COLONIAL LANDSCAPES: FROM HISTORICAL TRAUMA TO MYTHIC HISTORY
1850 – 2013

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That is what we’ve always got to remember: we are the first people of Australia. Yet for the first 190 years of written Australian history, Aboriginal people were excised, excluded and ignored.¹

In 2011, the Australian government released its official Multicultural Policy; a sixteen-page document which emphasises the value immigrants can bring to Australia.² Interestingly, whilst the cover page includes images of numerous Australians – all of differing ethnicities – the first-page image is of a white Australian farmer with his daughter. The images that follow are of an Indian woman, an Asian woman, two African children and so on whilst the very last image is of an Indigenous woman.

This document – its images and its verbal emphasis on multiculturalism as the integration of immigration – is a useful point of departure for an examination of how the dominant visually and verbally constructed image of Australia – here represented by the white farmer welcoming new immigrants whilst Indigenous people remain an afterthought – reveals an interaction between trauma, memory and landscape which underpins the continued inequality of Australian society. It is this image of Australia, and the physical and imagined Australian landscape within which it exists, which has made Indigenous people and the trauma of colonisation invisible within that landscape and thus within history, allowing white Australia as the descendants of the colonisers and settlers to construct a narrative in which they are both the primary inhabitants and owners of the Australian landscape.

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The stories that nations tell about their past invent their present. The process of Australia’s colonisation, surrounded and fuelled by discourses of white male discoverers and of taming the landscape, has become accepted as knowledge in popular memory. The verbal and visual discourses, which have constructed these images and the corresponding myths of the original ‘white Aussie bushman’ and the harsh but yielding Australian landscape, have laid the foundations for the current Australia and its past. The imposition of this Australia upon a pre-existing Indigenous landscape through the violent and traumatic process of colonisation and latter efforts of nation building has resulted in a contemporary Australia which continues to struggle with the question of how to reconcile the past with the present and to integrate ‘white’ and ‘Indigenous’ Australia.

As this article shows, physical and imagined landscapes are sites of collective memory and knowledge, and this is no less tangible (or real) for pre- and post-colonial ‘Indigenous’ Australia than it was/is for colonists, settlers, and contemporary ‘white’ Australia. Examining the impact of early colonial art and literature on the creation of an Australian landscape imbued with a mythologised colonial past, as well as the corresponding creation of an Indigenous landscape through art, oral history and cultural practice, this article demonstrates how the intersection and entanglement of landscape, memory and meaning becomes a powerful force in the creation of identity, culture and communal historical knowledge. Invoking the ‘anguish’ of Deborah Rose Bird’s Indigenous colleague Phil – who stated that ‘[non-Indigenous people] see the scarred tree and the tools – they don’t see the connections to country’ – this article seeks to make visible the co-existence of these two (white and Indigenous) landscapes, showing that their entanglements and tensions will continue to act as barriers to reconciliation as long as the latter remains ‘unseen’.


4 The concept of collective memory has been a growing interest for historians in the past two decades. The concept is inherently cultural, allowing for individual members of a society to locate their identity within a given social structure, and for a community as a whole to reconstruct its present from an acceptable version of the past. Most simply, collective memory can be thought of as information shared by a community about their past. For more information see: Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, Representations 26, no. Memory and Counter-Memory (1989): 7–24; Noa Gedi and Yigel Elam, ‘Collective Memory – What Is It?’, History and Memory 8, no. 1 (1996): 30–50; Alon Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method’, The American Historical Review 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386–1403; Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, New German Critique 65 (1995): 125–133.

Taking as dichotomous and separate two diverse and intermingled groups such as ‘white’ and ‘Indigenous’ Australians is inherently problematic and this article recognises the inadequacy of such an approach in capturing individual experiences. However, in speaking of ‘white’ and ‘Indigenous’ Australias; of landscapes as spaces – which Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad distils as reality individually and socially constructed through thought and interaction with the physical world – this article seeks to capture the interaction of discourses on a macro scale, revealing processes of power, and privileged and underprivileged bodies of knowledge.  

