidence of this exists in secondary sources, such as in the writings of colonists sympathetic to the Aborigines' plight, and it exists in primary sources such as Aboriginal oral histories, songs, dances and rock art. For example, near the Lilla Anangu community in Central Australia there is a rock painting depicting a man, presumably an explorer, on a horse⁶⁶. Out of the explorer's view, spear ready, an Anangu man watches. In this painting the explorer, now the subject of Aboriginal representation, is deprived of the dominance that his own writing would have bestowed. Rendered intelligible from a position of

human society as was traditionally believed. It also meant, given their humanity, that the white strangers were accountable for all food and water used, all harm caused, and were also obliged to return to their own country. In these circumstances punitive justice and violent resistance became appropriate responses to the continuing European presence. In this process of resistance to the encroachment of white society new and changing Aboriginalities, as much concerned with seeking an end to current conditions as with the continuity of tradition, began to emerge.

advantage the explorer is out of place, under surveillance, and in grave danger. This is not a view of things that is easily gleaned from reading explorers' journals where the indigene, although often represented as dangerous, is never superiorly positioned (Ryan 1992)⁶⁷.

In *Three Expeditions* (1839) Thomas Mitchell leaves no doubts as to the explorer's view of the dynamics of Aboriginal/settler relations which, like the Lilla artist, he communicates through graphic illustration⁶⁸. In *Tombs of a Tribe* (below), the antithesis of the Lilla painting, a mounted explorer surveys a landscape in which the Aboriginal is present only in memoriam.



Tombs of a Tribe

⁶⁶ I have not actually seen this painting but it was described to me in detail by an Anangu elder when I visited Lilla in 1995 for the purpose of viewing other rock paintings. The painting is estimated to be about 150 years old.

⁶⁷ Simon Ryan (1992) performs a postcolonial reading of the journals of explorers which yields evidence of indigenous strategies of unsettling exploration. Ryan argues that this is possible "because power does not inhere in the authorial/colonial textual agenda alone, but is shared through the indigenes' clear dominance of informational resources [knowledge of their country]." (Ryan 83)

⁶⁸ Of course, Mitchell's sketches are also supported by text which is equally unequivocal concerning the question of dominance in Aboriginal/settler relations: "these people [the Aborigines] cannot be so obtuse as not to anticipate in the advance of such a powerful race [as the British], the extirpation of their own" (Mitchell *Three Expeditions* 307).

In this sketch the presence of one points not to the arrival of the other, as in the Lilla painting, but to the other's passing. According to Ian Mclean (1998: 38) the purpose of Mitchell's art is to "fashion a space ready for colonisation". Aborigines appear as a diminishing force in a space that is "picturesque" or desirable in European terms. This way of representing Aborigines is analogous to New Age representations. In Cowan's texts, as in Mitchell's, Aboriginal culture is perched on the edge of vanishing, and in Morgan's *Mutant Message* Aboriginal people, having ceased reproduction, announce their imminent disappearance. Of course, unlike Mitchell the New Age is not especially interested in any geographical space that Aborigines may vacate (although sacred sites such as Uluru are much coveted). It is even only secondarily interested in the cultural space of Aboriginality, for the New Age in its generalising and universalising is actually deeply hostile to the profound localism that in fact lies at the heart of Aboriginal culture. The New Age simply seeks to render itself picturesque through appropriating and utilising Aboriginality as a sign of novelty: for this purpose the idea of increasing rarity simply increases its value.

From Mitchell to Morgan Aborigines have endured the effects of representations that are antithetical to their interests. This is not a state of affairs which is likely to end soon. While Aborigines are able to exert influence on the ways in which others represent them, and even in certain circumstances have representations removed from circulation, demands

for control over their representation are unlikely to have a significant effect upon the continuing proliferation of damaging representations. In seeking an end to their misrepresentation Marcia Langton (1993: 10) suggests that the most practical response lies in representation itself:

It is clearly unrealistic for Aboriginal people to expect that others will stop portraying us in photographs, films, on television, in newspapers, literature and so on....Rather than demand an impossibility, it would be more useful to identify those points where it is possible to control *the means of production* and to make our own representations. (Langton 10 my italics)

Langton's use of Marxist terminology alludes to the current commodified status of Aboriginality. An essentially commercial environment has been assembled in which Aboriginal self-representation exists side by side with powerful competing fabrications. The fact that Aboriginal people are far from equally positioned in this market place of narratives, images and signs places extraordinary demands upon Aboriginal resilience and imagination. In this challenge to the future of Aboriginal self-representation the New Age will no doubt continue to operate as a significant impediment.

the ending

*"Wanti nindo ai kabba?
Ningkoandi kuma yerta."*¹

questions and conclusions

In his analysis of technology Heidegger concludes that "questioning is the piety of thought" (1996: 341); in reverence for that which concerns us (that which occupies our minds) we must always question. In this thesis I have questioned Aboriginality. This has not been a small matter. As an object worthy of questioning it has been a call to responsibility demanding commitment, care and concern. As an object worthy of questioning it is also without limits. According to George Steiner, from the Heideggerian perspective, the object worthy of questioning (*Fragwurdige*) is "literally inexhaustible" and the questioner unavoidably "lays himself open to that which is being questioned [thus becoming] the vulnerable locus, the permeable space of its disclosure" (Steiner 58). I must now ask: what it is that I have become the vulnerable locus for? I must now throw into question my own questioning. I conclude by re-citing Ngurpo Williamsie's song for I see that this Kurna questioning must now be directed here: where have I pushed Aboriginality to? This is a question of paramount importance. In concluding I must question what it is that I have done. What do these words, carefully assembled, truly say, what do they reveal, and, just as importantly, what do they conceal?

¹ "Where have you pushed me to? You belong to another country."

