Becoming Mixed: Intercultural Engagement with Japan in Contemporary Australian Literature, Cinema, and Theatre

Timothy Kazuo Steains

Department of Gender and Cultural Studies
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
The University of Sydney

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Authorship Statement

This thesis contains material previously published by myself. The details are as follows:

- Chapter two of this thesis is published as: Steains, Timothy Kazuo. 2016. ‘Going with the Transnational Flow in Bondi Tsunami’. *Continuum* 30 (4): 466-76.
  I designed the study, analysed the material and wrote the drafts of the manuscript.

  I designed the study, analysed the material and wrote the drafts of the manuscript.

- Chapter eight of this thesis will be published in *The Journal of Australian Studies* in 2017 as ‘The Mixed Temporalities of Transnationalism in Dreams of Speaking’.
  I designed the study, analysed the material and wrote the drafts of the manuscript.
Declaration

I declare that the substance of this thesis has not been submitted already for any degree, nor is it currently being submitted for another degree.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis has been acknowledged.

I certify to the best of my knowledge that all sources of reference and their authors, wherever known, have been acknowledged in this body of work.

Timothy Kazuo Steains

22 December, 2016
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional owners of the land on which much of the study for this thesis took place. I pay my respects to their elders past, present, and future.

I’d like to offer heartfelt thanks and gratitude to my thesis supervisor Dr Jane Park. You saw promise in my work and encouraged me to grow intellectually and as a person. Thank you for the gift of a renewed relationship to writing and self-expression. Thanks also for being a companion devotee of Star Trek: The Next Generation. Thank you to my associate supervisor Dr Brigid Rooney whose very generous and sensitive feedback on my work has been an invaluable source of guidance and encouragement.

Thank you to the staff at the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies. It’s difficult to describe just how personally meaningful and valuable studying in this department has been. The generosity and wisdom of many in Gender and Cultural Studies encouraged in me confidence, joy, and a deep love of learning. Thank you to all my friends and fellow students in this department – of which there are too many to name! I cherish each of you and you have been the biggest part of what has made this journey unforgettable. Thank you for the laughs, the support, and the whiskey (Alifa and Paul(s)). I wish you every success in your futures. Thank you also to my friends in English for the zany conversations and the special bond that we share.

I acknowledge the Nikkei Australia group who graciously invited me in and whose dedication to highlighting Japanese Australian histories and experiences brings me great pride and inspiration.

Thank you to my close friend Mario for your honesty, love, and passionate presence over the years. I’m always provoked and rejuvenated by our conversations.

Thank you to the inimitable women who have been in my life during the process of writing this PhD. Sami, you are a ray of sunshine, thank you for the incredible happiness you brought into my life. Felicia, you show me again and again what it means to give and to love – I’m truly grateful for everything we share. Artemisia, you have been my teacher and
greatest inspiration, I hope we discover many moments of joy and insight together in the years to come.

To my parents Satsuki and Chris who ignited in me a desire to find truth and my own potential. Your decision to bring me up in a culturally mixed environment brings me benefits every day of my life. Thank you for the many meals, the quality time shared, and your incessant support over the course of my university education.

Finally, thank you to my sister Sophie. You are the reason I strive to be better. Your example is a gift that always gives. I love you very much.
Abstract

This thesis examines intercultural engagement between Australians and Japanese in a total of nine examples of contemporary Australian literature, cinema, and theatre. Given the recent political rhetoric surrounding Australia’s role in the ‘Asian century’ and its need to ‘engage’ Asia, this study considers how intercultural exchanges might lead to productive forms of cultural mixture in Australia. I use mixed racial and cultural experiences – such as my own – as a framework to think about the benefits of mixed cultural identification. I argue that cross-cultural engagement can lead individuals and societies to possessing multiple forms of cultural, national, and even racial identification. Individual moments of ‘becoming mixed’ offer ways of thinking about transnational formations of Australian cultural life and identity. This exploration takes up Ghassan Hage’s call to consider the potential of intercultural relations, given the many failures of Australian multiculturalism. In addition, by taking own mixed race position into account, this project examines the limitations of the restrictive ‘identity politics’ of many postcolonial or critical race approaches to ethnic and racial identity. I employ Kuan-Hsing Chen’s notion of ‘becoming others’ and place it in conversation with Deleuzian becoming and a version of the subject that draws on Freudian melancholia. Becoming others, or becoming mixed, allows us to consider the new possibilities of cross-cultural identifications that are not bound by rigid ethnic, racial, or national identities. The first section of this thesis examines three road movies centring on interracial desire – Sue Brooks’s *Japanese Story* (2003), Rachel Lucas’s *Bondi Tsunami* (2004), and Clara Law’s *The Goddess of 1967* (2000). The second section analyses three theatre-themed texts (one novel and two plays) that explore ghostly possession and the embodiment of difference through performance – Paddy O’Reilly’s *The Factory* (2005), Allan Marett’s *Oppenheimer Noh* (2015), and Mayu Kanamori’s *Yasukichi Murakami: Through a Different Lens* (2014). The final section examines three novels that centre on wartime reconciliation – Richard Flanagan’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013), Gail Jones’s *Dreams of Speaking* (2006), and Christine Piper’s *After Darkness* (2014).
## Table of Contents

**Authorship Statement** ................................................................. ii
**Declaration** ........................................................................ iii
**Acknowledgements** ............................................................... iv
**Abstract** ............................................................................. vi

**Preface** ................................................................................... viii
**Introduction** ......................................................................... 1

**Section I: Road Movies, Romance and Relations with Others** ................................................. 40
  1. Mourning, Melancholia, and Grief Eating in Japanese Story ................................................... 44
  2. Surfing the Waves of Transnational Flow in Bondi Tsunami ................................................... 59
  3. The Road to Intercultural Engagement, and The Goddess of 1967 ......................................... 77

**Section II: Embodying Difference and Ghostly Possession** .................................................. 97
  4. Possessing Difference in The Factory ..................................................................................... 101
  5. Ghostly Becomings in Oppenheimer Noh .............................................................................. 119

**Section III: War and Reconciliation** ................................................................................. 154
  7. Sadomasochism and becoming woman in the Narrow Road to the Deep North ....... 157
  8. Mixed Temporalities and Identities in Dreams of Speaking ..................................................... 183

**Conclusion** ............................................................................... 226

**Bibliography** ........................................................................... 236
In 2011 my sister, mother, and I went on a two month holiday to Japan together. We travelled to Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Yakushima, Beppu, and finally to my mother’s home prefecture of Okinawa. My white Australian father toiled away at work back in Australia while the three of us bonded in the space of Japan – although he was in Tokyo briefly at the end of our trip. One of the richest memories I have of that trip was our stay in Osaka; my mother had organised for us to stay at a cheap hotel in the suburb of Sakuranomiya. Unbeknownst to us, this suburb was famous not only for its Sakura park (which we couldn’t enjoy as we visited in the off-season) but also for its many and varied love hotels. We hadn’t accidentally stayed in a love hotel – if that’s what you were thinking – but, as my sister and I discovered, the night life in this tiny suburb of Sakuranomiya had an unexpectedly friendly vibe. We walked into a whiskey bar that could seat about 7 people: a couple making out at the bar shuffled out soon after we entered, and we talked a great deal, in our intermediate Japanese, with the barman about whiskeys from around the world and his former life as an air traffic controller. We moved onto a darts bar where the rowdy staff were celebrating a regular customer’s birthday. They let us join in their celebrations, and when we were hungry they took us to a restaurant that their friend ‘Hoso-me’ (squinty eyes) worked at. After that, ‘Hoso-me’ recommended we visit another bar down the road. On the next day we persuaded everyone to come to this last bar after their shifts and we talked and drank together into the night.

I feel that this stay in Sakuranomiya gave my sister and me a feeling of welcoming that we, as mixed race Japanese Australians, often desired from our mother’s home country. Rather than the cold, xenophobic exterior that we expected from Japan, Sakuranomiya offered a space in which we could feel – at least momentarily – part of Japan, and to some extent Japanese.¹ That is how I felt at the time, in any case. I always remember introducing ourselves to the staff at the darts bar. At first, they clearly saw us as foreign oddities: there was much made of their inability to say my name ‘Timothy’ for instance. But when I told them that my middle name was ‘Kazuo’ they roared with laughter. It’s an extremely old, traditional name that they associated with samurai times. Despite the comical nature of my middle name, the difference in their attitudes towards us changed noticeably when they

¹ The entirely separate problems of being Okinawan in Japan is something that I will not address in this particular anecdote. This aspect of my Japanese identity does give rise to several more complexities in my identification with Japan.
started calling me ‘Kazuo’ and my sister ‘Yoko’ (which is her middle name). There was a level of familiarity and intimacy created by their adoption of our Japanese names, and it was also noticeable to me how my own Japanese persona or identity went through a process of ‘becoming’ throughout the night.

This was not a process without its glitches. In returning briefly to my hotel room I asked the reception staff for the key that my mother had left at the front desk so that I could enter if I needed. I was a bit tipsy and had used an archaic expression for mother – ‘haha-ue’ – that I had learnt from my mother’s samurai drama shows. The staff must have thought me extremely peculiar – although, as my darts bar friends pointed out, this was a very ‘Kazuo’ thing to say. At another time I explained to my new friends that I usually dated older women, but, much to their surprise, instead of using the word ‘toshie-ue’ – meaning older – I used the word ‘toshi-ori’ – thus claiming that I liked to date elderly women.

Despite these slippages in performance, I am surprised by how being in this space of association and communication with Japanese people had brought out of me a latent Japanese identity. As a child, I attended Konomi-Kindergarten, a Japanese/Australian kindergarten in Sydney, and the Sydney Japanese School, an International School for primary school children set up by the Japanese government. But the high school I attended was a predominantly white school outside of Sydney, and there I supressed and forgot much of the Japanese identity I had grown up with. Spending time with Japanese people often conjures up this forgotten identity – although, as I mentioned, this conjuring process does not come without its hiccups.

I share this anecdote because this process of negotiating different cultural personas lies at the heart of the intellectual inquiry of this PhD thesis. In Sakuranomiya, my middle name offered a middle or third space between Japan and Australia – a space in which I was often consciously or unconsciously switching between Australian and Japanese personas in order to make myself intelligible and relatable. I had to ‘become’ Japanese and at other times become Australian, and perhaps this also gave rise to ‘becoming mixed’. In this thesis, I explore how the culturally mixed position of people like myself might inform our understanding of intercultural engagement. I am interested in how individuals become others, or become culturally mixed, through engagements with cultural difference.
While it is easy to frame intercultural engagement in the adversarial dichotomies of self/other or East/West, I investigate how those boundaries are crossed in intercultural communication and how culturally mixed identifications might eventuate. The divisions between Australia and Japan – and thus between my own Japanese and Australian culture – are repeatedly demarcated by not only Australian and Japanese people I meet in my daily life, but also by my family and even myself.

My parents practice a Japanese form of Buddhism transplanted into the Australian context. There was much talk in my upbringing about having to change the Japanese cultural practices for ones that Australians would find more palatable. Japanese structures were more focussed on authority, where Australian ones were more egalitarian and democratic. These are in many ways facetious stereotypes, and yet the realities of cultural difference cannot be ignored. Between my intercultural schooling and my parents’ religious beliefs, my upbringing was one in which I was made highly self-aware of my *hafu* Japanese identity. But what frustrated me about the ways in which my Australian and Japanese cultural identities were often separated and made to be incommensurable was the inability of many to consider what it would mean to live with both identities – or to be hailed in both positions. I wondered why Australian people couldn’t see that they didn’t have to differentiate their practices from Japanese ones. Couldn’t they see that they could have both, that we could be both Japanese and Australian? In these limited cultural framings both sides strove for dominance over the other; this led to an interior tug of war where my own identifications were conditioned by the power structures inherent in national identity formation.

The particular cultural politics of Buddhism are not at issue here – the cultural dilemmas I observed as a child were infinitely more complex than what they were made out to be. Clearly the very assertion of a Japanese or Australian way of being has no basis as a definitive ontological claim, and can be deconstructed with ease. However, it is my contention that national and cultural identities are real in so far as individuals identify with them. Cultural identities are also real because they shape the behaviours, values, and norms that make communication and understanding between people possible. Cultural difference represents a border between different acculturated norms. This does not mean that they cannot be changed or overlap with other cultural perspectives.
In addressing the possibilities of change and overlap between cultural identities, my central thesis questions are: How can intercultural engagement lead individuals to relinquish aspects of their national or cultural identification? How can it lead individuals to identify with cultural others? And how can it lead them to thus inhabit mixed cultural identities? This line of questioning does not suggest that the mixed race perspective is a superior one that all should subscribe to. This idea problematically burdens mixed race people with the idea that they are cross-cultural saviours. Nor do I suggest that we can only understand mixed cultural or transnational experience through the mixed race perspective. Rather, I intend to highlight the benefits of any individual cultivating mixed cultural perspectives in order to let go of rigid national identities, and become more transnational, intercultural, and transcultural in our frames of reference.

In a changing academic environment that faces the challenge of negotiating between different cultural and national expectations around academic work, these questions of the intercultural could not be more pertinent. We do face a global culture of Anglo-dominance in academic publishing and knowledge. And these biases do lead to the kind of reductive claims of difference that are similar to those I heard as a child: they do things differently, their work is not of the same standard, they don’t know how to write about Australian culture. How to displace the Anglo-dominance and find intercultural ways of doing scholarship that can lead to more sophisticated or at least more legitimately transnational forms of academic work: transnational work that isn’t simply the incorporation of one system into another more powerful one. These questions also motivate my interests in intercultural studies.

For me, becoming others is the starting point for building intercultural relationships whose benefits are not yet clearly definable. While this thesis is not specifically about intercultural academic work – although this does feature in the analysis of one of my texts – I hope that my understanding of the intercultural can inform how we think about cross-cultural scholarship. This is an area of research I would like to pursue in the future. In my study, I look at the representation of intercultural relationships between Australians and Japanese in contemporary Australian films, novels, and plays. I examine how these texts stage intercultural engagements that lead characters – and also audiences – to become others: that is, to identify with different cultural perspectives and thus cultivate mixed cultural
identifications. These texts include the works of white Australians, a Hong Kong Australian, a Japanese Australian, and a mixed race Japanese Australian.

As the reader may note, this thesis represents my own process of coming to terms with the ways in which the world has and continues to differentiate between and separate my two cultural heritages of white Australia and Japan. My desire to explore a mixed consciousness, similar perhaps to what Anzaldúa calls 'mestiza consciousness' for Chicana women, is in many ways an attempt at reconciling ‘Timothy’ and ‘Kazuo.’ But more than that, it is also the culmination of both a utopic vision of real intercultural exchange between Australia and Japan, and the overwhelming desire to share in the mixed cultural identity that I so often felt in isolation.
Introduction
My analysis of Australian perceptions of Japan comes out of a fairly sustained Asia focus in mainstream Australian culture and politics. Especially with the rise of the Chinese economy in recent years, Australian politicians have sought to emphasise the economic benefits of close ties to Asia. The current Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull has continued with the pro-Asia rhetoric of many of his predecessors: ‘Australia is well placed to capitalise on this new wave of innovation and disruption emerging from China. … [Industry] must embrace disruptive change and most importantly continue to enhance its understanding and relationship with China and its economy.’ The previous Prime Minister Tony Abbott promised to be an ‘Asia first Prime Minister.’ Prior to that, much was made of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s ability to speak Mandarin, and his ‘Asia literacy’ focus – which can be traced back to his 1994 report on *Asian Languages and Australia’s Economic Future* – highlighted the need for Australians to become literate in Asian languages in order to further economic possibilities in the region. This sentiment is echoed in Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century* (2012), which sought to emphasise the need for deepening of ‘knowledge and understanding of Asia’ and the ‘acquisition of Asia-relevant capabilities.’

Of course, Japan’s meteoric economic rise in the post-WWII era had already led to a close economic relationship between Australia and Japan. Japan was Australia’s largest export market from 1966 until the late 2000s, when it was overtaken by China. But as David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska point out, Asia’s economic rise has long been a key social and political issue for Australia. Gillard claimed, in the context of Asia’s apparently unprecedented rise, that ‘we have not been here before,’ but as Walker and Sobocinska make clear, ‘Australians have been warning each other [for a century or more] that a ‘new’

---


5 ‘Australia in the Asian Century: White Paper.’
Asia looms just over the horizon." In 1915, Prime Minister Andrew Fisher made the same point about Japan’s rise: it had ‘no parallel in our history.’ Thus, there is something decidedly not new about Australia’s attention towards its Asian neighbours as well as its crucial economic relations with them. David Walker says as much when he writes, ‘Co-existing with the suspicion that Australia might be an Asian landmass, a part of Asia, was the argument that proximity to Asia might bring considerable trade benefits.’

In 1908, the Founding Chairman of the Stock Exchange of New South Wales, J Currie Elles, recommended that Australia engage Asia economically. He was one to ‘[lavish] high praise on the 'Orient' as the source of world civilisation.’ In the early twentieth century, Japan itself was often admired by Australians as a new force of modern power in the region. In 1903 a Japanese naval fleet visited Australia, drawing crowds of some 50,000 in Sydney. Rather than a blanket racist response to Japanese presence that we might expect from White Australia, Australians were interested in the “alert, keenly intelligent and progressive’ spirit of the Japanese officers.” In Melbourne the navy band played ‘lively dance music with admirable taste and finish,’ and in Adelaide the officers were ‘feted and toasted incessantly.’ It’s even the case that, as Yuriko Nagata and Julie Matthews point out, ‘Japanese men were popular among local girls’ in Australia. Some Australians were so positive about the Asian influence on Australia, and of racial mixing, that they foresaw a Eurasian future for the nation: One enthusiast declared in 1874 that ‘a little ‘Chinese thrift and industry’ and some of the ‘handicraft skill of the Hindoo’ would be useful additions to a future Australian race.