In her 2001 article *Timeline History and the Anzac Myth*, Elizabeth Furniss draws attention to the power of narrative form by stating that the ‘framing of history through themes of discovery and firsts is so deeply engrained in a Western historical sensibility that it may at times appear almost natural and inevitable.’ She explains further that such themes in the Australian context contribute to the structural exclusion of Indigenous history and people from Australia’s national myths and narratives by implying the primacy of white Australians as the nation’s first inhabitants and, thus, its rightful owners. The process of colonisation placed within the sphere of white control both the physical expanse of land called Australia and its perceived and imagined meanings, memories and history.

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In 2006 Marilyn Lake wrote that ‘the archive is one important site of public memory. Landscape is another.’ Just as geographer Paul Carter looked to different styles of language to reveal the Romantisation and legitimisation of colonial society, this article looks to early Australian art and literature as discourses which construct landscape, truth and reality. Although Carter’s esteemed *The Road to Botany Bay* was first published in 1987, the importance of place continues to form a focus for Australian academics who question Aus-

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8 Ibid., 279–280.
tralia’s pre-colonial and colonial past, and contemporary white-Indigenous relations. In 1998 Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs utilised Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’ to reveal how the emergence of a new and politically powerful form of ‘postcolonial racism’ was related to the growing ‘entanglements’ of white and Indigenous space in an Australia in which the boundaries placed upon Indigenous bodies (through symbolic imprisonment and Social Darwinism) were being destabilised.¹¹

A decade later, Jacobs reflected on this period, identifying the concurrent existence of ‘Sorry people’; white Australians who called for an apology to the Stolen Generations. Invoking Judith Butler’s notion of melancholia, Jacobs demonstrated that this contrition of a large section of Australia’s white population meant that Indigenous peoples were ‘relationally empowered’ through their ability to end white suffering by providing forgiveness.¹² At the same time, Indigenous writer and academic Tony Birch identified colonial mining towns-turned-tourist sites as tangible evidence in the continuity of white Australian narratives of emptiness prior to colonisation, revealing social tensions and cultural barriers which continue to impede Australia’s on-going process of reconciliation, exposing the continuing process of the mythologisation of Australia’s colonial past and its impact on constructing a white landscape, and demonstrating the continued need for work which historicises such mythologies in order to un-make them as accepted knowledge, to destabilise contemporary Australian society, and to call for a more inclusive Australian landscape.¹³

As current research into the interaction of white and Indigenous knowledge systems and forms of history proceeds at the Australian National University under Dr Martin Thomas, this article heeds Birch’s demonstration of the need for further research, concurrently examining both white and Indigenous discourses around ‘Australia’, thereby revealing not just the ways in which the white Australian landscape has become dominant, but also the reasons for its continued dominance in the wake of abundant research and calls for inclusion.

This abundance also encompasses numerous fields of academic enquiry. With


the publication of historian Henry Reynolds’ *The Other Side of the Frontier* in 1981 the historiographical understanding of colonisation shifted to include the historical and contemporary possibility of Indigenous agency and resistance in the process of colonisation.\textsuperscript{14} Although Reynolds’ text came under criticism at the time for its lenient approach to oral history as evidence and later in 2009 as the catalyst for the ‘History Wars’ by ‘making people ashamed of the past’, *The Other Side of the Frontier* was followed into the 1990s and 2000s by similar inquiries from anthropologists such as Deborah Bird Rose and Denis Byrne.\textsuperscript{15} Taking the Indigenous connection to land and its conflict with western knowledge systems as a focus, Rose’s work has continually advocated for a shift in the perception of an ‘Aboriginality’ which can ‘only be lost, not recovered.’\textsuperscript{16} In a similar approach, Byrne has shown how the ‘discovery’ of Indigenous cultural artefacts, as well as the creation of a national identity linked to the ‘white Aussie bushman’ has translated traditional Indigenous artefacts into the white landscape, allowing for their appropriation into that landscape, and strengthening the connection of white Australia to the land, solidifying their identity as ‘original Australians’.\textsuperscript{17}

As a synthetic piece, this article builds on the research which has preceded it, incorporating an emotional element in the form of a response to the trauma of colonisation, and interpreting the Australian (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) landscape both temporally and spatially to explore the interaction between this trauma and the construction of contemporary reality. Heeding Rose’s warning that studies of Indigenous pasts can become a form of ‘death work’ in their implicit assumption of a lack of potential future and of

\textsuperscript{14} Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1982).


a contemporary ‘inauthenticity’ of surviving Indigenous culture, this article argues for a future Australian landscape constructed through a process of reconciliation built on the recognition of ‘authentic’ Indigenous and non-Indigenous responses to colonisation and contemporary cultural expression.