I have aimed to disclose or unconceal ways in which Aboriginality is produced and circulated (as truth, as the representative, as the incontestable, as the unquestionable) and then functions instrumentally for ends beyond or antithetical to the interests of Aboriginal people themselves. In part one I showed the ways in which a strategy of primitivisation manufactured and deployed the category of the primitive as a negative term that valorised the modern. In part two I disclosed strategies through which a problematised Aboriginality empowered and protected the dominant groups in a racialised settler state. Drawing upon Foucault's definition of governmentality, I argued that the governmental (via the technologies of sign systems that include popular fiction) produces fictive constructions of the common good comprising concepts such as national homogeneity and racial purity. The governmental - simultaneously inciting and punitively addressing "unintegrated passions" (Goodchild 15) - then assumes the authority to discipline those (enemies within) who fail to serve the common good. In part three I revealed how Aboriginality is constructed and determined by current needs and values of the West that appear to develop out of the discontents of a materialist modernity. In these texts, an Other is idealised by "a modernity destructive of the very otherness it celebrates" (Frow, 1997: 101).

This thesis has clarified various ways in which Aboriginality – as an object of Western knowledge – is utilised in projects of domination and control. According to Levinas, Western thought has *consistently*

practised a suppression of the Other through vain attempts to generate ethics of encounter out of self-knowledge and self-interest:

[For Levinas] knowledge is necessarily aimed at or inevitably leads to objectification, alienation, and domination. Therefore knowledge cannot be the basis of ethical life, that is, of a kind of transcending concern for other people, a concern untouched by our own needs, desires, or attempts to control.... If we begin with knowledge – in the guise of science or philosophy, technique or ontology, rational reflection or psychoanalysis – we will never respect the other person as irreducibly other. Knowledge is something acquired, dispensed, and instrumentally used by us. Consequently, knowledge of others necessarily reduces the other to something we possess, something we have acquired, and something ultimately we will use. (Gottlieb 222)

I have questioned knowledge (in the form of the popular) and uncovered derogating employment. But in this process of interrogation and disclosure there is also that which, as a consequence, is concealed or obscured. This raises a number of questions. Firstly, in my questioning of Aboriginality as a Western discursive object, to what extent have I hidden from view (or insufficiently acknowledged) the uniqueness and power of a multiplicity of Aboriginalities whose origins lie not within the self-perpetuating project of an imperialist modernity but within communities creatively responding to alterity and fashioning distinctive pathways through the present? Secondly, and this is a related question, does my thesis wrongly imply an Aboriginality that is defenseless against appropriation and problematisation? Thirdly, in emphasising the ways in which Aboriginality is misrepresented and misused by non-Aboriginals, to

what extent have I obscured (or insufficiently acknowledged) the many ways in which there is a positive engagement of Aboriginality and its others resulting in productive representations, hybrid forms and new becomings? In seeking critically to unveil Aboriginality as a derogating employment in the service of Western interests has this thesis inadvertently become “the permeable place of disclosure” for an Aboriginality conceived solely in terms of passivity or appropriability, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations visualised in terms of dominance and exploitation?

For Heidegger, to disclose entities is always to reveal them in *particular* ways, to encounter them, to understand them, to grasp them in one way rather than another – as things to be used, things to be consumed, things to be embraced, things to be nurtured, things to be preserved. Disclosures need places in which they can occur. In *Being and Time* Heidegger quite simply identifies the place of the occurrence of unconcealment as *Dasein*². Later he developed the concept of “the clearing” (Collins & Selena 1998). The clearing (*Lichtung*) is a field that is actually beyond human being, but human beings, along with other beings, appear within it. It is an open region in which entities appear in different ways, but always in mutual encounters with one another. While humans are important to it they can never completely control it. The clearing is like

² In Heideggerian thought, *Dasein*, which literally translates as being-there, is the being for which being is an issue, that is, the conscious human being.

a forest clearing, an opening in the shadow of the forest. However, while the clearing is a place of potential for things to be, some things appear and others do not. The clearing is not only a place of disclosure; it is also a place of concealment. The very fact that some things can become present means that other things cannot. Other ways of appearing are always possible, but because things are appearing in a particular way, this very appearance obscures other ways of appearing.

The concept of the clearing as described by Heidegger is difficult to grasp. Neither a thing nor a location, a formless abstraction, the clearing paradoxically remains unclear. For the purposes of concluding I restrict this concept and claim that the clearing is always a clearing within (and of) language, and furthermore, that discourse is a clearing within the open region of language; discourse allows things to appear in certain ways and renders others unimaginable. Moreover, this thesis is also a clearing; it is a place where certain things have become present, a place where certain things have become clear. It is a clearing in the sense that it is a place where particular things have become apparent, but it is also a clearing in the sense of a clearing-out. This thesis has aimed always to make explicit Aboriginality as derogating employment, and at the same time it has sought to function as a purging of the various ways in which this derogating employment manifests itself in the field of popular discourse. If in doing so it has partly obscured the presence of a multiplicity of powerful and affirmative Aboriginalities - that is the clearing

has determined that some things have appeared at the expense of others – this has not been its intention. This clearing has sought to make a contribution, however small, to the ongoing creation of places where Aboriginality (unencumbered by the West's will to power) can reveal itself as itself. Perhaps in such places a Levinasian ethics of encounter may be realised. Others can be Others and "imperious metaphors of possession, property and comprehension [can be] replaced by a vocabulary which instead privileges approach, proximity, caress and fecundity" (Davis 25). Perhaps also in such places, the encounter of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal can take the form of Deleuzian becoming, a mutually productive transformation where each is willingly drawn onto the other's line of flight and freely becomes other. In such places the question "Where have you *pushed* me to?" might never appear.

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