Perceptions of a ‘Rising Asia’ brought fears of Asian power as well. Insecure about Australia’s own ability to defend itself, many Australians feared invasion by an

---

7 Ibid., 3.
8 David Walker and Informit, Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939 (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 10.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 86.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 85.
undifferentiated ‘Asia’ as well as contamination of a fantasy of white racial purity in the nation: ‘Through the 1880s, ‘Rising Asia’ became shorthand for a looming geo-political conflict. Writing in 1888, the Queensland labour activist William Lane thought all-out race war was just a generation away. He imagined Australia fighting to determine whether it would have a ‘white’ or a ‘yellow’ future.’ With the Federation of Australia in 1901 came a nationalistic atmosphere marked by racism and paranoia. Australian imaginations were gripped by the global fear of the ‘yellow peril’. Wing Fai Leung claims that ‘the phrase yellow peril (sometimes yellow terror or yellow spectre), coined by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, in the 1880s, after a dream in which he saw the Buddha riding a dragon threatening to invade Europe, blends western anxieties about sex, racist fears of the alien other, and the Spenglerian belief that the West will become outnumbered and enslaved by the East.’ Japanese victories in the first Sino-Japanese (1894-5) and Russo-Japanese (1904-5) wars increased the fear of growing Japanese, and by extension Asian, military power. Fear of this power proliferates in the many invasion novels that were popular in Australia in the late nineteenth and early the twentieth centuries. The novels had titles such as the aforementioned William Lane’s ‘White or yellow? A story of the race war of AD 1908’ (1888), The Yellow Wave (1895), and The Australian Crisis (1909). As Megumi Kato highlights, ‘When the Japanese are represented as a potential enemy, they are faceless and dubious figures; in terms of Australia’s fear of Japan and indeed of Asia as a whole, they become a composite ‘mass.” These representations ‘echoed in the consciousness of Australians as a fearful image of the invading ‘Other.’”

Terror of an Asian future led to a process of demarcating borders between Australia and Asia. While the Aboriginal Yolngu people of north-eastern Arnhem Land had an ancient cultural and trade exchange system with Indonesian Macassans, with the implementation of white settler Australian laws and nationhood, these transnational links were severed in the name of differentiating Australia from Asia. As Suvendrini Perera writes: ‘The annual arrivals of the Macassans, a thorn in the flesh of British authority … was formally interdicted in 1907. This ban marks a definitive stage in the self-constitution of island-Australia, its

---

15 Walker and Sobocinska, Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century, 4.
17 M. Katô, Narrating the Other: Australian Literary Perceptions of Japan (Clayton: Monash University Press, 2008), 50.
This division between Australia and Asia speaks to the racial exclusion that white settler authority attempted to create and maintain: ‘The geographical differentiation of the island-body, Australia, from the islands of Asia is paralleled by a process of racial differentiation.’ The exclusionary logic of the white settlers was formalised in what is known as the White Australia Policy: a group of historical policies that attempted to deny immigration by non-European peoples to Australia. The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 included an extremely difficult dictation test, the justification of which speaks directly to the yellow peril fear. The then Attorney General, Alfred Deakin, justified the policy by saying, ‘It is not the bad qualities, but the good qualities of these alien races that make them so dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors.’ The racist overtones of this policy are again clear in then Prime Minister Edmond Barton’s statement, ‘The doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman.’

The abolition of the White Australia Policy took place over a period of about 25 years, and it wasn’t until 1973 that the last remnants of it were finally removed from Australian law. In the late twentieth century the dominant policy governing migration in Australia became ‘multiculturalism.’ A comparatively ‘practical, humane and sensitive way of accommodating immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.’ But of course the lived realities of multiculturalism are far more problematic than the many endorsements of it will claim. Multicultural discourse emerges from a colonial system of managing and containing difference: as Baden Offord et al point out, ‘In Australia, the values which have become ubiquitous to its national story, and which underpin its institutions, have been formulated

---

19 Ibid., 26.
21 Quoted in Timothy Kendall, ‘Within China’s Orbit?: China through the Eyes of the Australian Parliament,’ (Australian Parliamentary Library2008), 17.
22 ‘Fact Sheet – Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy,’ ed. Australian Government. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
through efforts that are distinctive to a settler society, specifically to an Anglo-Celtic settler society with a British heritage.'

Vocal critic of Australian multiculturalism Ghassan Hage sees multiculturalism as an inherently racist policy: ‘both White racists and White multiculturalists share in a conception of themselves as nationalists and of the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White ‘ethnics’ are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will.’

While multiculturalism is often framed as a more inclusive alternative to a previous, discriminatory policy of assimilation – as Hage points out – multiculturalism, in fact, has much in common with assimilation.

Assimilation was never buried by multiculturalism – it continued to co-exist with it ... All government documents on multiculturalism in Australia from the foundational Galbally report of 1978 onward celebrate diversity, but they ensure with a ‘but’ or an ‘as long as’ or ‘in so far as’ that no one forgets that this diversity should not happen at the cost of Australia’s cohesion, core values etc ... Assimilationism, therefore, always existed as a disciplinary technique which was deployed specifically to ensure that the diverse cultures that were integrated into the multicultural fold were ‘good to integrate and be multicultural about’ in the first place.

We can see this in the superficial, exoticisation of difference in the form of ethnic food. The cultural mixture of cuisine provides a safe, non-threatening metaphor for Australian multiculturalism, but, as Lyn Dickens points out – following Hage – ‘the exotic appeal of cultures which are ‘othered’ and added to the multicultural ‘zoo’ only further objectifies these cultures, and people who are associated with these cultures, and replicates a colonial relationship of the white Australian centre with difference.’

Multicultural discourse also seems unable to deal with the realities of cultural tension, difference, and racism in Australia. As Dickens points out,

---

Where [len] Ang speaks of early and mid-1990s Australia as perceiving itself to be ‘on the road’ to a multicultural society, Australia in the twenty-first century presents itself as an already multicultural, equal and tolerant society, where race no longer matters. By discarding the notion of being on a journey in favour of proclaiming that the nation has reached its multicultural destination, a discussion of the endurance of racism in Australia, or even that of racialised identities, is discouraged, as it disrupts the notion that Australia has achieved a post-race society.28

The contradictory binds created by multiculturalism are exemplified in the example of the Cronulla Riots. This was an event where a group of white Australians chased and attacked lone individuals who were deemed to be of Middle Eastern descent (this apparently included a Greek and a Bangladeshi).29 These attacks took place in response to a confrontation (at Cronulla Beach – south of Sydney), on the previous day, between an Australian life guard and two Lebanese Muslim youths – the former of which ended up severely beaten. As Hage points out, ‘this event itself followed a history of tensions between largely white locals and non-local Muslim Lebanese men who were increasingly perceived to have ‘taken over’ imposing their forms of masculinity (modes of playing football and modes of harassing girls) on the beach.’30 One of Hage’s interviewees recounts an episode where he was punched to the ground by the riot mob and forced to kiss the Australian flag. When the Lebanese male replies ‘but that’s my flag,’ he receives the reply, ‘No it’s not. Kiss the flag.’31 This exchange represents an assimilationist attitude on the side of the white rioters; the insistence on acquiescing to white domination aims to stamp out difference in the Australian space. If people of colour are seen to have ‘taken over,’ the mainstream impulse is to position them back into a place of submission to a white norm. But more interesting is the reality that those targeted by the attacks were not unassimilated but, as evidenced by their presence on the Cronulla beaches, overly familiar and comfortable in Australian space.

What is behind the claims that the Leb boys were un-integrated was the fear that they seemed over-integrated: for people who are so different they were too integrated for their own good: no sense of their assumed marginality – arrogant. 'We

28 Ibid., 70.
29 Hage, 'Intercultural Relations at the Limits of Multicultural Governmentality,' 246.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 248.
don’t expect you to act like this on the beach’ the assimilationists and the multiculturalists were really screaming in union. ‘Can’t you be a bit shy for God’s sake!’

Thus the person of colour in Australian multiculturalism is in an impossible bind: they are either unintegrated or overly-integrated. This recalls Homi Bhabha’s maxim of ‘white but not quite,’ which explains how colonised subjects are forced to mimic cultural whiteness but are never allowed to become white. How can one assimilate or integrate if the status of integration is never granted? This paradox of multiculturalism points to its failure: Hage calls it a ‘multiculturalism – assimilation polarity’ that only leads to dead ends. For him the only way forward is to ‘move to forms of intercultural relations where we can live with the sovereignty of the other,’ not a domination or destruction of otherness and difference.

I take up this challenge of conceptualising an Australian relationship to others that more robustly converses with difference – rather than simply including others under the condition that they submit and assimilate to white mainstream culture. For the purposes of my thesis I explore exchanges and interactions between Australians and Asians (specifically Japanese). Part of the challenge of re-imagining Australian cultural attitudes towards difference involves the realisation that Australia is already robustly Asian. It already contains Asian people and cultures that have been changing Australian culture for centuries. As Fran Martin et al write: ‘translocal, inter-cultural experience that we argue is a defining feature of contemporary Australian life must profoundly (re)shape our understanding of both the nation, and our selves.’ The specific arguments around intercultural dynamics that I argue for will feature later in this introduction, for now I wish to focus on this recent reconceptualisation of Australian life and culture.

Rethinking Australian nationhood involves seeing the nation as influenced by various transnational flows; these flows highlight the ways in which Australia is connected to and shaped by global cultures. In Australian literature, and in the field of literary studies for

---

32 Ibid., 250.
34 Hage, ‘Intercultural Relations at the Limits of Multicultural Governmentality,’ 253.
35 Ibid.
example, there is much discussion of what many are calling a transnational turn; these approaches focus on the need for Australian literature to ‘be ‘worlded’, or located in relation to world literary space.’ As Robert Dixon points out ‘the national literature has always been connected to the world,’ and this resonates with the earlier observation that Australia has always been Asian or transnational. Vilashini Cooppan, a US academic who spoke at the 2014 Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference, writes,

The space of nations is never simply their own. What the structure of national identification conceives of as the outside – the world beyond the border, the cultural other outside the compact – is in fact always inside, always already present in the very moment and process of national formation.

In the same vein, Cooppan sees the notion of the global as ever haunted by the nation or local, and argues then, following Stuart Hall, that ‘the local/global reciprocally re-organise and re-shape one another.’ Thus, she aims to see local and global identifications not as static but in constant movement and dialogue.

It’s not enough to see Asia or the transnational as aspects outside the nation encroaching on nation. As Cooppan shows, the outside is always inside, and a key aspect of these global flows for my project is the reality of Asian residence in Australia. As Martin et al write,

The 2011 Census revealed that 26% of Australia’s population was born overseas with a further 20% having at least one overseas-born parent, and over the past decade Australia has become home to increasing numbers of temporary and permanent migrants from Asia. India and China are now the two top source countries for

---

Migration Program visa places, and Mandarin is the nation’s most widely spoken language after English.\textsuperscript{42}

Thus, Martin et al ‘propose that the everyday translocal and inter-cultural experience of Asian-heritage migrants in Australia—which constitutes Australian social life as translocal and intercultural—underlines the fallacy of conceiving of ‘Asia’ and ‘Australia’ as radically separate or separable entities.’\textsuperscript{43} These claims are typical of an area of study called Asian Australian Studies, in which my thesis questions are firmly couched.

Asian Australian Studies grew out of the ferment of anti-Hanson sentiment in the 1990s. It was part of an influential critique of race and postcolonialism in Australian academic work at this time: as Jacqueline Lo writes, ‘I maintain that the critique of race and racism is fundamental to ‘doing’ Asian Australian studies.’\textsuperscript{44} But Asian Australian Studies is also a critique of multiculturalism and the lived experiences of systemic racism in Australian society. It uses the strategic essentialism of a racialized identity,\textsuperscript{45} but also criticises the nationalistic tendencies of multicultural logic. It focuses on diasporic identities and attempts to destabilise the identities given to ethnic people under multiculturalism:

\begin{quote}
[A] diasporic framework foregrounding tropes of hybridity and mobility decentres the nation as the ultimate signifier by emphasising the multiple and heterogeneous forms of belonging to, and traveling within and beyond, the nation. Such approaches, therefore, suggest that the concept of the nation is pluralised and hybridised, and that ownership of space (symbolic as well as political) is thus always partial, provisional and open to contestation.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

The lived experiences of diasporic Australians add to the transnational and intercultural realities of Australian cultural life. Olivia Khoo, Belinda Smaill, and Audrey Yue’s book \textit{Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Asian Diasporas} (2013) looks at Australian

\begin{footnotes}
\item[42] Martin, ‘Australia’s “Asian Century”: Time, Space and Public Culture.’
\item[43] Ibid.
\item[45] Ibid., 15.
\item[46] Ibid., 18.
\end{footnotes}
diasporic film outside of the lens of diasporic authorship—which often focuses on the particularity of diasporic Asian Australian identities. Instead, they, critically expand the category of Asian Australian cinema to chart a history that includes not only the work of diasporic filmmakers but also examines Australian films featuring images of Asia and Asians, films produced by Australians working in Asia’s film industries or addressed at Asian audiences, and Asian films that utilize Australian resources, including locations and personnel.  

Their project accounts for expanded definitions of transnational cultural and material flow in the creation of Asian Australian cultural products.

Asian Australian Studies itself has cross-pollinated to some extent with Inter-Asia Cultural Studies (IACS). Many of the key Asian Australian figures have—like Khoo, Smaill and Yue—focused on either Australian/Asian interconnections or simply Asian cultural production. Meaghan Morris, in her article ‘The Great Australian Loneliness’: On Writing an Inter-Asian Biography of Ernestine Hill,’ acknowledges the role of the Asian Australian Studies Research Network, while going on to present an Inter-Asia reading of Hill’s work. Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, which is a movement as well as a journal, a research network and now an academic society ... grew out of conversations shared between people committed to taking seriously the immense diversity of the region by recognising a plurality of ‘Asias’, differing in both conceptual and material ways, and to building new relationships between and across these multiple Asias.  

Unlike Asian Australian Studies which largely focuses on the Australian context, IACS focuses on Asia, or ‘Asias’ as Morris says. However, Morris and Catherine Driscoll have attempted to include Australian cultural questions within IACS concerns: noting the important influence Asian Studies has had on Australian Cultural Studies and Kuan-Hsing Chen’s inclusions of

---

Australia in his conceptions of the region, they insist ‘on a perspective which is open to the possibility that Australia is part of an Asia-Pacific region.’

Thus my work attempts to balance these two modes of engaging with Asian and Australian interconnections. I wish to examine the Asian influence on Australian culture, but am also interested in bringing Australian questions to Asian cultural inquiry too. Having said this, my work certainly sits more comfortably in an Asian Australian framework; my texts are all Australian texts and thus while I attempt to transnationalise and problematise national identities, my focus does not extend to Asian cultural products. While my analysis of Hong Kong Second Wave director Clara Law’s Australian film *The Goddess of 1967* does consider the overlapping national frameworks of Australian and Hong Kong cinema, this thesis predominantly explores Australian cultural objects. In addition, unlike Khoo, Smaill and Yue, I do not examine Asian/Australian co-productions.

I omit Asian and co-produced cultural texts to focus on what I believe is the unresolved question, or unfinished business, of how to respond to the failure of Australian multiculturalism. The response requires, in Hage’s words, attention to ‘intercultural relations,’ and I believe that the benefits of ‘intercultural relations’ can inform other transnational forms of contact and exchange. The need to find languages and frameworks for intercultural or transnational relationships is of course a global concern. Baden Offord highlights the urgency for

> new and reflexive ways of thinking about what it means to co-habit the planet, particularly how to get along with others who are radically different. Understanding how to get along in a world of cultural and social diversity is now ubiquitous to the human condition. Flowing out of this are questions about human identity and how it is constructed. The opportunities, challenges and inevitability of rubbing shoulders with difference are now so extant that we need to develop new languages and disciplines for not just coping with these things, but to negotiate and understand

---


50 Ibid., 176.
them fully. As Edward Said remarked about human culture: ‘Survival is about the
connections between things.’51

What my texts stage is exactly the move to Asia or the attention to Asia that features in
much of the recent Australian scholarship. They are about Australians – including Asian
Australians – who interact with Japanese, who live in Japan, who learn about Asian culture
and people. The question I ask then is: how do interactions with Asia (which in my texts are
represented both within Asia and in Australia) reshape Australian identities? My contention
is that these cross-cultural interactions lead to cultural mixture, or cross-cultural
identification, in those involved in intercultural exchange. This mixture creates a kind of
Asianisation or transnationalisation of Australian identity, rather than domination of an
ethnic identity by a white core. My project charts one aspect of much larger process of the
transnationalisation of Australian cultural life. My argument not only highlights the
importance of interacting with difference, and recognising the sovereignty of difference – as
Hage says – but also the ways in which we are changed by difference and become different
ourselves in the process.

My hope is to move into a more global, but specifically Asia, focussed line of inquiry in
postdoctoral research. Perhaps the work of this thesis will lead me to comparative
examinations of Australian and Asian multicultural or intercultural experiences.

In drawing attention to the changeable nature of Australian cultural identity – premised as
this is on a critique of multiculturalism – my analysis hinges on another key critique: that of
rigid and exclusive racialised identities. As Lo points out in her definition of the hybrid racial
term Asian Australian: ‘the concept of race is not deployed as biological ‘fact’ but rather
used strategically to unite people of various Asian ethnicities thereby enabling a degree of
political solidarity and critical purchase.’52 The term employs what Spivak calls ‘a strategic
use of a positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.’53 However, as a
mixed race person I have often had an ambivalent relationship to such racialised identity
formations. I do not fit easily within many of these identity categories, and the categories

are often policed by notions of authenticity and certain kinds of racial politics that I don’t always conform to. As many critics have observed, racialised identities can run the risk of re-inscribing the exclusive logic of race rather than undoing it. Paul Gilroy, celebrated scholar of race, writes in his book Against Race:

Too often in this century those folk have found only that shallow comfort and short-term distraction in the same repertory of power that produced their sufferings in the first place. My enduring distaste for the ethnic absolutisms that have offered quick ethnic fixes and cheap pseudo-solidarities as an inadequate salve for real pain, means that I do not see contact with cultural difference solely as a form of loss. Its inevitable interactions are not approached here [in this book] in terms of the elemental jeopardy in which each sealed and discrete identity is supposedly placed by the destructive demands of illegitimate ‘tranethnic’ relation.54

Here Gilroy argues in favour of relations with difference – and he quotes Glissant here – instead of rigid racial identities. Influential postcolonial critic Rey Chow also criticises some of the tendencies in ethnic identity formation (specifically Asian American identity). In her book The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism she writes about autobiographical ethnic writing and its attempts at forming an ethnic identity:

...to be autobiographical could be seen as the narcissistic act par excellence because it is the act through which it becomes apparently possible, perhaps for the first time, to connect and compose oneself and thus to attain a modicum of the ‘self-regard’ that seems to be absent all along. Moreover, might not access to such self-regard, however remote in the present, promise, in the end, to vindicate the group’s identity— the elusive yet undeniable something called ‘Asian Americanness’?55

Chow argues against the possibilities of attaining a secure ethnic self – something she sees as part of a Freudian narcissistic desire to retain an undifferentiated self which exists prior to its relationship to the other. She also criticises the tendency of some to form these

identities through an abject attitude towards one’s own ethnicity. Chow gives the example of how internment in the US context created a memory of marginalisation and exclusion that offers a rallying point for Japanese American or Asian American identity. She argues that ethnic autobiographical writing can fall into a trap where it cannot escape its own marginalisation because it has to constantly perform its own marginal position in order to be recognised: ‘However migratory, hybridized, and in flux it might be, is not ethnicity in this context finally assigned the value of a referent that confines and immobilizes?’