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Appropriating a definition derived from ‘clinical and theoretical work’, Bain Attwood explains that trauma ‘is an extraordinary event that cannot be experienced or assimilated fully at the time of its occurrence. It lies outside people’s capacity to make cognitive and emotional sense of an event.’

Invoking the results of the 2001 Violence in Indigenous Communities report, Hannah McGlade used this definition to reveal colonisation as traumatic. She goes on to say that ‘Colonisation...involved forms of systemic power and control of Aboriginal people, involving overt physical violence, covert structural violence and psycho-social domination’ and that the on-going effects of such methods of violence and domination have created an inter-generational response to this trauma which has become more acute over time.

As Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton have suggested, ‘memories link us to place, to time and to nation...they enable us to inhabit our own country’. The collective memory of colonisation – that contained within the landscape – reveals a direct response to this great historical trauma. For white Australians, W.E.H. Stanner’s ‘Great Silence’ is symptomatic of remembering the past in a way that enables this linking to nation. For Indigenous Australians, the impossibility of escaping such memories, of forever being ‘manifestations of Australia’s living hell’, has resulted in their complete dispossession from their land.

In order to escape the trauma of colonisation, white Australia has removed

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20 Ibid., 36–37.


from its popular discourses, mythologies and histories – and therefore from its constructed Australian landscape – the ‘living reminders of colonisation.’

Geographers and urban historians such as Denis Cosgrove and Dolores Hayden have previously revealed landscape as both a dynamic creator and communicator of knowledge and cultural relations, and an important actor in the creation and preservation of social memory. Drawing from their conclusions, this article employs a Foucauldian analysis to demonstrate how discourse, power and knowledge interact within place to constitute a particular rendering of the Australian landscape that has material affect. Referring to Judith Butler’s classification of discourse as the ‘limits of acceptable speech’, this article shows that this constructed Australian landscape is revealed visually and verbally through representations of the past and present. Such representations are signs and symbols which, taking the place of the thing for which they stand, allow a people to organise, recognise and understand their world. Such symbols are present in early colonial art, literature and the physical remnants of the colonial era as the discourses which surround the dominant (white) Australian landscape. Underpinning the discourses of the Indigenous landscape, such symbols are similarly revealed in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial art and oral histories.

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When the European colonisers first arrived in Australia, they encountered a land which, to them,

Was characterised by a succession of absences. Not only were there so few people, but also there was no history, no cultural context within which the land could be understood, no basis for interaction with it except in terms of hostility and brute conquest. For them the land was without form, and void: *it could not be imagined*.

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24 Ibid., 227.
In order to render the Australian landscape imaginable, the Europeans began a process of recreating it through art, literature and the dissemination of such imaginings through mass media. From white Australia’s original Romantic imaginings of the land characterised by the inviting postcard-style landscapes painted by Eugene von Guerard and described by early-settler poets, to the solidification of rural mythology in the art of the Heidelberg School and the work of Andrew Barton “Banjo” Paterson and Henry Lawson, the Australian landscape has been reconstituted, not only in accordance with a European sensibility, but also as a white masculine space. This space exists into the present in the form of colonial towns and historic sites, giving tangibility and thus credibility to these foundation myths. Writing and drawing Indigenous Australians out of the landscape and history, it is this colonial landscape which is the foundation for today’s Australia.

One of Australia’s earliest and most celebrated artists, Austrian-born Eugene von Guerard (who worked in Australia from the 1850s to the 1880s) was one of the first artists to focus on the bush, simultaneously turning it into a dominant theme of Australian art and making it comprehensible to a European imagination. Von Guerard – along with his contemporaries Nicholas Chevalier and Louis Buvelot – painted the Australian landscape as vast, minimally inhabited and often picturesque. Their landscapes also invoked Burke’s notion of the sublime, inspiring at once ‘terror and awe’ at the vastness of the land. Blending Romanticism, the picturesque and the sublime, von Guerard’s paintings, such as his Bushy Park and Mr Lewin’s hut on the Barwon River, epitomise the early colonial Australian landscape. Reinforcing mythologies of terra nullius, these images created an inviting, idyllic and European landscape; their rolling hills and green fields reminiscent of the English countryside, the Noble Savages peaceful and non-violent, the land itself open and seemingly free from danger.

These myths and images were echoed in poems published at the time. The *Aborigines Complaint* (1844) reinforces the image of the Noble Savage as non-threatening, as slowly being destroyed by Progress and the superiority of European civilisation. Such images of Indigenous people naturally ‘dying out’ were a product of a belief in the tenets of Social Darwinism. Believing that Indigenous people ‘were not only naturally inferior...[but] also serially prior’, the nineteenth century racist classification of Indigenous peoples thus suggested that ‘Aboriginality could be lost, but not added to’.

Focussing purely on the Australian landscape, Australie’s (Emily Matilda Manning) 1877 *From the Clyde to Braidwood* depicts the mythologisation of the Australian landscape as echoing the British countryside, exploring a land with ‘Naught on the road to see/Save sullen trees’ and ‘A township like/All others, with its houses, church, and school’.

The widespread impact of these discourses in reinforcing the mythology of *terra nullius*, of painting and writing Indigenous people out of the landscape, and of creating a new Australian landscape with ties to the English motherland, was aided by the advent of illustrated newspapers. Increasing in popularity in the 1860s and 1870s – along with publications such as Andrew Murray’s *Bears Circular and Rural Economist* (1862-1875) and later *The Bulletin* magazine (1880-2008) – illustrated newspapers allowed for a mass distribution of rural imagery and mythology. With these publications promoting a particular image of the Australian bush such as that found in the photography of Nicholas Caire (illustrated newspapers), the poetic lines of Lawson and Paterson (*The Bulletin*), and the distribution of descriptions which characterise sheep as ‘the only tenants of this vast territory’ (*The Economist*, 1860), the colonial landscape created by early colonial artists and poets was recreated for and distributed to Australia’s growing urban population.

For Benedict Anderson, such a distribution is important in the formation

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of a national consciousness. Distinguishing between those who travel and those who do not, he claims that those who travel form a national consciousness from tangible experience, whereas those who do not form a national consciousness through their interaction with print media. Thus, for Australia’s burgeoning urban population, the dissemination of these ‘societal concerns and popular myths’ through the verbal and visual discourses encased in these publications created a national consciousness which was tied to the bush despite the reality of population distribution. That these discourses were reinforced, reimagined and reconstituted a decade later through the art of the Heidelberg School and contemporaneous literature simply made them more powerful, creating a national identity which was linked to a perceived and believed version of the nation’s colonial history as being non-violent and largely devoid of an Indigenous presence.

The artists of the Heidelberg School – prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – have been characterised as the ‘discoverers’ of the true Australian landscape. Placing them neatly within Furniss’ framework of privileged discourses of discoverers and firsts, this characterisation has enabled these artists and their works to solidify the Australian landscape created by the early colonialists. Fortified by contemporaneous literature, this solidification of the landscape as the sphere of the white colonialists has managed to remove the trauma of colonisation from white Australia’s collective memory, confirming the conclusion that landscape is formed as much from the earth as it is from the minds and memories of those who inhabit it.

At the heart of Australian bush imagery and literature is the white male journeying bushman. Although he is sometimes shown with others, the bushman is most at ease when he is solitary, and solitary he most certainly is. A noticeable characteristic of the work of the Heidelberg School is the complete

39 Astbury, City Bushmen: The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology, 1.
lack of an Indigenous presence in the landscape. The Heidelberg School ended the work begun by the colonial artists; the removal of the Indigenous people from the imagined and represented Australian landscape. These images supplanted the earlier works as the colonists’ hold over the Australian landscape became ‘nervous’; a process Byrne describes as stemming from the ‘question of how close people are allowed to get to each other’. In the case of Australia, this meant the rejection of memories and evidence of colonial violence and the physical and symbolic imprisoning of Indigenous peoples as white settlers became conscious of Indigenous existence and thus proximity. By removing this presence from the imagined Australian landscape, the Heidelberg School made this proximity figuratively impossible, asserting the dominance, primacy and solitariness of the white landscape and further denying Indigenous existence and obstructing overt resistance.