Kuan-Hsing Chen – one of the founders of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies – also highlights the ‘nativist’ discourse of many postcolonial identities. In their rejection of their colonisers, the colonised can fashion exclusionary, essentialist identities: Chen quotes Albert Memmi’s critique of nativism where he says, the colonised ‘will be nationalistic but not, of course, internationalist. Naturally, by doing so, he runs the risks of falling into exclusionism and chauvinism, of sticking to the most narrow principles, and of setting national solidarity against human solidarity – and even ethnic solidarity against national solidarity.’ Another major pitfall of these postcolonial identities is the fact that they depend on definition against a coloniser in order to exist. Even though they critique the coloniser, they are inextricably bound to them. They reproduce relationships of domination and structures of power, rather than undoing them. As Chen says

The colonized, like other subaltern subjects who are in the process of self-discovery (those at the right of each pair), are seeking self-identification and self-affirmation. But until the structure breaks down, the object of identification for the subaltern subject is always bound up with the subject in power (those at the left of each pair), and the result is the reproduction and strengthening of the structure or regime. Colonial identification theory indicates that it is through violence and a politics of resentment that the colonizer and the colonized are bound together. That same logic applies to relations within other forms of identity politics.

56 Ibid., 152.
58 Ibid., 95-6.
Chen’s alternative to this postcolonial problem is perhaps the one that I am most influenced by. I will return to that in a moment, but I also want to highlight the importance of putting forward an alternative. We are trained as academics to be critical of social forces, but we are rarely encouraged to put forward an alternative. Sometimes we gesture towards new possibilities, but we rarely flesh them out. Hage makes this point on the topic of critical or anti-politics:

Since the 1960s there has been a gradual realisation in radical and critical thought that the oppositional spirit and politics that marked anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles throughout the world suffered from a fundamental weakness. While sometimes successfully overturning the political orders they were ‘anti’ about, they have been less successful in structurally integrating into their anti-politics an alternative to the realities they have overturned.\(^{59}\)

Finding a language for new forms of relations is difficult, as bell hooks notes in her book *Writing Beyond Race*. Describing relations with the other, she says:

Many of us found that it was easier to name the problem and to deconstruct it, and yet it was hard to create theories that would help us build community, helps us border cross with the intention of truly remaining connected in a space of difference long enough to be transformed.\(^{60}\)

What is the way forward in rethinking the colonised/coloniser bind? What is the way forward in escaping the traps of identity politics, while still maintaining a sense of cultural identity? How do we relate to others? In order to give my answer to this question I provide a particular definition of subjectivity based on mixed race subjectivity, and show how this informs intercultural relations as I understand them.

Vincent J. Cheng makes a similar critique of identity politics, to the ones mention earlier, in his book *Inauthentic: The Anxiety Over Culture and Identity*. But Cheng highlights how the mixed race category destabilises any attempted exclusivity around Asian American identity, and he uses mixed race to think about Asian American identity as a whole: ‘I would argue

---


that, as a functional (albeit patently artificial) category, ‘Asian American’ is an inherently—and functionally—‘mixed-race’ identity and category. The category itself contains an extremely heterogeneous mix of ethnic and racial groups – including many mixed race people – and can therefore be said to be ‘mixed race’. This suggests a certain open-endedness or fluidity to the notion of ethnic identity.

Mixed race studies itself contains a wide array of focuses and claims. Critical Mixed Race Studies, for instance – which is a new academic formation that recently launched a journal – includes a broad field of academic and non-academic inquiry into the nature of mixed race experience, where ‘critical’ approaches seem to be involved in the arguments surrounding critical race studies. The literature ranges from early work on the psychology of mixed race, to analyses of hypodescent and the one drop rule in the US context, political aspects of racial categories in the US census, hybridity and cultural in-betweenness, concerns specific to particular groups like African American and Chicana/o groups, and much more.

Recent developments in mixed race studies focus on the global nature of mixed race: its many different forms, iterations, and dynamics across the world. The aim of this global focus is to disrupt national frameworks in mixed race studies, especially the influential national paradigms of US based studies, where much of the mixed race literature comes from. The recent anthology *Global Mixed Race* for example does not explore mixed race in the US context, rather it highlights the different ways in which mixed race is understood in other national and transnational contexts. Within the framework of Critical Mixed Race Studies my work ostensibly would be viewed under a global category – as Maureen Perkins and Farida Fozdar’s chapter in the aforementioned anthology is: it is entitled Antipodean Mixed Race. However, my analysis of mixed race intends to show the transnational nature of the mixed race experience in the Australian context, specifically the mixed experience of inhabiting spaces in between Australian and Japanese cultural identities.

---

While mixed race destabilises existing racial identity categories, it also presents interesting, more fluid and ambivalent ways of thinking about cultural subjectivity. Gloria Anzaldúa’s work offers important insights to me, and it gets to the heart of the particular tensions I wish to illuminate. Anzaldúa’s writing about the ‘ambivalence from the clash of voices’ in the mixed race subject provides, for me, a highly resonant way of thinking about mixed race experience. She writes, ‘within us and within la cultura chicana, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture.’ This dynamic of multiple voices or multiple racial, ethnic, or cultural selves within the mixed race person reflects the kind of subjective experience I drew attention to in my preface. I explored the feeling of having different cultural selves that can arise at different times. And as Anzaldúa writes, these selves can sometimes be in conflict: the negotiation between these selves can represent an important aspect of mixed race identity. Her schema highlights the internalised ways in which whiteness or mainstream white culture can discipline ethnic identity (which we saw at the social level in the critique of multiculturalism). As it has often been my desire to flesh out and more fully develop my largely suppressed or under-developed Japanese identity, I focus in this thesis on the constructive effects of exploring and developing dormant or suppressed cultural selves through intercultural interaction. This is not simply an experience for mixed race people; mixed cultural identities are common and can be cultivated by anyone.

The version of the subject that I provide is, loosely, a Freudian melancholic. In Freud’s earlier writing on mourning and melancholia, mourning signifies a healthy process of dealing with the loss of a loved one or loved object; the ego grieves the loss but eventually detaches its love from the object and finds something else to be attached to: it gets over the loss. In melancholia however, one cannot get over this loss, Freud writes that, ‘the free libido was not displaced onto another object; it was withdrawn into the ego.’ This withdrawal includes the desire to incorporate the lost object into the ego, to feed on it as it were, and never let it go. While in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ Freud regards this condition as

---

65 Ibid.
pathological, later in *The Ego and the Id* he regards melancholia as an essential part of all ego formation. Judith Butler, glossing Freud, writes that ‘the ‘character of the ego’ appears to be the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archaeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief.’\(^{67}\) This unresolved grief, ‘is central to the formation of the identifications that form the ego.’\(^{68}\) Butler goes on to say that this lost object, embodies the other, the outside to the psychological inside.\(^ {69}\) In incorporating the other the subject incorporates the outside; David Eng and Shinhee Han note, following Butler:

If the ego is composed of its lost attachments, then there would be no ego— indeed, no distinction between inside and outside—without the internalization of loss along melancholic lines. Melancholia thus instantiates the very logic by which the ego and its psychic landscape are constituted. It is only after this partition of internal and external worlds that the work of mourning—that subjectivity itself—becomes possible.\(^ {70}\)

Judith Butler uses this framework, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, to talk about the nature of gendered and sexual identification. In her version of what is cis-gendered hegemonic heterosexual masculinity she sees the loss created by dis-identifying with homosexuality or femininity as crucial to the construction of the hegemonic masculine. She says:

If the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, *preempting* the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss.\(^ {71}\)

This version of the gendered or sexual subject can’t be used in all cases, obviously. Butler conflates gender and sexuality – this is also before the trans-critiques of her work – and she


\(^ {68}\) Ibid., 132.

\(^ {69}\) Ibid., 134.


creates a dichotomy here between homosexuality and heterosexuality, the same between
masculine and feminine. I’m not a queer theorist so cannot make a strong intervention in
gender debates, and these gender questions are not strictly relevant to my thesis as a
whole. However, Butler does at least queer sexuality at the conclusion of her Freudian
analysis: she attempts to dismantle the binary logic that she has set up. She brings
homosexual and disavowed gender identification into a less bifurcated, more queered
subject. This manoeuvre interests me, particularly in thinking about cultural identification.

My basic position on melancholia is that no matter what one’s identification (in terms of
gender, sexuality, culture, race, nation), there are suppressed, denied, dormant or
unrealised aspects of the self within. When we perform a particular kind of identification,
the loss of other possible identifications lies beneath. This doesn’t always have to be a
negative loss; it can be done through awareness of those losses. Butler’s version of the
masculine obviously is a version that lacks such awareness. Also, there may be scales of
identification and disidentification, rather than the clear-cut binary that Butler produces.
When we are acculturated into particular environments we learn to perform certain
behaviours, certain subject positions, and not others. Certain possibilities in ourselves are
lost due to interpellation and these lie, in an extreme sense, suppressed within the self. This
also contributes to the strangeness of difference. As Julia Kristeva says, in Strangers to
Ourselves, ‘The foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the
foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious that ‘improper’ facet of our impossible ‘own and
proper.’”

A very simple example of this might be not knowing how to use chopsticks: one might never
have been socially conditioned to use one’s body and mind in this way. Perhaps through
tavel to an Asian country one might learn and therefore discover a hitherto unrealised
ability to use chopsticks. More complicated examples might include how certain kinds of
socialisation might affect the way one expresses or feels particular kinds of emotion.
Through inhabiting different social spaces, where certain ways of feeling and expressing are
suddenly socially appropriate, we might become more likely to express or feel particular
emotions in different ways. Different languages may also limit as well as expand our

relationship to particular emotions. Thus one social system may suppress certain aspects of
the self and bring out others. My contention is that intercultural interaction can lead to
unrealised or under-developed aspects of the self being expressed. If we associate those
new behaviours or identifications with certain cultures, we may become, in a sense,
culturally mixed. I will explain the ramifications of this ‘if’ later in this chapter.

Eng and Han make the racial parallel to Butler’s melancholia in the way that they point to a
lost whiteness in the racialised subject.73 As a child, the racialised subject wants to fit in and
be white but they are never allowed. This leads to a melancholic sense of loss that haunts
the ethnic person. Anne Anlin Cheng, on the other hand, frames the foreigner as the
disavowed, suppressed part of the hegemonic white nation.74 I attempt to connect these
two arguments by focussing on another aspect of racial melancholia: that is, how the desire
for whiteness also involves the disavowal of ethnic difference in the racial melancholic. This
personal dynamic can be used to talk about the disavowal of difference in the condition of
whiteness, as well as the more mainstream disavowal at the national level – as in Cheng’s
work. It’s my hope that recognising and developing ‘relations’ with the other within changes
people’s personal identifications.

This way of personally relating to difference that I highlight closely resembles Hage’s recent
writing on ‘alter’ rather than ‘anti’ politics. Although he’s addressing the discipline of
anthropology, I think that much of what Hage proposes has broad applicability over the
humanities and social sciences. He states that critical anthropology takes us outside
ourselves,

...by telling us that regardless of what and who we are, we, as individuals and as a
society, can dwell in the world in a completely different way from the way we dwell
in it at any given moment ... The other has, but we can have, different ways of
conceiving sexual relations; kinship; our relation to plants, animals and the
landscape; causality; sickness and so on. It can therefore be summarised by the very
simple but also paradoxically powerful formulation: we can be radically other than
what we are. It is paradoxical because in the very idea of ‘we can be’ other than what

---

73 Eng, ‘A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia.’
we are lies the idea that ‘we already are’ other than ourselves. Our otherness is always dwelling within us; there is always more to us than we think, so to speak.\textsuperscript{75}

I also draw on another similar way of relating to otherness expressed by Kuan-Hsing Chen. As a way of disrupting the powerful bind that keeps the colonised in a relationship of domination at the hands of the coloniser, Chen proposes ‘disidentification with the colonizer.’\textsuperscript{76} In Chen’s framework of ‘critical syncretism’ the process of disidentification involves identification with others – or, as he says, becoming others:

The direction of identification put forward by a critical syncretism is outward; the intent is to become others, to actively interiorize elements of others into the subjectivity of the self so as to move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations in the form of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism or nationalistic xenophobia. Becoming others is to become female, aboriginal, homosexual, transsexual, working class, and poor; it is to become animal, third world, and African.\textsuperscript{77}

Chen wants identification to have ‘multiple reference points’ multiple nodes of identification.\textsuperscript{78} However, rather than an interiorisation of an exterior other, I propose a ‘becoming others’ that involves the exteriorisation of an interior other – through interaction with exterior others. While Chen’s version of critical syncretism deals with ‘others’ that are many and varied, I focus on ‘others’ as ethnic, national, or racial others – which are the focus of much of his analysis anyway. Thus the becoming others that I propose constitutes one part of Chen’s larger process of becoming others. I also highlight here that, in my reading, becoming others does not mean to identify as others but to identify with others. This distinction is important: Chen is not asking, for example, for white people to go and identify as an African American – as Rachel Dolezal did\textsuperscript{79} – in fact he clarifies that his notion of becoming others is ‘for subaltern subject groups.’ I argue that ‘becoming others’ should be seen in a ‘cultural sense’: it is learning about and identifying with other cultural practices.

\textsuperscript{75} Hage, Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination.
\textsuperscript{76} Chen, Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization, 99.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 101.
and thus becoming culturally mixed – it involves having multiple nodes of identification. This does not foreclose the possibility that some may identify as others – sometimes there are legitimate instances where communities will include racially different individuals into their own racial or cultural groups – but the particular circumstances of this kind of identification are not the focus of this thesis.

I want to further clarify this concept by momentarily exploring Deleuzian becoming and a Deleuzian version of ‘becoming-other.’ Chen himself never mentions Deleuzian becoming specifically, although he does say ‘becoming animal’ – and ‘becoming female’ sounds an awful lot like Deleuze’s ‘becoming-woman.’ His explorations of disidentification and multiplicity also have clear Deleuzian influences. There are many similarities to Chen’s and my own uses of ‘becoming’ and that of Deleuze’s. However, I also wish to point out some key differences.

Deleuzian becoming is difficult to define. One way of thinking about it that Rosi Braidotti highlights is to compare it against Enlightenment or Cartesian notions of ‘being’ and ‘self’: ‘Boundas suggests that the most effective way to think about Deleuze’s becoming is a serialized notion, removed from the dualistic scheme of transcendental philosophy, which inevitably indexes the process of becoming on to a notion of the self, the individual or the ego.’ Rather than taking for granted a fixed sense of self or being, becoming suggests a subject in flux, in constant process: ‘the process of becoming is a time-bomb placed at the very heart of the social and symbolic system which has welded together Being, Subjectivity, Masculinity, Heterosexuality and Western ethnocentrism.’ It also destabilises the self/other dualism. Rather than the self defining itself against a fundamentally different other, individuals are multiplicities that are in processes of becoming with other multiplicities. Deleuze and Guattari write,

\[\text{The self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities. Each multiplicity is defined by a borderline functioning as Anomalous, but there is a string of borderlines, a continuous line of borderlines (fiber) following which the multiplicity changes. And at each threshold or door, a new pact? A fiber stretches}\]

---

81 Ibid., 70.
from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible.\textsuperscript{82}

This idea, ‘allows for the breaking up of the hypothesis of the individual as a stable, closed-off, atomistic unit that is in-divisible, and reinserts into our conception of it a dynamism that permits focusing on processes of \textit{generation} and becoming.\textsuperscript{83} There are many becomings on the way to what Deleuze and Guattari call the ‘imperceptible,’ the first of which is apparently becoming-woman: ‘If becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment, with the becomings-animal that link up with it coming next, what are they all rushing toward? Without a doubt, toward becoming-imperceptible.’\textsuperscript{84}

Perhaps between becoming-woman and becoming-imperceptible [which can be read as the absence of difference], there might be becoming-Other. This is one of my conjectures. How to apply Deleuze’s ideas to questions of ethnic identity, the postcolonial, or – in Chen’s case – the decolonial? There have been many comparisons drawn between Deleuze’s ‘in-between’\textsuperscript{85} space of becoming and Bhabha’s hybridity.\textsuperscript{86} In addition, Birgit Kaiser highlights how the destabilisation of the subject in Deleuze is comparable to postcolonial studies’ ‘critiques of Western conceptions of self.’\textsuperscript{87} In her attempts to meld Deleuze with postcolonial studies, she says:

\begin{quote}
The task of postcolonial analyses, specifically, would then lie in the examination of processes of identification and individuation as they occur under the condition of entanglements on a global scale, by paying \textit{privileged} attention to the challenges that result for these from postcolonial/neocolonial power relations, and by
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, 279.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Kaiser, ‘The Singularities of Postcolonial Literature: Preindividual (Hi)Stories in Mohammed Dib’s ‘Northern Trilogy’,’ 133.
\end{itemize}
envisioning alternative – that is non-appropriative and non-colonizing – ways of becoming under such conditions.  

But we must also acknowledge the ways in which Deleuze may not be amenable to postcolonial theory. For one, as Jerry Flieger highlights, Deleuze ‘seems to be resolutely opposed to any form of what we have come to call identity politics, presumably since this politics necessitates ‘territorializing’ – staking out one’s turf in the social hierarchy. In fact ‘identity’ itself is a notion Deleuze wants to undercut or complicate.’  

Deleuze and Guattari are clear that becoming does not involve identification; it is intended to undo identification. One becomes difference, rather than separated from difference. For many postcolonial critics, Deleuze’s exploration of the apparently ‘positive’ effects of becoming and its relationship to difference effaces important questions of power and colonialism: it sounds like appropriation. As Kathrin Thiele says,  

What is questioned is therefore nothing less than whether a thought that concerns itself with difference in a purely affirmative way – and consequently rids itself of all forms of ‘representation’, ‘recognition’, ‘identity’, and ‘Subjectivity’ (with a capital S) – does not fall prey to both a continued essentialization of ‘passivity’ (as for example in the case of the so-called ‘feminine’) and of ‘subalternity’ (as for example with post/colonial subjects) and gives up on any effective political strategy; a Politics (also with a capital P) that is able to bring to a halt the more and more rigid stratifications of this world.  