The Heidelberg School was not, however, immune to the anxiety inherently associated with the Australian bush. Although the anxiety and violence associated with the Indigenous presence had been removed, the fear of madness and death remained very real to the white consciousness. The work of Frederick McCubbin depicts this anxiety. Echoing von Guérard’s sublime landscapes, McCubbin’s 1911 *Violet and Gold* depicts a simultaneously beautiful and threatening Australian bush scene. Although at first glance the scene is calm and unthreatening, the depth of McCubbin’s painting draws the viewer into a dense and all-encompassing bushland. There is little or no sky to be seen, the pool in the foreground reflects the surrounding trees, imprisoning the viewer on all sides by ghostly gum trees. This is a disorienting work which accentuates the fickleness of the Australian bush.

Many of McCubbin’s other works are also preoccupied with the inherent dangers of the bush such as his 1907 *Lost* and 1890 *A Bush Burial*. These images emphasise the vulnerability of those who called the bush home. The dangers of the bush were also present in early-settler poetry with Paterson’s *Waltzing Matilda* and Lawson’s *Andy’s Gone With Cattle Now* depicting, respectively, the suicide of a thieving swagman, and a family suffering from overwork, illness and

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41 Astbury, *City Bushmen: The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*; Hoorn, ‘Pastoral Beginnings: Advertising the Land.’
43 Byrne, ‘Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia’.
threats from squatters in the absence of their only young, virile male defender.45

These discourses which characterised the bush as dangerous were important in the creation of colonial and rural mythology and thus the Australian landscape. Such images of the bush as overbearing and intimidating are juxtaposed with images of the land being moulded and tamed by the hands of the white settlers to make it suitable for a civilised existence, often through the use of brute force.46 Tom Roberts’ 1886 Wood Splitters provides such an example. There is a battle going on, there are weapons present, but the enemy cannot fight back. More than that, the enemy is being re-created into an ally, one which will allow for farming, for cattle grazing, for the sustenance of white colonial life.

Reinforcing these images was Australian literature which – similarly devoid of an Indigenous presence – explored the dichotomy of the bush as both beautiful and harsh. Paterson’s In Defence of the Bush counters the fictitious (and silent) townsman’s objections to the ‘dismal…land of no delight’ by pointing to idyllic images of the Australian bush, reinforcing both the myths of terra nullius and a yielding Australian bushland.47 Such imagery was commonplace in Paterson’s work with his 1933 Australian Scenery describing a land ‘Where Nature pampers or Nature slays’.48

These works responded to the trauma of colonisation by eradicating it from the national consciousness and replacing it with another easily conquerable and far less violent conflict; that of the white settler against the new and imposing landscape. Such images also came at a time when a national consciousness and identity were maturing. Byrne has identified the emergence at this time of a ‘sturdy, bush-wise, independent, and male’ Australian ‘type’ from a near-seventy percent Australian-born population.49 Bernard Smith had previously linked this national consciousness to an expression of artistic ability through the uniqueness of being able to ‘see’ the Australian bush: ‘To paint Australia you had to be Australian...Unless you were born with

46 Astbury, City Bushmen: The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology, 100–129.
49 Byrne, ‘Deep Nation: Australia’s Acquisition of an Indigenous Past’, 94.
'Australian' eyes you could not hope to 'see' the Australian landscape'.

Given that the objective purpose of these early-settler works of art and literature was to create and solidify this national mythology and national consciousness the image of taming the landscape is important. These visual and verbal discourses – begun by early colonial artists and poets, distributed by media publications and solidified by the Heidelberg School and contemporaneous literature – came to construct the image of the bush-situated journeyman as archetypal (and original) Australian. They recreated a white colonial landscape which was devoid of life prior to European (characterised as human) settlement. They created a harsh but yielding Australian landscape and populated it with Aussie Bushmen. They laid the foundations for contemporary Australia.

These discourses have continued their influence because the landscape which both encases and is encased by them remains. Using examples of colonial towns turned into tourist-inducing historic sites, Birch has painted a picture which leaves the impression 'of a [white] history that reflects the anxiety over Australia’s colonial past rather than certainty.' Yet he also shows how the tangible existence of these sites, coupled with their own self-creating and self-perpetuating ‘evidence’, creates a sense of objective truth and credibility. The use of a Courthouse-turned-Museum at Stieglitz in the Brisbane Ranges, Victoria as the starting point for the town’s tour locates the site’s mythologies within a credible body of evidence, despite a clear lack of substantive evidence for the narratives presented within both the museum itself and the archive. Just as with the art, literature and publications of Australia’s early colonial and settler periods, the histories espoused and perpetuated by these sites systematically remove Indigenous people from and bind white Australians to the Australian landscape. Giving dimensions to this popular history of Australia, these discourses and the landscape they have created gives solidity, permanence and integrity to the idea that white Australians can unselfconsciously exist as the land’s original discoverers and inhabitants.