As Thiele points out, this question rests on the problem of the persistence of othering. But the conventional view of othering doesn’t adequately speak to Deleuze’s version of the subject. Strictly speaking, and if we take Deleuze’s schema seriously, there is no othering as there isn’t a fixed subject that can serve as the self or the other. Subjectivity is becoming, it is process, the subject ‘always already becomes-other.” The subject is part of an involuntary process of always becoming with other multiplicities and is never actually tied

---

88 Ibid.
89 Flieger, ‘Becoming-Woman: Deleuze, Schreber and Molecular Identification ’ 40.
90 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 237.
92 Ibid., 59.
down to any one given identity – although many may try to ascribe that identity to others or themselves. All this is to say that Deleuzian becoming explores a level of fluid interchange at a level beyond something like cultural identity. What he describes accounts for much more than the ethnic identity portion of an individual. This is why Deleuzian theories of becoming may not be strictly amenable to traditional postcolonial theory. When Chen asks us to voluntarily and actively ‘become others’ of our own volition, in order to cultivate multiple nodes of identification, he describes a political imperative to create exchange between social/cultural ‘identities.’ This call still works within the bounds of socially constructed identities, rather than outside them as Deleuze does. I will return to my answer to this discrepancy between my own and Deleuze’s versions of becoming in a moment.

But first, Thiele provides an interesting Deleuzian take on what she also describes as ‘becoming-other,’ in a partly postcolonial sense of the other. She explores Deleuze’s take on Michel Tournier’s novel *Friday* (1967), which is a reimagining of the Robinson Crusoe story. In this novel, Robinson is stranded on a Pacific Island; at the beginning he attempts to organise his life around his European ways of making sense of the world and one’s role within it. In this way he constitutes the typical European Self, cultivated in differentiation to ethnic, racial, cultural others.

He starts salvaging anything from the shipwrecked *Virginia* that still might have relevance for a so-called civilized life, from alcohol, the captain’s tobacco, half broken furniture to, of course, the Bible. Furthermore in Tournier’s account, Robinson is also led towards the measurement and cultivation of the land, as well as the subsequent codification of rules that he himself establishes for his new ‘civilized’ life on the island.93

However, Tournier’s Robinson starts to let go of his English way of life and, instead, learns from the people native to the island and listens to and connects to the landscape. As Tournier explains, one of the key questions he had of Defoe’s novel was: ‘If you must live on an island in the Pacific, hadn’t you better learn from a native well versed in methods adapted to local conditions rather than attempt to impose an English way of life on an alien

---

93 Ibid., 62.
However, Tournier doesn’t attempt to represent a robust intercultural process of becoming-others. As he says,

my novel Friday is not really an anthropological novel. The genuine anthropological novel remains to be written. Its true subject – and an exciting and rewarding subject it is – would be the confrontation and fusion of two civilizations personified by two representative narrators, and it would take place as if under laboratory conditions on a desert island.\(^9\)

Rather, Tournier’s Robinson cultivates a more abstract connection to the island through his own sexuality. In Deleuze’s words, ‘[Tournier’s] Robinson’s final goal, is ‘dehumanization,’ the coming together of the libido and of the free elements, the discovery of a cosmic energy or of a great elemental Health which can surge only on the isle – and only to the extent that the isle has become aerial or solar.’\(^9\) This process of becoming aerial or solar completely recalibrates Robinson’s previous European identity which differentiates the self from an objectified environment. Robinson awakens to different possibilities in his sense of self, he can interface with place and let it reshape him: ‘Slowly, yet necessarily, unbecoming himself, Robinson becomes a figure capable of learning with and from the many painful and exhilarating experiences he undergoes in his life on the island.’\(^9\) Thiele shows that this ‘undoing or un-working’\(^9\) can be compared to the postcolonial work of undoing or questioning Western privilege and Western metaphysics.

Tournier’s Robinson’s process of becoming elemental represents a posthuman scenario that destabilizes identity in exactly the ways that interest Deleuze. But I’m interested in this unfinished ‘anthropological’ story of Robinson’s interaction with the Indigenous Friday character. Tournier provides some insight into this relationship when Robinson says,

As I think of it, there is nothing very astonishing in the almost crazed intensity with which I [now] watch Friday. What is unbelievable is that I should have lived so long in his presence without, so to speak, seeing him at all. How can I account for that blind

\(^9\) Quoted in ibid., 65.
\(^9\) Ibid., 67.
\(^9\) Ibid., 64.
\(^9\) Ibid., 68.
\(^9\) Ibid., 70.
indifference, when for me he is the whole of humanity assembled in one person, my son and my father, my brother and my neighbor?\textsuperscript{99}

Thus Robinson comes to have a deeply intimate relationship with Friday; Robinson watches to learn about Friday’s practices and his ways of existing on this island. Robinson learns to internalise those ways of being/becoming; he realises them in himself. As Thiele says,

*Friday* experiments with an-other, a more different/ciated journey of (un)becoming, in which Robinson is not the one who ultimately gains back what he has lost, but who by looking at Friday himself regains a new space for movement, a space for negotiation and learning as a constitutive dimension of his becoming.\textsuperscript{100}

It is exactly this kind of becoming that interests me. The different, alien other starts to fall away: as the different other that structured the sense of self no longer retains its integrity, so too does the self therefore morph or even disintegrate. The transactional model of interaction so typical of the European capitalist/colonialist way of relating, keeps the other at a distance. But it’s through interaction that the other becomes familiar and one learns from their perspective. The other’s practices start to become one’s own and one awakens to a hitherto unknown way of existing in the world. So too do one’s practises affect the other: as Thiele writes, ‘Robinson and Friday for a short while are allowed to become-other together-on-with the island, and in which, to use an expression by Bracha L. Ettinger, we witness the ‘co- emerging I and Non- I prior to the I versus other.’\textsuperscript{101}

My understanding of becoming-other, then, may be one small form of becoming in a larger, much more complex, Deleuzian notion of becoming. I am concerned with identity and with the ways in which social structures shape our subjectivity and our relations with others. This is not to say that I do not recognise the constructed nature of this identity or the ways in which it may feed into a ‘territorialisation’ that Deleuze attempts to destabilise. Becoming others, and its identititarian realities, is real in so far as people have some level of investment in cultural, national, or racial identity. And these don’t have to be fixed or unselfconscious identities either. All of the texts I explore frame the characters’ identities as Australian

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 70.
and/or Japanese. In the process, many of the texts attempt to subvert the logic of any hard-boiled national or cultural identity. Even if relations are – at least to some extent – framed within these cultural identity understandings, they still produce cathartic and powerful learning experiences in which people’s senses of self can undergo robust change and metamorphosis. Certainly these intercultural experiences call forth and involve many aspects of the self, not only a narrowly imagined national node of identification, and certainly any national or cultural identification will have many interconnections with other nodes in an individual. This thesis cannot account for all the ways in which national or cultural identity intersects with and reshapess gender, sexuality, emotion, the body, the spiritual – the list could go on. And it doesn’t attempt a definitive schema for becoming either.

This thesis does, however, explore interaction between people who imagine the integrity of their own and others’ cultural identities. I leave all the complex modes of concurrent becoming to the reader’s imagination. The labels ‘Australian’ and ‘Japanese’ come to stand in for a great many heterogeneous behaviours, practices, and ways of feeling. They are never fixed or rigid, and can never truly signify any definitive referent. These labels are necessarily stereotypes, but we require the stereotype in order to begin a communication, to begin legibility. Communication involves negotiating through these stereotypes and occasionally cutting through them, breaching their limits, and crossing boundaries. I take the stereotype of the ‘Australian’ and ‘Japanese’ identity labels as large nodes that encompass many more complex nodes, and in my analysis I necessarily fail at accounting for the true vastness of what these nodes and becomings contain. And yet, by looking at the ways in which ‘Australian’ and ‘Japanese’ identities cross boundaries and become each other through intercultural interaction, I begin a process of exploring the unimaginably complex phenomenon of communication (and the transformations it can involve). The lived experiences of intercultural exchange and becoming-others can have lasting and powerful effects on individuals and, as I hope to show, may offer new ways of understanding national or international negotiations with difference.

In order to further elucidate the relationship between intercultural communication, becoming, and stereotype, I briefly outline the version of intercultural interaction that this thesis explores. Hans-Georg Gadamer thought that communication was possible because of
what he called the fusion of horizons.\textsuperscript{102} He thought that each person has a horizon of knowledge –

![Diagram of overlapping circles]

the sum total of their cultural knowledge – that intersects with another’s horizon in the moment of communication.

![Diagram of overlapping circles]

The overlapping areas of knowledge allow for the possibility of communication. I see these horizons – or what Vince Marotta calls ‘fore-meanings’ or ‘fore-structures’ – as not bounded horizons, but permeable ones.

![Diagram of overlapping circles]

In addition, I don’t see the subject as bounded by a single identification but, following Chen, as comprised of multiple nodes of identification: what Deleuze calls ‘multiple subjects of

becoming.’103 Indeed, these multiple, permeable nodes are not fixed but in a continual process of becoming.

However, the boundary between people is still there, there is still cultural difference. As Marotta – who uses Gadamer to talk about intercultural communication – says:

When engaging and interpreting otherness one’s fore-understanding cannot be placed on hold and neither are they prior to the act of engagement and interpretation. Thus the nature of understanding a text or an alien culture is always a ‘productive attitude’ (Gadamer 264) and thus it imposes some form of boundaries. The crosscultural subject cannot disengage from its own fore-meanings because they constitute the very act of interpretation.104

Also, in a phenomenological sense there is some level of differentiation between one person and another. I don’t just flow into another and download everything they know. There is a boundary between us, although it can be a permeable one.

One of the things that Eve Sedgewick and Adam Frank do in their shared chapter, in Touching Feeling, on Freud is to problematise essentialist models of difference based on Freudian binaries of self and other. What they say offers an interesting way to think about the paradox of the essentialist boundary co-existing with the non-essentialist flow of identification. They say: ‘There is not a choice waiting to be made in theoretical models,

between essentialism and no essentialism. If there’s a choice it is between differently structured residual essentialisms. ¹⁰⁵ Their overall argument in this chapter is something completely different, but ‘residual essentialisms’ represents a useful way to think about the cultural identification I’m looking at.

Stereotype can function as a similar kind of porous boundary. Richard Dyer highlights the conventional, negative ways in which we understand stereotype to delineate exclusive boundaries; he writes that the function of stereotype is ‘to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who clearly beyond it. Stereotypes do not only, in concert with social types, map out the boundaries of acceptable and legitimate behaviour, they also insist on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none [Dyer’s emphasis].’¹⁰⁶ And yet, Frederic Jameson shows that stereotype is an inevitable part of cross-cultural interaction and representation. He points out

the role of the stereotype in all ... group or ‘cultural’ relations, which can virtually, by definition, not do without the stereotypical. For the group as such is necessarily an imaginary entity, in the sense in which no individual mind is able to intuit it concretely. The group must be abstracted, or fantasized, on the basis of discrete individual contacts and experiences which can never be generalized in anything but abusive fashion. The relations between groups are always stereotypical insofar as they must always involve collective abstractions of the other group, no matter how sanitized, no matter how liberally censored and imbued with respect . . . The liberal solution to this dilemma— doing away with the stereotypes or pretending they don’t exist—is not possible, although fortunately we carry on as though it were for most of the time.¹⁰⁷

He argues that the external surface of those that interact with each other cannot show the true internal complexity of the individual. We have to work with this external surfaces and ‘brush against the other’: this is the difficult but necessary reality of intercultural

---

communication. And as Rey Chow shows, representation constitutes exactly this process of using stereotype: ‘Insofar as stereotypes are generalizations that seek to encapsulate reality in particular forms, they are not essentially different from the artificial or constructed makeup of all representations.’

Thus the residual essentialisms of stereotypes (created by fore-meanings or horizons of knowledge), or nodes of identification such as ‘Australian’ or ‘Japanese,’ offer a starting point from which we brush up against the other. Intercultural communication allows us to work through stereotype, and sometimes our fore-meanings or fore-structures – our preconceptions of the other – will be overcome and changed. The other becomes less different and more familiar through extended interaction. The sense of self we had cultivated in opposition to a different other also therefore undergoes change. We recognise the other, suppressed or dormant, in ourselves, and may awaken to how – as Hage says – we can be radically other than what we are. We become others.

I explore this becoming by focussing on the intercultural exchanges between Australian and Japanese characters in the texts I analyse. I also show how the process of consuming these cultural products can lead audiences to identify across difference and thus become others. I employ a mixed method of literary and cinematic textual analysis as well as contextual or cultural analysis. I consider this thesis to be an interdisciplinary one that straddles literary studies and cultural studies. The experimental and perhaps more fluid space of cultural studies (as opposed to literary studies) has allowed me to focus on particular cultural questions governing my response to these texts. Although my texts are all Australian texts, I am not interested in the questions of what constitutes or defines Australian literature, film, or theatre. My inquiry focuses on the intercultural interaction between Australia and Japan in these texts, and what that can show us about cross-cultural relations more broadly. I also highlight the substantial history of interdisciplinary methodology in Cultural Studies. As Ien Ang writes,

[C]ultural studies itself has played a major role in subverting existing disciplinary communities—such as English, sociology or anthropology—by instigating a ‘cultural turn’ in each of them, but this has not led to the downfall of these disciplines; on the

---

contrary, it has reinvigorated and rejuvenated them, providing them with new lines of inquiry and intra-disciplinary conversation.  

Speaking to the institutionalisation of cultural studies a discipline in Australia, Ang attempts to draw attention back to the importance of inter-disciplinary work in cultural studies:

Cultural studies is at its best when it acts as an integrative inter-discipline, as simultaneously like and not like sociology, anthropology, literary studies, history, human geography, and so on ... It is cultural studies’ habit to shuttle between disciplines— its flexibility and openness—that makes it a productive and useful intellectual resource.

In this spirit, I use my ‘in-between’ mixed method of literary and cultural analysis to explore becoming others. Readers from literary studies background may find my thesis lacking in robust textual analysis, where cultural studies readers may see an overemphasis on textual analysis. My hope is that the reader can appreciate the overlaps I have attempted to create between these two methods I have been trained in. In any case, involved questions of discipline and method do not comprise a large part of this thesis’s intellectual inquiries.

I believe that my focus on the intercultural does represent an important cultural studies question: it asks us to think about ‘cultures’ and their interrelationship with, but also interaction with, other cultures. Many academics examine this in the academic arena. Wenche Ommundsen highlights how Australian literature academics come up against the limits of their transnational horizons in transnational academic spaces:

As teachers and scholars of Australian literature we have all been in situations when we have felt called upon to explain to overseas students or conference presenters why we think their reading doesn’t work: it is based on inaccurate information about the contexts that informed the text’s production. But our eagerness to correct such readings may also mark the limits to our transnational horizon. Can such readings

---

109 Ien Ang, ‘Cultural Studies Matters (Does It?): Engaging Inter/Disciplinarity,’ Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 14, no. 3 (2013).
110 Ibid., 435.
nevertheless be ‘right’ within a different reading framework, or, if factually incorrect, can they still be culturally productive?\textsuperscript{111}

Meaghan Morris explores Naoki Sakai’s answers to the problem of creating conversation between transnational scholars and scholarship. She says that his book provides ‘a way to think about non-communal communication as a project requiring both practical involvement – one attempts it without knowing what will happen – and ‘trust’, defined in Translation and Subjectivity as an adventurous, unsentimental approach to sociality that accepts the aleatory nature of the latter.’\textsuperscript{112} Ge Sun also explores what was possible in the ‘intellectual community dialogue’ that she set up between Chinese and Japanese intellectuals. Sun plays down any ideal or perfect ‘transcultural’ union between the two groups, but she sees the intellectual community as a place in which ‘intellectuals can constructively refigure themselves,’ and thus create ‘cultural openness’ in their own cultural spaces.\textsuperscript{113}

While I explore transnational scholarship in only one of my chapters, the governing problem of the intercultural continues to be a pressing cultural studies concern. I hope that my thesis contributes in some small way to this discussion, and I hope that my future work will explore more on this topic.

It’s possible to read each chapter in this thesis as a standalone piece. The chapters contain analytical approaches unique to each, and they focus on themes that are specific to each text. However, there are broad connections to be made across all the chapters, and I have expressly grouped the texts into three sections: each section focuses on a particular thematic concern shared by the texts in that section.

Many of the texts explore the influence of the past on the present. In Section I we see concern for the influence of colonialism on Australian society and, in Sections II and III, many of the texts consider the current day ramifications of the Second World War. This focus on the past highlights how the texts, and their nation-oriented narratives, are affected by what Jacques Derrida calls hauntology:

Derrida in *Specters of Marx* asserts that haunting is endemic to the structure of every hegemony; within every dominant system is a repressed order of value that is hidden, an alternative which threatens and perpetuates the possibility of revolt. He uses the term ‘hauntology’ as a pun on ontology to suggest that ‘every social ontology is also the condition of being haunted.’

In Section II we look specifically at the theme of haunting and ghostly presence. As Jacqueline Lo writes, trauma and postcolonial theorists have used hauntology ‘to bring an awareness of history to the present and to address issues of ethics and justice in relation to the Other, the silenced and the hidden.’ Similarly, the concept resonates with my own argument about the suppressed or silent other within national identifications. Thus, the focus on past temporalities in many of the texts in this thesis highlights not only the lingering effects of specific historical events, but also the hidden potential of suppressed aspects of national discourses and identifications. Just as Lo argues that we need to welcome and preserve the difference of the ghost that haunts our ontologies, I argue that we welcome and become the other within.

This thesis contains three sections with three texts each, and each section contains three governing arguments. The first argument has to do with how the shared conditions or focus of each of the texts in the section enable intercultural engagement and becoming others. These three focuses are the road movie and interracial romance in Section I, intercultural theatre in Section II, and wartime reconciliation in Section III. Secondly, each section has a narrative of progression; that is, as we progress through the section, each text has increasingly more sophisticated approaches to intercultural engagement and processes of becoming others. In addition, each section involves increasingly more developed understandings of intercultural engagement, and this brings me to the third argument. Each section reveals a particular argument related to intercultural engagement and becoming others that I wish to highlight, and, as we move from Section I to III, each argument highlights the next stage in strengthening and furthering intercultural engagement as I define it. In Section I, I argue for the importance of ongoing forms of intercultural

---


115 Ibid., 119-20.
engagement, rather than brief encounters that have limited potential for cross-cultural identification. In Section II, I highlight the importance of bringing intercultural engagements to the cultural space of Australia – rather than limiting them to international spaces. And in Section III, I stress the need to use comparative approaches in analysing shared cultural issues in different contexts; this allows for both cultural perspectives to be changed by each other – rather than only one perspective being enriched by the presence of the other.

The first section – entitled ‘Romance, Road Movies, and First Contact’ – analyses the films Japanese Story (2003) directed by Sue Brooks, Bondi Tsunami (2004) by Rachel Lucas, and The Goddess of 1967 (2000) by Clara Law. All films are road movies that feature explicit or implicit romance or desire between Australian and Japanese characters – notably Japanese men and white Australian women. They also all represent a ‘first’ phase of contact between Australians and Japanese. My interest lies in how these first stages of contact negotiate stereotypes around Japaneseness, and what conditions are necessary to breach those stereotypes and become others. The road movie itself offers a useful structure for this process of change. Road movies create alternative spaces, isolated from mainstream culture, which facilitate transformative processes in the protagonists. This refashioning of identities in the road movie usually ends in ‘an ultimate reintegration of road travellers into the dominant culture.’

I examine how the transformative influences of both the road and sexual desire change or don’t change the Australian characters the films represent. Japanese Story and Bondi Tsunami shy away from the possibility of ongoing intercultural engagement by dismantling the disruptive intercultural power of the road and re-integrating their characters into the mainstream, whereas The Goddess does not depict this re-integration process – rather, it has the protagonists continue their road trip into an unknown future. I therefore argue for the importance of ongoing engagement over brief encounters with limited scope for becoming others.

In the second section, entitled, ‘Embodying difference and Ghostly Possession,’ I explore three theatre-themed texts all of which involve, either explicitly or implicitly, ghostly possession. The texts include Paddy O’Reilly’s novel The Factory (2005), Allan Marett’s English-language noh play Oppenheimer Noh (2015), and Mayu Kanamori’s play Yasukichi

Murakami: Through a Distant Lens (2014). These texts have a much more complex and intellectual engagement with Japan. They depict or reflect familiarity with and engagement with Japanese culture – or in the case of Kanamori’s play with Japanese Australian history. Thus this section considers what is possible in more sustained engagement between Australia and Japan, and the theme of ghostly possession explicitly highlights the possibilities of becoming others. Individuals embody or are possessed by Japanese cultures or characters, and I thus explore how these instances of cross-cultural embodiment lead individuals to mixed cultural identities. The first two texts depict intercultural becomings within the space of Japan, where Yasukichi Murakami brings intercultural questions to Australia. I argue that we need to explore intercultural dynamics in Australian cultural space in order to challenge and change Australian cultural identity.

In the final section, called ‘War and Reconciliation,’ I examine three novels that explore the effects of World War II on intercultural engagement between Australians and Japanese. The texts include Richard Flanagan’s The Narrow Road to the Deep North (2013), Gail Jones’s Dreams of Speaking (2006), and Christine Piper’s After Darkness (2014). Each of the texts contain some reconciliatory message in them, usually inexplicit, that, while focussing on the past, in fact reveal future ways of relating to and exchanging with Japan. This involves the witnessing and acknowledgement of the wrongs of war as well as the ability to become the other – rather than keep them forever at a distance. While The Narrow Road highlights Japanese wrong doing in the Burma Railways Camps and Dreams of Speaking highlights Western wrong doing in dropping the atomic bombs, After Darkness compares Australian wrong doing in the internment of Japanese residents in Australia and Japanese wrong doing in Unit 731. Piper’s comparative approach to injustices committed during war, and to wartime reconciliation, offers an important step forward by highlighting how Australians and Japanese can learn from each other’s cultural perspectives – and not simply how Australians can learn from Japanese perspectives, as is the case in many of the texts I analyse.

All these sections end with a text by an Asian Australian individual. Law is Hong-Kong Australian, Kanamori Japanese Australian, and Piper mixed race Japanese Australian. I intend to show the unique contribution that Asian Australian voices have in framing intercultural interaction. They, especially, disturb the common bifurcation of Australia and
Asia, and as a result produce – in their texts – robust forms of cultural mixing and becoming that bear particular significance.

My thesis explores contemporary Australian representations of Japan and I acknowledge here the work of Megumi Kato who, in her book *Narrating the Other: Australian Literary Perceptions of Japan* (2008), provides a comprehensive analysis of (white) Australian literature on Japan prior to the turn of the twentieth century. I am indebted to her work, as it makes my twenty first century focus possible.

In thinking back to my stay in Sakuranomiya, and my intermittent moments of becoming other or becoming Japanese, I hope that I have given some sense, in this thesis, of what it means to feel difference in the self rise out of you. These moments in which I have become a different version of myself through interaction with Japanese culture have accelerated and informed my own negotiations of cultural identity. They continue to reshape my sense of who I am and how I might interact with others.
Section I: Road Movies, Romance and Relations with Others
This section examines three Australian road movies – *Japanese Story* (2003), *Bondi Tsunami* (2004), and *The Goddess of 1967* (2000) – which all feature interracial romance or desire. *Japanese Story* and *The Goddess of 1967* both focus on actual romantic relationships between a white woman and Japanese male, where, in *Bondi Tsunami*, director Rachel Lucas sexualises Japanese men through her directorial gaze. Desire and romance provide the terms through which to think intercultural interaction and becoming in these films. The films explore the beginning stages of contact, increasing levels of bonding and intimacy, and finally negotiations of the longevity of relationships between Australians and Japanese. The road movie structure itself also provides a framework for these intercultural interactions. The alternative space of the road allows the characters to become vulnerable to cultural difference and cross boundaries that cannot be crossed in mainstream social space. Ultimately road movies attempt to reintegrate the transformative power of the road into the dominant culture; this generic trope allows us to think about how these films imagine the future of intercultural relations in the Australian setting. This section does not analyse in detail the generic conventions of romance and road movies, or set out the terms by which these genres make intercultural interactions possible. Rather, it uses the basic structures of these genres to explore broader questions of intercultural engagement and becoming others.

The intercultural engagements between Australia and Japan become increasingly substantial as we move from *Japanese Story* to the *The Goddess* in this section. *Bondi Tsunami* and *The Goddess* engage with Japanese – and more broadly Asian – culture(s) in more depth, and where *Japanese Story* and *Bondi Tsunami* contain the literal or metaphorical death of the Japanese protagonists, *The Goddess* has the protagonist live on in Australia. The literal death of Hiromitsu in *Japanese Story* and Shark’s symbolic process of dying into, or melding with, the landscape in *Bondi Tsunami* represent a melancholic consumption of difference that seeks to suppress the transgressive relationship that the road movies indulge. *The Goddess* has a more significant ability to imagine an Australian future that includes others and continues to engage with them. These negotiations of difference reflect the psycho-drama that the films represent: as we progress through the section each film reflects increasing comfort and confidence in relating to the other without and therefore, as I argue in the introduction, the other within. In addition, I suggest that
Clara Law, the Asian Australian director of *The Goddess*, produces a more mixed cultural sensibility that the other films fall short of imagining. This mixed, diasporic perspective reframes the relations with difference we see in the first two films by white Australian directors and, in the process, opens the audience to the cultural differences that constitute Australian national identity.

The films depict initial, first contact-type interactions between Australians and Japanese, which do not always lead to continuing relationships or significantly transformative moments of becoming others. In Section II, we explore individuals with long-standing engagements with Japan who experience more robust forms of becoming others. Nevertheless, the tentative beginning stages of intercultural interaction are important – and individuals cannot necessarily immediately experience the kinds of self transformation I privilege in this thesis. Therefore, I take the interactions – especially in the first two films of this section – to set the foundation for later interactions and becomings. In fact, the limitations of these first two films bring into relief the circumstances necessary for deeper forms of interaction with the other. While becomings can be many and varied – and *Japanese Story* and *Bondi Tsunami* certainly exhibit moments that we could argue are moments of becoming others – this thesis draws attention to the desire to see the circumstances I call becoming others taking place in a space of ongoing intercultural engagement. *Japanese Story* and *Bondi Tsunami* retract from the possibility of ongoing engagement, but this retraction constitutes a necessary part of the process of moving towards ongoing engagement. This section’s focus on initial encounters between Japanese and Australian characters represents an important aspect of defining and establishing the terms of this thesis’s argument for ‘becoming mixed.’

Each chapter in this section uses a different critical lens. My chapter on *Japanese Story* explores how the cultural power of whiteness and nation influence the representation of difference in the film – I also explore aspects of the film that disrupt these nationalising forces. My critique of the assimilationist tendencies of this film’s diegesis leads to an analysis of the transnational flows that construct the representation of Japan in *Bondi Tsunami*. This focus on transnationalism then moves to an analysis of intercultural relations in *The Goddess of 1967*. The shifts in critical focus parallel each films’ increasing abilities
(within the chronology of this section) to imagine more complex and robust forms of cross-cultural interaction.
1. Mourning, Melancholia, and Grief Eating in Japanese Story

*Japanese Story* (2003) is the first text I examined in my PhD candidature. It is a well-known film in Australia that contains a significant cross-cultural interaction at its heart: an interaction that has animated my subsequent work on Japanese/Australian relations. My initial approach to this text was one that highlighted strategies of Orientalism and essentialism, and I drew attention to the assimilationist aspects of the nation building project the film seemed to promulgate. Much has been written on the problematic racial politics of this film; but, in revisiting this text, I wish to explore two key competing tensions in its narrative trajectories. On the one hand, the film exhibits a clear assimilation story that quashes and incorporates difference into a national mainstream: this narrative represents the internalisation (via romantic relationship) of an external other (Japan). On the other hand, the film constitutes the eruption of a suppressed guilt complex in relation to white Australian settlers’ treatment of Aboriginal people: this narrative constitutes the externalisation (or acknowledgement) of an internal national other (Indigenous presence/history). I examine these concurrent tensions in the film and consider how they inform each other.

Grief, mourning, or melancholia – as I will argue – are key focuses in this film. The white Australian geologist from Perth, Sandy (Toni Colette), is forced to chaperone a Japanese investor, Hiromitsu (Gōtaro Tsunashima) around Pilbara in Western Australia. They don’t like each other: their interactions are stilted by perceived rudeness and apparent cultural barriers. But when they get bogged in the desert, and have to spend the night there, they work together to escape their predicament, and eventually become friends. This friendship moves quickly into romance; the two make love one night in a motel and enjoy intimate trips together around the Pilbara region. But when Hiromitsu dives into the shallow end of a billabong, Sandy pulls him out only to find him dead. The final act of the film explores Sandy’s process of mourning for Hiromitsu and culminates in an apology to his wife – who visits Australia to return Hiromitsu’s body to Japan.

Sandy’s grief encapsulates the two governing tensions of the film that I highlighted earlier. It represents the melancholic scenario illustrated in my introduction: that is, it represents the
suppression of difference within a white dominated cultural space. Hiromitsu is not allowed to exist in the mainstream space of Australia and his presence and influence must be disavowed in order to maintain the integrity of the national project. At the same time, Sandy’s grief for this Japanese outsider triggers a much more primordial national grief, to do with the mistreatment of Aboriginal Australians, which haunts the Australian psyche. Sandy’s apology to Hiromitsu’s wife is a coded apology to Aboriginal Australia, and it represents a desire to vent guilt and acknowledge this suppressed other to the Australian nation. In this sense, it represents a desire to acknowledge the other within and to begin a relationship with it. Later in this chapter I will examine the limits of this part of the narrative – especially those created by the lack of Indigenous representation in the film.

In this chapter I outline how melancholia functions in Japanese Story, explore the intercultural interactions of the road movie and the romance story, and tie these aspects to the narrative of Indigenous reconciliation also motivating the film.

The Melancholic Nation

As Hiromitsu and Sandy eat steak and chips in what seems to be an outback diner, they joke about managing to escape the desert where they had been trapped overnight. Hiromitsu says, ‘But without me you are alone, and then you die...Yes, you die...In the dessert.’ Sandy then corrects Hiromitsu’s pronunciation of desert as dessert, but Hiromitsu’s mispronunciation draws attention to a scene of consumption: not only in this scene, where the two share lunch, but also in the consumptive logic of melancholia – which I argue is a dominant aspect of this film. Freud writes that in the melancholic subject, ‘the ego wants to incorporate [the lost] object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it.’ Hiromitsu’s leap into the waterhole in the Pilbara desert accentuates the proximity of death, desert and dessert if we consider it, as Chew Yi Wei does, a ‘metaphorical swallowing.’ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok draw attention to melancholia as a kind of swallowing too when they write that ‘in order to have to ‘swallow’ a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having

---

1 Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia.'
swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing.'³ This consumptive behaviour also reflects bell hooks writing on ‘eating the Other’:⁴ Sandy’s desire for Hiromitsu might be an Orientalist consumption of difference that highlights, as in hooks’ essay, a form of appropriation at the heart of this desire.

The appropriative nature of this consumption works as a metaphor for assimilation, as in Cheng’s work – where she ties melancholia to race relations within the US nation:

Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet retention of racialized others. The national topography of centrality and marginality legitimizes itself by retroactively positing the racial other as always other and lost to the heart of the nation. Legal exclusion naturalizes the more complicated ‘loss’ of the unassimilable racial other...

Freud’s notion of this uncomfortable swallowing and its implications for how loss is processed and then secured as exclusion lend provocative insights into the nature of the racial other seen as ‘the foreigner within’ America. In a sense, the racial other is in fact quite ‘assimilated’ into—or, more accurately, most uneasily digested by—American nationality.⁵

As mentioned in the introduction, melancholia creates the possibility of the ego by constructing that ego’s difference to a lost or repressed aspect of the self. This internal dynamic illuminates the ways in which national identities are made possible by defining that identity in opposition to difference or an other. This reading aligns with Olivia Khoo’s writing on the film:

Asians have largely been understood in the national cinema within a structure of sacrifice; that is, the deaths function symbolically in the creation of a coherent self-identity for those who witness it. In the repression or exclusion of difference, a

⁵ Cheng, The Melancholy of Race, 10.
perceived national identity and national cinema can find order and expression, and as Australia’s nearest neighbour and friend Asia is most frequently, and conveniently, deployed as the excluded ground of this order.\(^6\)

Sandy’s interaction with Hiromitsu represents an opening up to this excluded or repressed other lodged within the Australian self or identity. She begins to become vulnerable to difference, and following Kristeva, to the foreigner within. But this brief romance with the other is apparently too much to bear and, as Khoo highlights, Hiromitsu must be pushed back down – almost like a Jack in the Box. Nevertheless, this first move towards opening up is important in itself. It also represents the first part of the arc of becoming suggested by my three sections. The film’s negotiation of the disruptive and transformative presence of the other – by the end of the film – suggests much about the possibilities and limitations inherent in its relationship with difference. I will return to this later in the chapter as I tie the significance of the Asian other to that of Aboriginal Australia.

As Brigid Rooney writes, ‘through displacement, the story of the intense grief of a representative white Australian woman functions therapeutically to vent what haunts the nation’s collective consciousness, a still-unresolved public guilt.’\(^7\) Rooney’s argument hinges on the similarities between Japanese Story and another Australian film Walkabout which centres on Indigenous-white relations. Rooney’s description of Indigenous issues haunting Australia resonates with Gelder and Jacobs’ contention in Uncanny Australia that reconciliation ‘intends to bring the nation into contact with the ghosts of its past, restructuring the nation’s sense of itself by returning the grim truth of colonisation to the story of Australia’s being-in-the-world.’\(^8\) Cooppan’s interpretation of Derrida’s writing on hauntology highlights a condition where hegemony is constantly haunted by its other:

In the narrative of traces that Derrida calls a ‘hauntology’ and that he argues ‘belongs to the structure of every hegemony,’ the specter produces a strictly uncanny effect. Simultaneously preceding, succeeding, and exceeding each point in


which power finds its telos, the specter is visible and invisible, present yet absent, before yet after, the ‘tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone other.’ Discourses, as Derrida’s reading of Marx insists, have their specters too, entities they position as other but that return as their selves and their futures.9

The national discourse that structures this film is clearly haunted by the colonial past, and even an interaction with Asia – which is often framed as Australia’s future – can bring up this ghost from the past. It’s almost as if by opening the self up to the suppressed other, by becoming vulnerable to difference and its transformative possibilities, that the Australian psyche is compelled to face this still unresolved trauma: a trauma involving the original structuring other to the white Australian national self. When we dig into the ‘archaeological remainder’ – to use Butler’s words – of the lost other within the self, much more than the disavowal of Asians is uncovered. This also highlights how transnational engagements are never removed from national concerns: as Pheng Cheah writes, the nation is ‘a specter that haunts global capital and awaits reincarnation, the undecidable neuralgic point that refuses to be exorcised.’10

The ghostly presences of Indigenous and Japanese others almost force themselves out of the national self. This is reflected in Sandy’s attraction to difference (as if the other calls to her), the ways in which her relationship with Hiromitsu changes her, as well as the way the film seems to unconsciously vent its suppressed anxieties to do with Aboriginal Australians. However, just as there is this push to externalise the internal other, the film – as in its retraction from engagement with Japan – shies away from a robust engagement with reconciliation. There are no Aboriginal people in this film; reconciliation is explored, rather disingenuously, in their absence.

Again, we find a pushing and pulling between two opposing tendencies in the film. An expansive desire to let the ‘foreigner within’ out, and a retractive desire to keep them hidden and under control. As I show in the analyses to come the film attempts a median

---

point between these two tendencies and thus starts a process of engagement with Japan and Indigenous Australia.

**Intercultural Romance on the Road**

The first act of this film presents the audience with two stereotypical characters – one Australian, and one Japanese. Sandy is an assertive, loud-mouthed woman with masculine features that recalls the Australian bush hero type: ‘Sandy displays a familiar mixture of vulnerability and brashness that numerous Australian heroes before her have embodied on the silver screen.’ Hiromitsu takes numerous photographs of the landscape, communicates in monosyllabic Japanese words, and displays a certain Japanese sexism in his treatment of Sandy – he expects her in one scene to put his luggage in the car, as if she were a chauffeur. They stereotype each other as well: Sandy says to her colleague Bill, ‘I’m not traipsing around the bloody desert with some Japanese prick who doesn’t know his arse from his elbow and wants a glorified tour guide. I’m a geologist not a bloody geisha.’ When Sandy asks Bill, ‘what does he want?’ he replies, ‘How would I know? Sandy, he’s Japanese.’ As we looked at in the introduction, stereotypes offer a contact zone; they make others legible within the particular cultural and linguistic systems of a cultural group. The codification of the interactions between Australian and Japanese along these lines is evident in the ways in which some of the Australian mining workers know how to navigate Japanese business protocol: they use of Japanese language introductions and perform the ritual exchange of business cards. They even take Hiromitsu to Australian karaoke, even though he ‘hates karaoke.’ Hiromitsu plays to the stereotype in the way that he doesn’t speak English to Sandy initially – even though he can – and he maintains a power relationship between them: he demands to be driven around to various distant locations by Sandy, and at one point when Sandy refuses to drive further into the desert he intimidates her by calling a colleague and speaking in Japanese (in reality he’s just having a mundane conversation). His power as a Japanese investor, and the stereotype of himself that he maintains, keeps both the Australian miners and Sandy at a distance. The first act highlights how the characters

---

manoeuvre around these surface or stereotypical versions of themselves – identities formed by mainstream society. It isn’t until the second act, when Sandy and Hiromitsu get bogged, that the veneer starts to peel back and they interact in a way that transgresses the usual codes of the mainstream social world.