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50 Bernard Smith, 1975, quoted in: Ibid., 95.
51 Rowley, ‘Imagination, Madness and Nation in Australian Bush Mythology’.
Despite the discourses of primacy revealed in the representations analysed above, it is established that Indigenous people and culture were present in Australia long before 1788, and that Indigenous people have suffered physically, psychologically, and emotionally since colonisation. Despite this, Indigenous communities throughout Australia have retained and adapted aspects of their traditions, languages and knowledge making them, collectively, the ‘oldest surviving continuous culture in the world.’ A culture which, just like the white Australian culture outlined above, utilises the Australian landscape as an archive of collective memory.

The relationship of Indigenous people to the land can be understood through the Dreaming which, most simply, describes ‘the relations and balance between the spiritual, natural and moral elements of the world.’ Bill Gammage has shown how these relationships ultimately allow ‘place [to] dominate time, and translate well understood ecological associations into social relations.’ In so doing, Gammage also shows how Indigenous culture, religion, and history were shaped by, and in turn shaped, the Australian landscape prior to colonisation. Indigenous and white Australians have shaped their history from their landscape, and have shaped their landscape from their history. Yet the unintelligibility of Indigenous history to a western sensibility has exacerbated and aided the removal of the Indigenous landscape from contemporary Australia.

In this section, a variety of Indigenous verbal and visual discourses have been selected in order to show both how Indigenous literacy and historical culture can and does differ from a white Australian culture contingent on a western philosophical heritage, and how such differences create barriers of understanding and seeing which contribute to the marginalisation of the Indigenous landscape and so people. By selecting some examples of Ind-
digenerative discourses which existed prior to colonisation, some which are
direct response to colonisation, and some which have and have not been
appropriated (consciously or unconsciously) by the dominant white land-
scape, this section also seeks to demonstrate how, despite Indigenous dis-
courses being similarly active and constructive forces in the creation of
landscape, Australia continues to be dominated by the white landscape.

Teaching people how to be a part of their land, linking the past to the pres-
ent through landscape, and emphasising the importance of place to culture,
Dreamtime stories have enabled the oral transmission of knowledge from one
generation to the next, enabling the continuation of culture even in the wake
of the trauma of colonisation. Photographer, writer and documentary film-
maker Liz Thompson has worked with a number of Indigenous communities
throughout Australia to document and record these traditional oral histories.
Two of these are *The Sunbird* from the Warburton community in Western Aus-
tralia – a story about an old magic man punished for his greed, deceit and theft
by being burned alive until he turned into a sunbird – and *Turtle Dreaming*
from the Maningrida community in the Northern Territory – about a man who
was hit by a lightning bolt in a storm, becoming a green turtle and being given
a song from the ancestors of the Dreamtime which told of the names of fish,
of Dreaming totems and moieties and of the law.\(^{59}\) These stories teach chil-
dren about boundaries, about the ‘jigsaw pieces’ which make up their land-
scape, and about ‘skin groups [which] is like the circle of life, it’s everything:
culture, business, ceremony…it tells [them] what [they’re] responsible for’.\(^{60}\)

Although these stories have been recorded with enthusiasm from these
communities, the transcription of these ancient oral Dreamtime histo-
rories into a static and unchangeable form such as a published book – and
one produced in English – in a post-colonial Australia raises concerns. Al-
though the translation and transcription of these stories encourages and
enables non-Indigenous understanding to some extent, this act, as Chris
Healy has noted, of the translation of Indigenous history ‘into the idi-
om, structures and narratives of European historiography reinforces the

\(^{59}\) Warburton Aboriginal Community and Liz Thompson, *The Sunbird: A Story from
Warburton Community* (Port Melbourne, Victoria: Pearson Australia, 2010); Ndjebbana people
and Liz Thompson, *Turtle Dreaming: A Story from Maningrida Community* (Port Melbourne,
Victoria: Pearson Australia, 2010).