We see a deferral of sexual tension early on in their interactions when the film parallels phone call conversations that the two have about each other. Sandy says on the phone – in response perhaps to a question such as ‘Do you like him?’ – ‘Hiromitsu? Get real the guy’s a jerk. A real jerk. Boring as bloody cat shit.’ But in an earlier scene Sandy does watch Hiromitsu at the beach; the camera pans up and down his body, suggesting her gaze on him. Hiromitsu also says, on the phone to a colleague (in untranslated Japanese), that his guide is aggressive and annoying. But to another apparently suggestive question he says, with some awkward laughter, that she has a big bum as well as blue eyes. When the two get bogged in the desert the tension between them rises: it was Hiromitsu who wanted to drive further into the desert despite Sandy’s protestations, but he also refuses to call for help (as it would damage his reputation). They attempt various methods at escaping the bog and are thus forced to interact with each other more closely. Hiromitsu initially leaves the work of getting out of the bog to Sandy, but eventually starts contributing himself. They fail to escape on that day, and have to sleep overnight in the desert together. Hiromitsu seems to recognise his responsibility in creating their predicament and softens to Sandy’s presence. He helps her collect wood for a fire, and reads the desert survival manual Sandy has in the car.

One of the key turning points in the film is when, near sunrise (the coldest period at night in the desert), we see a bird eye shot of Hiromitsu and Sandy sleeping back-to-back at a distance from each other and Sandy moves over to sleep against Hiromitsu’s body for warmth. This represents the beginning of their connection in the displaced space of the desert. When Sandy wakes in the morning, Hiromitsu is shirtless; he’s collecting sticks to lay beside the bogged tires in a renewed effort to free the four-wheel-drive. The two have a newfound energy, perhaps due to the beginnings of their intimacy, and the plan works – they escape the bog. They’re ecstatic and jokingly sing ‘on the road again’ as they drive back to town. They share in an emotional release that joins them in a newfound friendship, and later that night their closeness becomes sexual tension. We see several shots of Sandy looking at Hiromitsu in the four-wheel-drive, and vice versa. Sandy also reaches for her
cigarettes and the two touch hands – adding, again, to the rising tension between them. The car suddenly becomes a space of heightened intimacy and there is cathartic release at night when the two spend the night together and have sex.

Much has been made of the sex scene where Sandy wears Hiromitsu’s pants and straddles him. Olivia Khoo finds the scene ‘completely unerotic, and worse, almost laughable,’ and she highlights the Orientalisation inherent in Sandy taking on the male role during sex. Peter Mathews reads Hiromitsu as an imperial Japanese colonialist whose global power Australia fawns over and sexualises: ‘In this allegory, Sandy wearing the pants as she rides the imperial ‘wave’ symbolises the perverse fantasy that Australia will gain power from its current masters through the kind of twisted, Oedipal love that an incestuous parent-figure bestows on a favorite child.’ Jane O’Sullivan on the other hand writes that the scene produces a queering of gender roles with Sandy taking on a masculine demeanour, and with Hiromitsu’s ‘supine body resting swathed in what is, on reflection, a shroud-like sheet of white linen … replicating the gender dissidence of drag.’ It is important to point out how this scene depends upon Hiromitsu’s feminisation, and how Orientalist a trope that is. However, it’s also important to consider the transgressive nature of this interracial sex scene. Asian men are rarely sexualised in Australian cinema – or even in Western cinemas, more broadly. The fact that this white woman has sex with an Asian male represents a clear transgression of the kinds of boundaries (that we saw at the beginning of the film) set between Australians and Japanese in the dominant culture. O’Sullivan’s point about the queering of roles in this scene, exemplifies the transgressive, non-normative nature of what happens on the road. In a later scene the two switch roles again; Hiromitsu is on top and then after sex the two spoon and Sandy is on the outside, enclosing Hiromitsu. Hiromitsu and Sandy’s sexual relationship creates an intimacy that would not be possible in the social space of the first act. They have crossed the boundaries of stereotype, lost their previous senses of cultural identity that kept each other at a distance, and, instead, become vulnerable to and entwined with difference.

---

12 Olivia Khoo, 'The Sacrificial Asian in Australian Film,' RealTime, no. 59 (2004).
13 Mathews, 'Misunderstanding the Other: Colonial Fantasies in Japanese Story,' 188.
The forced intimacy created on the road and through the two characters being trapped in the desert, exemplifies the cultivation of ‘alternative space’ in the road movie genre. In this alternative space, ‘isolation from the mainstream permits various transformative experiences.’ But, as mentioned earlier, the disruptive experiences cannot live on in the mainstream – thus, neither can Hiromitsu. The interracial relationship must be destroyed before the road movie’s ‘reintegration of road travelers into the dominant culture.’ This quashing of difference through death resembles what Ghassan Hage’s calls ‘necrophillic politics’: ‘a kind of ‘we’ll love your art and dancing [and bodies?] but only after we’ve made sure we’ve broken your spears.’

Before his death Hiromitsu says, ‘In the desert you have shown me something beautiful,’ but on return from the road nobody can understand the intimacy that the two shared: Bill asks Sandy, ‘what the hell were you doing out there, anyway?’ The return to nationally prescriptive identities is made explicit when Sandy says to another character from the nearby town, ‘He’s Japanese...was’ and the reply is, ‘still is I suppose.’ Although the road led to a shedding of nationality, a relationality where ‘Japanese’ and ‘Australian’ were no longer important signifiers, here, Hiromitsu returns to being an other and to being defined by his national identity.

In what follows I explore how the death of Hiromitsu raises a guilt complex around Indigenous issues, and examine how the third act of the film (Sandy’s mourning or, as I argue, melancholia) attempt engagement with Japan and reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians.

**Aboriginal Reconciliation**

Before exploring the Aboriginal Australia hidden beneath the inscription of Japan in the film, I highlight another Indigeneity hiding behind the sign of Japan: that of Okinawa. The film opens with Hiromitsu driving through the desert listening to Yothu Yindi’s ‘Treaty.’ Critics have commented on the seemingly symbolic gesture of him changing the disk from ‘Treaty’ to one that plays a Japanese pop song. Jane O’Sullivan writes that ‘a sensorially disoriented

---

15 Cohan and Hark, 'Introduction,' 5.
16 Ibid.
17 'Intercultural Relations at the Limits of Multicultural Governmentality,' 242.
Hiromitsu decisively returns to the car, ejects the CD, replacing it with the more soothing strains of traditional Japanese music. Peter Mathews’s somewhat eccentric reading asks:

Is it a dismissal of the very notion of Treaty as a manoeuvre of the weak? Is it a symbolic revocation of Japan’s surrender in World War II, a continuation of war by other means? Or is it an unconscious replication of the arrogance of an earlier wave of imperialists, who landed on Australia’s shores with a sense of manifest destiny?

Hiromitsu plays a song entitled ‘Romance’ by Ryuichi Sakamoto, it features Okinawan vocals. The film also contains a large proportion of original music scored by Elizabeth Drake; she draws on two Okinawan folk songs, ‘Asadoya Bushi’ and ‘Chinsagu No Hana,’ in music that recurs in several scenes. While Rebecca Coyle rightly argues that the film marginalizes the song origins and employs Japanese instruments for a kind of exotic (and Orientalist) flavouring, I want to highlight that using Okinawan music as a stand in for Japanese music strikes a particular discord. Okinawa isn’t strictly Japan proper; Richard Siddle argues that ‘Uchinānchu (‘Okinawan people’ in the Okinawan language) are ... a separate ‘people’ or ‘nation’ (minzoku), or, at the very least, an ethnic minority.’ The situation in Okinawa has been described as ‘mutual colonialism by the United States and Japan,’ and some Okinawan activists have claimed Indigenous status through the United Nations. Yi Wei writes that Hiromitsu changes the music as he ‘presumably find[s] familiarity and comfort from the Japanese language in a place so remote and far from home.’ However, this critic finds it unlikely that a mainland Japanese person could make

---

18 O’Sullivan, ‘Geologist or Geisha?: Disorienting Body and Landscape in Japanese Story,’ 140-1. O’Sullivan may not recognise that this is a popularised version of a traditional Okinawan song.
20 Sakamoto is not Okinawan.
22 Ibid., 111.
26 Wei, ‘An Australian Tale in a Japanese Story: Reading the National in Sue Brook’s Japanese Story,’ 52.
sense of the *uchināguchi* language. In fact, the language itself may well be less comprehensible to Hiromitsu than English. This paper cannot do a comparative analysis of Okinawan and Australian colonialism or Indigeneity, but I indicate the possibility of doing such work and tie this hidden Indigeneity to the larger theme of the hidden Australian Indigenous presence in *Japanese Story*.

The unusual tension between this narrative of interaction with Asia and that of reconciliation with Australia’s past, highlights the difficulty of tying these two different issues together. This difficulty is evident in academic analyses of race and culture in Australia. Suvendrini Perera writes that the racialisation of Asian others in Australia cannot be divorced from the ‘interlocking’ system of racial hierarchy that affects Aboriginal Australians: ‘Non-Anglo migrant histories that fail to recognise and unpack these hierarchies and their interdependence are in danger of simply reinscribing them.’

Jacqueline Lo highlights the work being done in whiteness studies regarding Asian-Aboriginal cultural histories and connections, and argues that more work in this area needs to be done in Asian Australian studies: ‘Academic work in this area is vital to not only broadening Asian Australian research but challenging the racial codification of the Reconciliation process as a largely Black/White matter.’ In addition, Ghassan Hage, at the end of *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, writes, ‘until we choose to face and deal with the consequences of our colonial theft, it will remain the ultimate source of our debilitating paranoia,’ thus suggesting that multicultural studies consider issues of Indigenous sovereignty in its own analyses of racialisation in Australia. In invoking these calls for multicultural, Asian Australian, transnational and diasporic approaches to recognise the settler colonial system of racial hierarchy that has and continues to structure racial dynamics in Australia, I also engage with Paul Sharrad’s questions about what role Indigenous literature plays when we see Australian literature as world literature (with its focus on global flows and connections). His concern relates to the terms by which we define the global: Is Aboriginal literature considered global by the academy? Does world literature represent a push to quell the...

---

28 Lo, ‘Disciplining Asian Australian Studies: Projections and Introjections.’
oppositional discourses of postcolonial or anti-colonial studies? For Sharrard, ‘World literature is not the solution to all our problems; it is merely another expression of a set of ongoing problems.’ Although I am not speaking to the question of Indigenous literature as such, a similar question arises at the heart of my critique: What role does Aboriginal Australia play in an analysis of the global flows always affecting Australian national identification?

Brigid Rooney makes the compelling argument that *Japanese Story* deliberately converses with Nicholas Roeg’s *Walkabout*, where an Aboriginal boy (played by David Gulpilil) commits suicide after a white girl rejects his overtures. The film ends somewhat abruptly after this point with the white girl, later in life, reminiscing melancholically about the Aboriginal boy that she rejected. Rooney argues that Sandy’s process of mourning Hiromitsu redresses the abruptness of the death in *Walkabout*. Sandy ‘must move beyond the comfortable, fundamentally complacent melancholy of the settler to shoulder the weight of responsibility’; this treatment contrasts with the death of the Aboriginal boy which ‘is relegated through [*Walkabout*]’s almost amnesic return to settlement, city and future life.’

Instead of an early Freudian conception of mourning where the subject eventually overcomes the pain of loss, where ‘mourning must either come to a healthy end or become pathologically melancholic,’ Felicity Collins and Therese Davis argue that the film maintains an ‘open wound’, doing grief-work that ‘enables us to respond to loss in creative ways that sustain memory rather than deny the pain of loss.’ This film plays out this reconciliation narrative through Sandy’s process of grieving for Hiromitsu.

In the 5 minute long sequence where Sandy attempts to extract Hiromitsu’s body from the waterhole and put it into the back of her four-wheel-drive, she utters at one point ‘Oh God, I’m sorry,’ and the latter section of the film culminates in an apology to Hiromitsu’s wife: ‘I should’ve not let it happen. It was my fault, my responsibility. I’m so sorry.’

---

33 For a reading that ties the dead body to ‘thing theory’ see Lesley Stern, *Dead and Alive: The Body as Cinematic Thing* (Montreal: caboose, 2012).
apology may also constitute a coded apology for past mistreatment of Aboriginal people, and even specifically perhaps the apology to the Stolen Generations which was eventually made by Kevin Rudd in 2008, five years after the film’s release.

However, what can be made of this apology when the film does not significantly feature Aboriginal Australians or explicitly mention reconciliation? The film seems to reinscribe the myth of terra nullius in the way that it erases Aboriginal Australians from its own narrative, and a reconciliation narrative at that: Hiromitsu at one points says of the Australian landscape, ‘There is nothing. It scares me.’ This landscape eventually consumes Hiromitsu, reflecting the colonial associations that the desert has in Australian representation. Meaghan Morris writes that the Australian desert can contain discourses of the sublime that ‘[displace] the often bloody human conflicts of colonial history with a pale metaphysics of landscape in which man confronts the Unknown.’ Hiromitsu is thrust into a deep Unknown; the uncanny, unfamiliar landscape in which white Australians feel ‘out of place.’ The casting of the Japanese male in this reconciliation story – and the collapsing of Aboriginal and Asian narratives into the other – resembles one of the aspects of Hansonism that Perera identifies. She writes that Hansonism achieves its need to consolidate ownership of the land in part by ‘casting the ‘Asian’ as the alien and invader figure, thus (re)usurping the place of the indigene,’ whose sovereignty has been ignored. In recent times, the ‘Muslim’ has come to usurp the place of the Asian. While Rebecca Coyle writes that ‘Euro-Australians need the cathartic process of recuperation and reconciliation from the past in order to progress and fashion a model for the future,’ it’s important to admit the significant limitations of the film’s attempts at a coded Aboriginal reconciliation.

We can read the film as simply attempting to begin a process of reconciliation by acknowledging the significance of loss and creating empathy for others. Before her apology, Sandy speaks to Hiromitsu’s wife in a prepared Japanese statement. Her use of Japanese suggests a gesture of reaching out and a willingness to engage in cross-cultural

35 Gelder and Jacobs, Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation, 23.
37 Coyle, ‘Now You Blokes Own the Place’: Representations of Japanese Culture in Recent Australian Cinema,' 113.
communication – this is far cry from the Sandy we met at the outset of the film. Her experiences with Hiromitsu create a desire to bridge the gap between the two cultures. Sandy’s initial characterisation suggests an emotionally distant woman, unable to connect with others: there are various suggestions of her casual dalliances with men that do not eventuate in any clear emotional attachment. And her friend even says to her, ‘even when you’re here, you’re not here.’ But Sandy’s relationship to Hiromitsu seems to affect her deeply, her raw emotional pain after his death speaks to the extent to which she opened up to him. Similarly, Hiromitsu speaks of the pressures of life in Japan, but in a letter that Sandy receives from his wife (Hiromitsu’s wife is in possession of his belongings and finds this letter that he had apparently intended to give to Sandy before leaving) he says: ‘Now I can be good husband, good father, good man. But today I stand in the desert, the sky is so big, so blue, there is so much space, and my heart is open.’

While the film certainly shies away from an integration, into the mainstream culture, of the transgressive experiences on the road, it does still leave us with an ‘open wound’ – as Collins and Davis say. Both the Australian and Japanese characters have opened their hearts to each other, and Sandy’s grieving process creates empathy for the other and a desire to reconnect – even a responsibility to do so. This may be the first step towards a fuller engagement with both Japan and, potentially, Aboriginal Australians.

Conclusion

The resolution of the film, thus attempts to fold together white Australia’s relationship to Asia and to Aboriginal Australians. It also attempts to reconcile the two competing trajectories of expansion and contraction that I have mentioned earlier. Contraction happens through the internalisation of a national and cultural other, and expansion through the externalisation of suppressed difference in the Australian nation and psyche. The film falls short of including Japan within Australia, and thus defining the Australian cultural space as one that includes Asians. Australia does not become symbolically culturally mixed and neither do the Australian characters become others in any significant way – certainly in comparison to some of the other texts in this thesis. It’s more true to say that Sandy interfaces with difference, and thus opens up to being ‘radically other to what [she is]’, but Hiromitsu’s death minimises the potential for transformation. The transgressive, disruptive,
non-normative interracial relationship that animates the second half of the film must be disavowed and flattened out in order to conform with the dominant culture.

Having said that, the film does constitute the first steps towards what I call ‘becoming others’. Sandy has been touched by difference and reshaped by it, and she makes genuine efforts to open lines of communication with Hiromitsu’s wife. She may not identify with Japanese culture in explicit ways, however, Sandy’s mourning does try to carry an ‘open wound,’ or an openness to difference, into the future. She shows us the importance and the challenges of the first phases of intercultural engagement, and anticipates further engagement. By removing the possibility of including Hiromitsu in the future of Sandy’s Japanese or Australian Story, the film shows us the need for continued cultural exchange. The level of engagement continues and amplifies with the next two road movies that I explore in this section.
2. Surfing the Waves of Transnational Flow in Bondi Tsunami

The *Bondi Tsunami* (2004) website claims:¹

There have been a few Australian films made a [sic] with Japanese characters and themes over the years; Green Tea and Cherry Ripe, Heavens Burning, Goddess of 67, Japanese Story and several documentaries about Japanese living in Australia. However Bondi Tsunami is perhaps the first half Australian/ half Japanese feeling film that feels genuine to both cultural head spaces, dually depicting an Australian and Japanese ‘way of’ in its sense of visual style, philosophy, humour, beauty and pop sensibility.

The mixed racial connotations of director Rachel Lucas’s description of her film as ‘half Australian/ half Japanese’ highlight what some have called the film’s ‘hybridity.’² The film does indeed mix cultural signifiers and stereotypes associated with Australia and Japan, and reflects what Rebecca Coyle calls, ‘the fluid/mobile nature of Japanese residence in Australia and of Australian relations with Japan.’³ The fluidity of the film’s cultural representation is not only reflected in its focus on water and surfing, but also in its sensitivity to the transnational cultural flows coming from Japan into Australia.

In my analysis of this film I explore the ways in which Lucas takes up popular soft power flows from Japan, such as in her incorporation of manga style, cute and cool Japanese sensibilities, and Buddhist philosophy. Much more than Brooks, Lucas consciously attempts to use Japanese cultural references and styles in her characterisation and film making. She’s interested in the cache of Japanese culture, especially its association with capital. But as Koichi Iwabuchi writes, ‘The boundary-violating impulse of cultural flow [is] … never free

---

¹ The website is no longer functioning. The last access date is August 18, 2014. The website had stated that the last update occurred during 2014. Although the author of the website is not strictly known, in this paper they are assumed to be Rachael Lucas for the sake of clarity in citation. Any quotations of Lucas refer to this website unless otherwise indicated.


³ Coyle, 'Now You Blokes Own the Place': Representations of Japanese Culture in Recent Australian Cinema,' 110.
from nationalizing forces.' Transnational flows can often be uneven in nature and do not ‘totally replace the old power relations.’ Thus, in analysing the transnational dynamics of Bondi Tsunami, I also consider where the film finds its limits and reintroduces nationalising impulses. The film exhibits the twin impulses of expansion and contraction observed earlier in Japanese Story. I argue that this film attempts a more robust expansive gesturing in its deliberate and sustained engagement with Japanese soft power. The film also displays a clear sexualisation of the Asian male, but only stages an inexplicit, coded form of sexual consummation between the Asian male and the white woman’s scopophilic gaze on him. This extra-diegetic desire focalised in the gaze is evident in music video sequences that fixate on the Japanese male body. The protagonist’s symbolic melding with the landscape at the end of the film signifies, on the one hand, an inclusion of difference, while at the same time resonating with the previously explored assimilationist desire to contain and consume difference. The end of the film constructs, as in Japanese Story, an integration of the transgressive road traveller into the mainstream discourse. It isn’t until my examination of The Goddess of 1967 (which is, oddly enough, older than the other two films) that we see a narrative that does not conform to this conventional structure.

In exploring the transnational flows exhibited in this film, I respond to my previous analyses of nationalism and assimilation – while at the same time highlighting the inevitable nationalising forces at work in transnational engagements.

Transnational flows and the hyperreal

Bondi Tsunami follows its protagonist Shark, a Japanese surfer who seems to be going through an existential crisis, on his road trip from Bondi Beach to the Gold Coast. Along the way he meets three other Japanese characters: the surfer Yuto, a flamboyant comedian-like personality, Kimiko, a fashionable Harajuku-inspired groupie, and Gunja Man, a spaced out Rastafarian who may or may not be a hallucination. Shark’s voiceover gives a loose narrative to a film shot mostly as a music video: ‘it was created for the Japanese and Asian home entertainment market and for projection (like music videos) on sports screens and at

---

5 Ibid., 48.
nightclubs.”6 Shark pontificates on the meaninglessness, but also beauty, of life in a way that resembles (for director Rachael Lucas) Zen philosophical sensibilities of ‘void’ and ‘emptiness.’7 The four road trippers visit the various oversized monuments peppering the Central Coast – The Big Banana, Pineapple, Merino, Prawn etc. – and surf the waves at beaches along the way. At one point they get stuck in the desert, due to running out of petrol, but eventually make it to the ‘Emerald City’ of the Gold Coast – a nod to the Wizard of ‘Oz’ story.8 The Gold Coast represents paradise, and perhaps the Buddhist Pure Land; there, Shark seems to have an enlightenment moment that resolves his personal narrative of self-discovery. The film draws out this fairly simple plot over various montage sequences, occasional scenes featuring dialogue, and surfing footage.

Delia Falconer writes that after the deregulation of the Australian financial system in the 1980s, and the floating of the Australian dollar on the world market, the Australian film industry went through a ‘corresponding float.’9 Instead of funding Australian films that were primarily for domestic consumption, the Australian film commission began to encourage film makers to attract international investors for their films. In order to do this, Australian films needed to be able to market a particular kind of Australianness to the world; Falconer writes, “Australianness’ consequently emerged as a set of tropes aimed, tactically, at gaining global audiences.”10 Falconer draws connections to Australian mining company commercials that tried to characterise Australians as ‘proud world customer[s].’11 Lucas was unable to attract government funding;12 even the multicultural television channel SBS refused to fund her film. She attributes her difficulties in finding funding to the unconventional nature of the film’s script. She claims that SBS told her something along the lines of, ‘it’s OK to have all these cross-cultural concepts as long as they’re in a ninety page Western three-act script that we can understand.’13 The film ended up being shot with $150

---

6 Coyle, "Now You Blokes Own the Place": Representations of Japanese Culture in Recent Australian Cinema.
8 Ibid.
9 Delia Falconer, ‘“We Don’t Need to Know the Way Home”: The Disappearance of the Road in the Mad Max Trilogy,’ in The Road Movie Book, ed. Steven and Ina Rae Hark Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 252.
10 Ibid., 253.
11 Ibid., 254.
12 Coyle, "Now You Blokes Own the Place": Representations of Japanese Culture in Recent Australian Cinema, 110.
13 Bruce Andrews, 'Searching for a Moment of Perfect Emptiness,' (St Kilda: The Australian Teachers of Media Inc, 2005), 120.
000 of credit card finance,\textsuperscript{14} and although Lucas claims that the crew ‘broke even’ touring the film across various theatres in Australia, the film makers clearly had their eyes set on international capital as this 2005 article shows: ‘Their priority ... is to land a six-figure overseas sale rather than ‘scrape around for twenty dollars’ on a continued Australian tour.’\textsuperscript{15} Lucas says,

\begin{quote}
We all knew that the movie had a market...after all the Japanese Surfing Market was a 5 billion dollar a year industry and no one had made a definitive Japanese surfing movie yet, a Japanese Endless Summer with Japanese in it...let alone a film that was shot in a Japanese fantasy travel location like Australia.
\end{quote}

By banking on the touristic appeal of Australia, especially for the Japanese market, it seems that \textit{Bondi Tsunami} was meant to attract Japanese capital for the film makers as well. Australian film making reflects the touristic ethos of marketing Australia, according to Meaghan Morris, by an opening up of the landscape to mobility and capital.\textsuperscript{16} Clearly this road movie, like \textit{Japanese Story}, showcases the mobility of Japanese tourists within the space of Australia. But unlike \textit{Japanese Story}, this mobility doesn’t end in disaster; \textit{Bondi Tsunami} offers a much more open, welcoming tourist brochure of the nation. The tourism oriented representation in the film exemplifies the openness to transnational flows (in terms of capital, people, and culture) that I argued for earlier. The film’s website even provides information about all the destinations featured in the film, in case ‘you ever wanted to go on your own Bondi Tsunami tour.’ The fact that the film ends at the paradisiacal Gold Coast, a popular destination for Japanese tourists,\textsuperscript{17} also says much about its touristic branding of Australia. Lucas says ‘when I was shooting the movie, I consciously tried to film Australia as it is portrayed in the perfect world of tourism advertising, calendars and postcards etc.’ and this compartmentalisation of the image of Australia for the purposes of marketing and tourism, reflects a trend that Iwabuchi calls ‘brand nationalism’ in transnational soft power: ‘uncritical, practical uses of media culture as resources for the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{17} Yvette Reisinger and Lindsay Turner, ‘Japanese Tourism Satisfaction: Gold Coast Versus Hawaii,’ \textit{Journal of vacation marketing} 6, no. 4 (2000).
enhancement of political and economic national interests, through the branding of national cultures."^{18}

The film got coverage on Japan’s national broadcasting network NHK,\(^{19}\) premiered in Japan at the Aichi World Expo in Nagoya, and had various party screenings around Japan.\(^{20}\) However, like *Japanese Story*, the film never gained distribution in Japan.\(^{21}\) It doesn’t seem to have been able to speak across cultures quite as well as the film makers thought it would, or wanted it to. Nevertheless, the film makers went to a great deal of effort to try and make the film speak to both audiences. The film’s English and Japanese website’s ‘behind the scenes’ information comes under the label ‘Otaku World’: Otaku being the Japanese term for fan (incidentally, the word has negative connotations in Japan and probably would have turned off Japanese visitors to the website). This Otaku world has thirteen sub-categories of information on the film; these categories provide a dizzying array of frameworks through which to view and interpret the movie: ‘A Japanese theme,’ ‘Australian Style/Japanese Cool,’ ‘Zen Philosophy,’ ‘Pop Cinema Fusion,’ etc. This clearly represents an attempt to give weight and substance to a film that can be easily dismissed as empty and over stylised. The cross-cultural ethic of *Bondi Tsunami* is a theme that constantly recurs. We should note that the apparent inability to communicate with Japanese audiences might have been something paralleled at home: the film never had a cinema release, although the Australian manga distributor Madman did release a DVD version. The sales figures of this DVD are not clear.

While writing on the film, after the fact, has tended to focus on its success as a self-funded production\(^{22}\) – Lucas for example published a book in 2007 entitled *Bondi Tsunami Rock n’ Roll Guide to Filmmaking* – nobody seems to regard it a significant financial success. The reception of the film in Australia was rather polarised; while several positive reviews exist,

---

20 Coyle, "'Now You Blokes Own the Place': Representations of Japanese Culture in Recent Australian Cinema,' 110.
many also regarded the unconventional style of *Bondi Tsunami* ‘vacuous postering,’\(^{23}\) ‘hard to watch,’ or ‘frustrating.’\(^{24}\) Thus, while the film contains ambitious cross-cultural fusions, we must also acknowledge the limitations of its intercultural communicative power.

The film itself takes its name from The Bondi Tsunami Australian Japanese Surf Competition that the film’s producer Anthony Lucas Smith had co-organised; the competition ran from 2000-2002.\(^{25}\) Smith and Lucas’s sister, Naomi Lucas Smith, taught English to Japanese students for a total of 8 years in Sapporo and Hong Kong. When returning to Sydney they filled a demand for a combination of English and surfing lessons for Japanese working holiday students. The family connection to Japan, the website writes, goes back to Lucas’s grandmother befriending a Japanese woman in the ‘70s, and this contributed to Lucas’s sister’s interest in Japan and the Japanese language. Lucas herself studied a subject on traditional Japanese theatre, which seems to have contributed to the theatrical ideas in the film. Lucas met Taki Abe and Keita Abe (Yuto and Shark in the film, they share no relation) one New Year’s Eve, she writes:

> I thought that Yuto and Shark were the most gorgeous Japanese guys I’d ever seen... and when we hung out with them on New Years Eve, sitting at Cremorne Point overlooking Sydney Harbour watching them drinking beers, playing the guitar and then huddling under a picnic blanket with one of their Japanese girlfriends - basically acting like a bunch of Aussie blokes, I realized that there was a movie in this.

The mixture of Japanese and Australian attitudes that Lucas sees in Shark and Yuto seems to contribute to the self-conscious process of mixing Japanese and Australian stereotypes and generic styles in the film. For example the film includes occasional splices of manga style comic book stills of the characters, as well as split screen sequences that may also resemble a comic strip look. Lucas wrote her characters as manga types, making the rather problematic but illustrative remark: ‘all the cast were really beginning to understand their roles as subhuman cartoon like characters.’ This reminds us of the 200 page manga *Crocodile Shoichi* published by the Australian government in 1989 for Japanese audiences; it


\(^{25}\) Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.
was intended to ‘maintain tourist interest in Australia.’²⁶ In addition, Lucas intended for the montage sequences, where the road trippers visit the various ‘Big’ monuments around the Central Coast, to ironically resemble a touristic Australian kitsch that might be comparable to what Lucas calls ‘‘cute’ irony’ in Japanese marketing products: ‘just about every company seems to be fronted by a giant fluffy toy or cartoon in Japan, so the silliness of our Big mango looking Pineapple fits in with Japanese sensibility too.’²⁷ Tenuous though the link may be, the self-conscious use of marketing style says much about the influence of Japanese soft power, and the cultural images of both Japanese ‘cute’ and ‘cool.’

Whether a giant pineapple can be ‘manga looking’ or ‘cute irony’ or not, the character Kimiko certainly personifies ‘cute Japan,’²⁸ or kawaii. At one point, in response to Gunja Man saying he travelled to Hawaii, Kimiko says ‘Hawaii? ... Kawaii,’ giggling into her hands. Kimiko wears cute Harajuku outfits, pigtails, collects plush toys, wears at least some pink in every scene, and to exemplify what Christine Yano calls Japan’s cute ‘pink globalisation,’²⁹ she has extended montages where she sucks on pink Pocky sticks and lollipops. Aviad E. Raz writes that, ‘Since the 1990s ‘Cool Japan’ and ‘cute Japan’ have become the dominant international tropes through which Japan markets itself in the global consumerist world.’³⁰

The film draws quite heavily on the pervasiveness of the ‘soft power’ of contemporary Japanese popular culture.³¹ One review for the Triple J radio station asks, ‘has there been a cooler road movie made here in Australia?’³²

Some commentators in Japan compared the globalisation of the Japanese media to the mid-nineteenth century opening up of Japan’s market by American Commodore Perry and his ‘gun boat diplomacy.’ However, as Iwabuchi writes, ‘unlike in the mid-nineteenth century, what is at stake this time seems less a foreign invasion of Japan than a Japanese advance

²⁷ Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.
into global media markets.’ While Iwabuchi criticises some of the Japanese attitudes towards these soft power flows, describing them as ‘superficial and nationalistic observations that people outside Japan are rejoicing in Japanese media culture,’ a similar nationalistic project happens on the Australian side. Producer Anthony Lucas Smith makes the somewhat unrealistic observation that the film, and thus Australia, grants Japan this global cool image: ‘The Japanese are thrilled that they finally look like cool global citizens in an Australian movie – its [sic] quite a big deal for them.’

Lucas says of the generation of Japanese she depicts in her film: ‘This free spirited ‘individualistic’ Nintendo generation of Japanese surfers have a very cool image here.’ The use of style from karaoke videos, manga, and the above association of Japanese cool with Nintendo gaming, reflects what Iwabuchi calls Japan’s ‘culturally odourless’ three C’s: consumer technologies (such as VCRs, karaoke, and the Walkman), comics and cartoon (animation), and computer/video games. The film also exemplifies the gendered nature of cute and cool; Kimiko mostly carries ‘Cute Japan,’ while the male characters, especially Shark, embody ‘Cool Japan.’ The three and half minute long opening credit sequence, comprises mostly of a low angle shot of the toned body of Shark as it glistens in slow motion to chill out music and is subject again and again to mostly Asian women’s sexualising gazes. He wears a cowboy hat and a flannelette shirt around his waist; his cowboy look, punctuated by his calm, stoic persona – making him, according to Henderson and Jetnikoff, ‘part surfer tourist and part samurai warrior.’ If ‘cool’ requires ‘emotional self-control,’ then as Irmela Hijiya-Kirschneriet says, the pervasiveness of the image of the samurai in the West may be related to the ‘coolness’ of the stoic, bushidō samurai culture. In Japanese and Hollywood depictions of the samurai, ‘the ‘samurai ethos’ represents the pinnacle of ‘cool’ masculinity.’ Shark’s sexualisation contributes to his ‘cool,’ but I will interrogate his

---

34 Iwabuchi, ‘Undoing Inter-National Fandom in the Age of Brand Nationalism,’ 89.
35 Lucas-Smith, ‘Bondi Tsunami - Making New Waves’.
36 Coyle, 'Now You Blokes Own the Place': Representations of Japanese Culture in Recent Australian Cinema,' 109.
40 Ibid., 157.
Asian masculinity later in this analysis. Shark’s Zen spiritual messages, a reflection of his *bushidō* persona, also represent yet another kind of cool.

Hijiya-Kirschnereit notes that the rebellious youth of the American Beat Generation have had a formative effect on contemporary notions of cool. Roland Kelts similarly identifies a second wave of Japanophilia that followed the eighteenth and nineteenth century Japonisme interest in Japanese aesthetics. He writes that the second wave happened ‘in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when beatnik writers and poets were drawn to Japan’s ascetic spiritual traditions.’41 Jack Kerouac’s influence on the road movie genre will also be looked at in the section to come, but it suffices to say that *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* typify not only the ‘60s atmosphere of ‘youth, rebellion, and counter-culture’,42 but in the case of *Dharma Bums* an interest in Buddhism and Japanese spirituality.43 Lucas sees her surfers as ‘young, casual, charismatic ‘earthy’ and rebellious...[they are] the young, commitment free generation who trade in marriage, mortgage and a career and kids to ride the eternal student/traveler highway,’ and Shark’s Zen narration adds to this Kerouac aesthetic – a road movie aesthetic that Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark call ‘sentimental existentialism.’44 The drug use in *Bondi Tsunami* and the trippy, hallucination sequences, also reflect this ‘60s feel, adding to the existential voice over that contemplates life, oneness, and void:

> Life is a dream
> A moment of perfect emptiness
> Nothing means anything, Nothing is real
> But what you imagine it to be
> Like sand on the ocean floor I exist
> Or a wave that forms on the horizon,
> I begin and end in my imagination
> I am nothing, an illusion.

---

43 Thank you to Sam Mathews for his extremely helpful ideas on the Beats, hyperreality, and the surfing road movie.
The emptiness and meaninglessness described here by Shark reflects the fact that the film, because of its lack of a substantial script, is largely meaningless in itself. The film was intended to be viewed as a background piece in a club or bar. Lucas also imagined viewers channel surfing in and out of the movie, with their minds switching on and off during the music video sequences. She saw the ‘mindlessness’ of this music video form as a way to free the mind, in a Buddhist sense: ‘interestingly many of these Zen ideals of centuries ago, correlate with the ‘mind freeing’ mantras associated with the experimental drug culture of the 1960’s.’ The highly stylised music video format and Shark’s musings on the nothingness of life give the film its overall form:

It’s always amusing when you get some 21 year old point out that Bondi Tsunami is just all music videos, that has no point [sic], or that it is meaningless- when the meaningless is the meaning. Emptiness or nothingness (mu-the Japanese translation) is [a] difficult philosophical concept for many westerners to grasp unless you have experienced it in some form, or realise you are experiencing it.45

Much like Zen Buddhist priest Ruth Fuller Sasaki’s criticism of the Buddhism in Dharma Bums as ‘the most garbled and mistaken I have read in many a day,’46 I would question whether Zen Buddhist practitioners would regard music videos as reflective of their philosophies. In any case, the appropriation of Zen Buddhist ideas becomes especially interesting when compared against the postmodern concept of the hyperreal that has been used to describe the aesthetic of this film.47 Jean Baudrillard describes the hyperreal as postmodern representation – simulation and simulacra – that no longer represents reality. Simulation has become more real that the real, it is hyperreal; a sign with no referent. The lack of meaning in simulation is ‘directly linked to the dissolving, dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media.’48 The overabundance of information and media reflects Lucas’s thoughts about the way people consume media in the current day, and subsequently why she wanted to make a film that one could drift in and out of: ‘People are very busy these days- they are waiting for DVD’s to come out instead of going to the

45 Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.
47 Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.
cinema, they are downloading films from the net, and when watching a DVD, they often watch half a movie and then get distracted talking on the phone etc.' This mixing of generic forms also represents what Miyoshi and Harootunian describe in *Postmodernism and Japan* as ‘playfulness, gaming, spectacle, tentativeness, alterity, reproduction and pastiche.’ Baudrillard draws on Marshall McLuhan’s work in *The Medium is the Message* to say that, there is not only an implosion of the message in the medium, there is, in the same movement, the implosion of the medium itself in the real, the implosion of the medium and of the real in a sort of hyperreal nebula, in which even the definition and distinct action of the medium can no longer be determined.