\(^{60}\) Warburton Aboriginal Community and Thompson, *The Sunbird: A Story from War-
burton Community*, 20–21; Ndjebbana people and Thompson, *Turtle Dreaming: A Story from
Maningrida Community*, 21.
right of both English and western ideologies to exist unselfconsciously’.\textsuperscript{61}

Healy, Rose, and Jeremy Beckett have all drawn attention to this translation and the issues it raises in their separate analyses of Indigenous oral histories which tell of Captain Cook.\textsuperscript{62} Taking Captain Cook stories such as those which come from Western Australia (Healy) – where Captain Cook never actually landed – which are repetitive in nature (Rose), and which subversively undermine the quaintness of colonial art and poetry by demonstrating the lack of power, agency, or respect granted to the Indigenous voice (Beckett), these stories reveal ‘Captain Cook’ as a powerful symbol of colonial trauma. As the one who ‘came from big England and come through down to Sydney Harbour’, Captain Cook is represented in Indigenous histories as the historical person of Captain Cook.\textsuperscript{63} As the – singularly – one who ‘started, and shooting from Sydney right up, right up to Darwin Harbour, all over Australia, see?’ Captain Cook stands as a symbol for the process of colonisation and, in his (and others’) restraint of Indigenous voices and bodies, these discourses reveal an Indigenous response to the processes of landscape building and domination by the colonists and settlers explored above.\textsuperscript{64} Responses to this process are also revealed in the manner of telling; in these stories’ repetitive nature, which Rose has identified as revealing the repetitive experiences of violence and marginalisation endured by Indigenous people through and since colonisation.\textsuperscript{65}

In white responses to these histories, Healy has shown how they have been relegated to the status of ‘myth’ because they do not conform to a European-historical sensibility which is ‘quantitative, populist, universalist, and materialist.’\textsuperscript{66} Healy’s conclusions suggest that they cannot become part of white colonial memory and, therefore, cannot be absorbed into the dominant white landscape of contemporary Australia. That they explore sub-

\textsuperscript{61} Chris Healy, “‘We Know Your Mob Now’: Histories and Their Cultures’, Meanjin 49, no. 3 (1990): 514.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{65} Rose, ‘Chapter 2: Captain Cook’; Rose, ‘The Captain and His Book in the Victoria River Country’.
\textsuperscript{66} Healy, “‘We Know Your Mob Now’: Histories and Their Cultures’, 510.
jects, events and people prominent in both white and Indigenous memory – Captain Cook, colonisation, and Indigenous-settler interactions amidst the Australian landscape – has both drawn them into the realm of Australia’s colonial landscape and been grounds for their exclusion since they do not agree in terms of time or place with colonial written histories.67

Such processes of exclusion or marginalisation are not limited to oral histories. Indigenous recordings, and transmissions of memory have traditionally been rejected or unnoticed by white Australia because they do not conform to a western sensibility of what constitutes ‘literacy’. Penny Van Toorn has drawn attention to the fact that the practices of different Indigenous communities of marking trees, reading animal tracks, utilising ‘logograms written into the air’ and marking and scarring the body can collectively be viewed as a different type of literacy culture.68 This understanding of marking and scarring the body as communicating a personal history has also been explored briefly by Gavin Souter.69

Using both landscape and the body in landscape as a canvas for history – personal and collective – also has an important place in traditional Indigenous art. Body, rock and bark paintings depicting the landscape or Australian animals have been traditional practices of many Indigenous communities to convey and represent Dreamtime stories.70 As with the oral histories examined above, artworks are given to artists through generational connections; the stories and methods of depicting the Dreaming belong to certain communities and people and it is only these people who have the right to create these artworks.71 Utilising particular motifs and symbols – which, like all representations and signifiers, are largely unintelligible to those unfamiliar with them – Indigenous art functions in much the same way as oral history, conveying history, laws and animal and land forms and functions which are a product of the Dreamtime, and enabling people to construct and understand the land in which they live.

In the 1970s, the dominant medium for such works changed from rock faces and human bodies to canvas when, at the encouragement of teacher Geoffrey Bardon, the Papunya Tula company began creating Indigenous artworks for a national, and later international, art market.\(^\text{72}\) However, unlike the conversion of oral to written history, the link between Indigenous artwork and its traditional forms remain. As representations of the landscape which are static in form, the canvas becomes less important than the representation itself. As Indigenous landscape artist Wenten Rubuntja has said:

> Doesn’t matter what sort of painting we do in this country, it still belongs to the people, all the people. This is worship, work, culture. It’s all Dreaming. There are two ways of painting. Both ways are important, because that’s culture.\(^\text{73}\)

Despite criticism from some regarding ‘authenticity’, Indigenous art and artists have garnered much national and international respect.\(^\text{74}\) Contemporary Indigenous art has also been subject to criticisms of ‘inauthenticity’ as artists begin to either move away from traditional symbols, methods, and materials, or to use them in new ways.

As art, historical record, and map, Djon Mundine and others’ *Aboriginal Memorial* is a tangible and readily visible representation of the Indigenous landscape.\(^\text{75}\) Designed and built to coincide with Australia’s bicentenary celebration, the *Aboriginal Memorial* asserted the right of an Indigenous reply to the largely uncritical celebrations of Australia’s bicentenary. As each hollow log coffin acts as a memorial to those who died, as a physical marker on the map of mob distribution, and as a record of the land and its inhabitants as it was before colonisation, the piece reasserts the existence of an Indigenous landscape and people which existed prior to colonisation and which persist into the bicentenary and beyond.

For both Trevor Nickolls and Gordon Syron, painting which incorporates el-


ements and colours from both western and Indigenous heritages provides a means by which to offer a subversive critique of contemporary Australian society, and to respond to the persistent effects of colonial trauma. Nickolls’ *Death in Custody* – which depicts a caged Indigenous man – and Syron’s *Judgement by His Peers* – which depicts a single white defendant standing trial against an all-Indigenous jury, lawyer, and judge – are both powerful critiques of the treatment of black bodies amidst a dominant white landscape. Although these works are not ‘traditional’, they are examples of a contemporary Indigenous artistic culture which combines traditional understandings of the link between body, landscape, and painting, and which – through their appropriation of some western techniques – protect themselves against appropriation into the dominant white landscape. In so doing, they reveal the existence of an Indigenous landscape which persists amidst Australia, and which challenges the right of the white landscape to unselfconsciously exist as dominant.

As these artworks show, attempts to re-establish the Indigenous landscape both within and alongside the Australian landscape left by the colonial era continue. Another contemporary attempt is Ricky Maynard’s and Tony Birch’s 2000 *Reversing the Negatives*. Focussing on Victoria, *Reversing the Negatives* combines photography (Maynard) and text (Birch) to create a new visual and verbal discourse through which to discuss and imagine ‘Aboriginality’ and Australia. Re-inserting Indigenous people into the landscape, amidst the city which ‘lays across [their land]. Its towers [stretching] for the sky’, it shows that their ‘country is still here’. By re-imagining the city – built on the foundations of the colonial landscape – as being home to both white and Indigenous Australians (and their memories of the past), Maynard and Birch create a new contemporary Australian landscape, one which has the potential to be truly inclusive and to reform the current terrain. The unearthing of the Indigenous landscape which existed prior to colonisation and which continues to exist amongst the Australian landscape today is vital to recognising Indigenous history and contemporary experience in Australia and, therefore, to restructuring the fundamentally unequal relations of Australian society.

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78 Ibid., 45.
Navigating through verbal and visual discourses of the Australian landscape, examining newspapers, literature, artworks, tangible historic sites, and museums, this article has shown how white Australia’s dominance over the Australian landscape has enabled the creation of a hegemonic structure which is, at first glance, historically contingent and so justified. Responding to academic and non-academic research and calls for Indigenous inclusion as the beginning of reconciliation, and taking colonisation as a traumatic process, this article has also demonstrated how white Australia controls the Australian landscape and its past and does so unchallenged. At the same time, this article has attempted to demonstrate why the fundamentally unequal relations of contemporary Australian society persist in the wake of such calls for inclusion. Displaying the issue in terms of entangled and overlapping landscapes with both tangible and imagined elements, this article opens the possibility of further productive research and intervention in the field of white-Indigenous relations and of destabilising these fundamentally unequal relations. Perhaps a reconsideration of Australia’s Multicultural Policy would be a place to start.