Likewise, immersion in the meaninglessness of the media of music videos signifies not only the loss of the message or the meaning, but the meaningless of the medium itself. In contrast to Baudrillard’s position that all meaning has imploded in the face of postmodern mass-media consumption, Lucas holds the similarly ambitious position that meaninglessness creates meaning.

We can see Lucas’s postmodern appropriation of Zen teachings about emptiness and meaninglessness, and her aesthetic of ‘mindless’ music videos, as a conversation between the transnational flows of ‘Cool Japan’ and the nationalising forces of Western stereotyping and commodification of Japanese sensibilities. The desire to represent ‘Westernised’ Japanese – and the various stereotypical images of ‘Cute Japan,’ manga, samurai, and Zen – reflect a ‘contact zone’ (to use Rey Chow’s words) that hybridises Australian and Japanese culture. At the same time however, it also show us places where limited stereotypes could be overcome, where deeper more engaged contact between the two nations might be achieved.

---


50 Baudrillard, 'The Implosion of Meaning in the Media.'
The Beach, the road movie, and masculinity

In Sand in Our Souls Leone Huntsman writes that the beach ‘is frequently invoked as a vivid image of ‘the Australian way of life.”\textsuperscript{51} She sees the beach as holding deep emotional significance to Australian people. It enables a nostalgic return to childhood memories of the beach, and Huntsman contends that when we wade into the deeper waters ‘we relive the experience of immersion, of merging into oneness with the vast undifferentiated matrix.’\textsuperscript{52} This oneness assuages the pain of primordial loss; ‘the sea, always there, though others might vanish, hurt us, abandon us, be unavailable.’\textsuperscript{53} I will return to aspects of the Freudian narrative later. Anne Game sees Bondi as an ideal microcosm for Australia itself. She is interested in the contradictions and tensions between competing ideas of Bondi held by residents, beachgoers, tourists, and those who seek to ‘beautify’ Bondi, detecting ‘little agreement about what constitutes the ‘nature’ or ‘culture’ of Bondi or the relations between them.’\textsuperscript{54} Game sees all these contradictions as equalised under the sun, sea, surf – things she sees all Australians owning.

However the word ‘owning’ has an important operative function here, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll see the beach as a space marked by ‘white possession’;\textsuperscript{55} Captain Phillip’s planting of the flag on the beach and, more recently, the race riots in Cronulla both exemplify this point. Suvendrini Perera’s book Australia and the Insular Imagination ‘takes as its subject those sites where the ideology of the insular is most invisible because it is felt and experienced as utterly natural: the ocean, the beach, the coastline. It is here that [Australia’s] territorialized limits are repeatedly asserted and delimited.’\textsuperscript{56} The beach is the border, the space that separates Australia from all that is not Australian, and thus a space in which the exercise of white sovereign power is particularly pertinent. Perera explores how the insular mentality also governs Australian attitudes towards refugees and boat arrivals. In the practice of surfing, as Clifton Evers observers, the white Western heterosexual male

\textsuperscript{51} Leone Huntsman, Sand in Our Souls: The Beach in Australian History (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 166.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{54} Quoted in ibid., 167.
\textsuperscript{56} Perera, Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats, and Bodies, 2.
surfer inhabits a comfortably dominant position: ‘Even though women, homosexual men, other ethnicities, and the like are surfing in increasing numbers they are still far outnumbered by these men, and sit below them on the pecking order in line-ups in Australia.’\(^\text{57}\) Evers also points out that this culture maintains and reproduces hegemonic masculine behaviours and values.

_Bondi Tsunami_ attempts, perhaps, to redress the centrality of the white, blonde surfer masculinity so pervasive in Australian representations of the beach. The Japanese Australian surfing competition that the film comes out of, and the representation of Shark, disrupt the invisibility of marginalised surfer identities: ‘For the first time, Australian audiences had a Japanese sex symbol. Australians had not seen a Japanese guy in a movie with out [sic] his shirt on before, looking like a tanned confident and cool cowboy- Japanese were either cast as soldiers or dorky business men.’\(^\text{58}\) Baden Offord highlights the cultural androgyny of the Australian beach scene: an androgyny that parallels the gender androgyny of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Life Saver communities that trouble the hegemonic masculinity so often associated with the beach.\(^\text{59}\) He points out that after the Cronulla Riots ‘the federal Immigration ministry and the local council established a program called ‘On the Same Wave’, to promote participation by Australians from very ethnically diverse backgrounds – Chinese, Sudanese, Somali, Lebanese, Syrian, Libyan, etc., – in Surf Life Saving Clubs.’\(^\text{60}\) Thus, _Bondi Tsunami_ itself might be seen as part of a movement towards new culturally and racially inclusive ways of imagining the Australian beach. In addition, the celebration of the desirability of the Asian male, in this film, works in response to the fact that Asian males are often ascribed the qualities of ‘asexuality, effeminacy, and homosexuality’ on screen.\(^\text{61}\) But Shark’s Asian masculinity relies on a mixture of exoticisation and deodorisation: ‘Abe’s exotic islander good looks, charming flirtatious personality and western sense of confidence set him apart from other Japanese male actors of the day that can sometimes struggle to translate to a western audience [my emphasis].’\(^\text{62}\) This representation of Japanese

---

\(^{57}\) Clifton Evers, ‘*The Point*: Surfing, Geography and a Sensual Life of Men and Masculinity on the Gold Coast, Australia,’ _Social & Cultural Geography_ 10, no. 8 (2009): 895.

\(^{58}\) Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.

\(^{59}\) Baden Offord, ‘*Androgynous Ethical Intervention and Living History*,’ _Coolabah_ 3 (2009): 95.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 94.


\(^{62}\) Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.
masculinity differs from the feminising representation of Hiromitsu in *Japanese Story*. The Westernness of Shark’s confidence signals his relationship to hegemonic masculine ideals; Patricia Hill Collins writes that men of colour ‘jockey for position within this hierarchy of masculinities’ to ‘enter the inner circle, often as ‘honorary’ elite White men.’ But a white woman has produced this representation, and as Kumiko Nemoto notes, white women have particular kinds of symbolic capital that men of colour can benefit from association with.

Lucas’s desire to see Shark as a sex symbol clearly shows her directorial, sexualising gaze on the Asian males in the film. This gaze signifies an at once explicit but also disavowed desire; in the opening scene, while one white woman does watch Shark briefly, Asian women’s gazes constitute the overwhelming majority of gazes on his body. The one white woman that Yuto dances with in a bar is a drag queen. So while the sexualisation of the Japanese male represents a clear break from racist stereotyping, we also witness an apprehension about fully identifying with this desire in explicit ways. The figure of Kimiko starts with sexual agency over the two males, but once the sexual tension leads to consummation (with Shark) Kimiko’s sexuality shuts down. She becomes marginalised within the group and mistreated, she becomes cute rather than sexy. In another example of mixed messages about the film’s desire for Shark, Kimiko represent someone apparently unworthy of Shark’s masculinity. Shark has access to Japanese women, but does not desire them. The film binds Shark’s libidinal desire, in the road movie narrative, to the land of Australia: he willingly communes with the space of the Gold Coast beach at the end of the film.

As mentioned earlier Beat Generation writers, such as Jack Kerouac, heavily influenced the road movie genre. His *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums* typify the rebellious escape into the landscape, and alternative existential musings, that we see in *Bondi Tsunami*. David Laderman writes that, ‘Kerouac’s watershed novel [*On the Road*] can be understood, in retrospect, as a ‘master narrative’ for the road movie.’ It articulates the alternative social values that rejected the conservative middleclass materialism of the ‘50s; this rejection would later blossom into 1960s counterculture. Laderman writes that, ‘the somewhat

---

cyclical, meandering quality of the narrative, and Sal’s whimsical first-person narration—
nor in the classical realist vein—both contribute to the novel’s celebration of quest and
transience over destination and stability.’ Lucas borrows from these road movie
conventions in her attempts to see Japanese youths as rebels on the ‘eternal
student/traveller highway,’ with sometimes drug-induced spiritual awakenings and
revelations.

Cohan and Hark write that *On the Road*, and many of the road movie films in the late ‘60s
and beyond, had a distinct queer subtext or at least palpable homoeroticism. *Bondi Tsunami*
typifies this buddy road movie homoeroticism. It starts with the buddy pairing of Shark and
Yuto, but, as Cohan and Hawk note, in the traditional buddy road movie the intimacy
between the two male protagonists ‘created a sexual tension whose relief would have to be
endlessly deferred.’ On more than one occasion Yuto, in his sleep, leans on Shark’s
shoulder; in both cases the two are alone, and Shark shoves Yuto off to defer the sexual
tension in the scene. Kimiko’s presence, momentarily eases the homoerotic tension but also
adds an unstable element to the group. Her introduction, which directly follows a shower
scene with Yuto and Shark, occurs in a montage of sexual saturation; as mentioned earlier
she sucks on Pocky sticks and lollipops over and over again, extreme close-ups of her lips
proliferate, and she flirts with Yuto in order to make Shark jealous. The instability that she
has creates offers no clear direction to a narrative that doesn’t try to be a romance story;
Lucas admits that she ‘ran out of steam at about page 40 with the 3 characters.’

Kimiko’s volatile presence can only be resolved and suppressed with the introduction of
Gunja Man. The shirtless Gunja Man haunts Shark in unusual and intimate ways; a dream
montage highlights their intense shared gaze in several successive shots, and Shark says of
him, ‘When I look at him I see myself, a void, emptiness.’ Gunja Man represents an
ambiguous, libidinal Id to Shark’s pontificating super-ego, and Yuto’s cushioning presence as
the ego. Gunja Man, an other-worldly figure that magically appears in the car, can hardly
speak, and seems to hold some kind of primal, primitive knowledge that Shark attempts to
suppress but ultimately embraces, or at least incorporates, in the denouement. It is no
coincidence that Gunja Man’s first appearance, in Shark’s fitful and surreal nightmares, ends

---

66 Ibid.
with Shark sleeping with Kimiko. So Gunja Man provides the catalyst for the sex between Shark and Kimiko, sex which ultimately disables Kimiko’s sexual agency and marginalises her position within the homoerotic male triad that she has joined.

In one scene, Shark and Yuto tell Kimiko to buy them food at a corner store, but once she walks in, they abruptly drive away. As they wait in the car by the beach Kimiko runs around the landscape in her platform shoes, in what Henderson and Jetnikoff call ‘submissive, tiny geisha steps.’ She goes looking for the two men, holding the food out in the front of her. Eventually she finds them and achieves her goal of serving them food, only to be scolded for not bringing them beer. After sleeping with Kimiko Shark constantly berates her and tells her that she isn’t welcome. When trapped in the desert, Shark orders Kimiko to go and find fuel. The unashamed sexist treatment piled on Kimiko in this film would obviously not be permissible if this were a white woman being mistreated by Japanese men; the male protagonists would no longer represent idyllic sex symbols. As argued earlier, the stifling of Kimiko’s sexual agency, and her transformation into the subjugated and non-threatening ‘Cute Japan,’ prepares the sexualised male other for consumption by the Australian nation, as well as consumption by the inexplicit, closeted desire of the scopophilic gaze.

Road movies create alternative spaces, isolated from mainstream culture, which facilitate transformative processes in the protagonists. If this refashioning of identities in the road movie leads to ‘an ultimate reintegration of road travellers into the dominant culture,’ then Shark’s existential harmonising with the space of the Gold Coast signifies his integration into the Australian dominant culture. His individual, creative and libidinal motivations, which reject Japanese woman as the object of desire, are fulfilled through consumption by the mother country of Australia – that is, through his naturalisation in the landscape. This consumption might represent a hybridising of Australian and Japanese sensibilities, an identification with the global other at the heart of nation formation. But this sequence also contains (sexual) consumption of difference which parallels bell hooks arguments about white sexual consumption of the other in ‘Eating the Other.’

---

68 Henderson and Jetnikoff, 'Exploring Representations of Asian Identities in Films for the Australian Curriculum,' 38.
69 Cohan and Hark, 'Introduction,' 5.
70 hooks, 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance.'
Sitting on the beach at the Gold Coast, Shark ‘reaches a point of spiritual enlightenment’; \(^71\) ‘Nothing is outside the mind,’ he says, ‘a beautiful death, a beautiful life...All is transparent in this perfect moment.’ The deathliness of his enlightenment resembles Barbara Lowe’s connection of the enlightenment principle to Freud’s death drive. \(^72\) As Lucas suggests the film can be read as a montage of memories stemming from Shark’s process of enlightenment: ‘Along the yellow brick road to enlightenment, Shark encounters three ghosts Yuto, Kimiko and the Gunja Man, that are all figments of his imagination, his personal demons, battling for attention as Shark slips in and out of consciousness, between reality and dream.’ In the final sequence the ‘ghost’ of Gunja Man features prominently, he flickers in an out of both the landscape and Shark’s dreams; Gunja Man seems to be impressing a deeper message onto Shark, and demanding acknowledgement. Gunja Man may represent the Id, suppressed desire, or perhaps even the death drive, but he just as equally represents Indigeneity. His characterisation as primitive, his juxtaposition with Uluru in his introduction sequence, and a scene where he randomly catches a boomerang in the air, all indicate this. Much like *Japanese Story*, then, Japan paradoxically represents Aboriginal Australia. \(^73\) By the end of the film, Shark’s ghosts seem to dissolve into him, and he himself disappears into the beach; close up shots of his face continually fade out into images of the beach, the waves, and the city of the Gold Coast. While we might read this naturalisation as Shark becoming Australian, there’s also a strong incorporative logic here – especially if we consider it a reintegration of alterity into the dominant cultural space of the city. Difference does not interact with Australians or Australia is any transformative way – throughout the film the Japanese tourists largely keep to themselves – rather, the difference is flattened out. By witnessing Shark ‘dying’ into the landscape we, yet again, see a necrophillic politics that disarms and consumes difference. We also see a limited gesturing towards Indigenous Australia in the way the finale combines the desert, the beach/Ocean, and the city, and therefore amalgamates Indigenous Australia, Asia, and white Australia. Like in *Japanese Story* Indigenous people are marked by a present absence – Japanese people and the landscape stand in for them.

---

\(^71\) Lucas, ‘Bondi Tsunami Website’.


\(^73\) Rooney, ‘Desert Hauntings, Public Interiors and National Modernity: From the Overlanders to Walkabout and Japanese Story.’
The film certainly represents the kind of contact zone that I explored in my introduction through Rey Chow’s writing on stereotype. It brings generic and stereotypical signifiers of Australian and Japanese culture together and mashes them into a hybrid, cross-cultural product. It offers a more inviting attitude towards Japan and Japanese culture than *Japanese Story* does, in the way that it references and incorporates Japanese soft power cultural flows. However, the denouement – as in *Japanese Story* – replays the contractive impulse of national construction and falls short of the kind of intercultural future that we will see in *The Goddess of 1967*. While the film attempts to become Japanese, in a sense, through its incorporation of Japanese elements, and certainly offers moments of becoming, it does not offer the kind of becoming that I wish to prioritise. This is because of a lack of an ethos of ongoing cultural engagement, as well as the assimilative impulses, at the end of the film. This is not to suggest that becoming others always necessitates ongoing cultural engagement, or that nationalising forces can ever be non-existent (or that they are always a negative influence). Indeed, sometimes moments of becoming that do not lead to ongoing engagement are important and necessary. Sometimes we are not ready for more, or it doesn’t feel safe. *Bondi Tsunami*’s engagement with Japan signifies an important step in the cross-cultural identification process that I put forward in this thesis. Without proposing a prescriptive argument for how to go about intercultural engagement, ultimately, I argue for the benefits of becoming others in intercultural interactions that do have the ability to stay open to the possibility of continuing and developing cross-cultural interactions.
3. The Road to Intercultural Engagement, and The Goddess of 1967

In *The Goddess of 1967*, Law makes the contact between Asia and Australia literal or physical in a scene where the two protagonists of the film, Yoshiyasu and Deirdre, share a room together for the first time on their road trip through the outback. When the blind Deirdre asks Yoshiyasu to tell her something about himself he says, ‘I am a man, a Japanese man’; as in *Japanese Story*, we see a primordial moment of contact, a first contact. She replies, ‘I can’t imagine what a Japanese man would look like,’ and he, ‘I look like a human being.’ She asks whether she can touch his face to get a sense of what he looks like, and he agrees. This scene is dark lit, and like much of the film unhurried and sensitive to the tentative emotions of its characters. The subtle sounds of the pool outside and the flickering purple light in the background – the outdoor lights or perhaps moonlight bouncing off the pool and caressing the sides of the motel room – create an ambient and transporting atmosphere that heightens the palpably intimate feelings emanating from the screen. Slowly, through Yoshiyasu’s nervous breathing, Deirdre touches his forehead, eyes, nose, and traces his lips. She licks his shoulder and smells him, following his scent down to his lower body before he recoils. Yoshiyasu does not seem ready to reciprocate Deirdre’s apparent sexual desire.

This ‘contact’ represents the start of what becomes an intimate sexual relationship, a relationship that forms during Deirdre’s journey to confront her sexually abusive father. The road trip she takes Yoshiyasu on is later revealed to be an apparent revenge mission in which she intends to kill her abuser. As Hilary Harris notes, the father signifies the abuses of colonialism,¹ and in the process of embracing her love of Yoshiyasu, Deirdre symbolises an Australia that confronts its colonialist past; turning its back on colonial identification, it pursues future contact, journeying, and identification with Asia.

Unlike in the previous two films, the Japanese male protagonist doesn’t die (literally or metaphorically) in *The Goddess* – rather, he continues his road journey with Deirdre into the unknown future. The film thus breaks with the incorporative moment conventional to the

---

¹ Hilary Harris, ‘Desert Training for Whites: Australian Road Movies,’ *Journal of Australian Studies* 8, no. 86 (2005).
road movie genre. It also envisions a future of ongoing engagement rather than retraction from that possibility. The protagonists disidentify with aspects of their cultural and national identity, and become others through identification with their culturally different counterpart. By showing how becoming others combines with a message of sustained intercultural engagement in the film, I show the benefits of joining these two elements – rather than only having one or the other.

The intercultural conversation happening within the film also parallels that happening in the criticism surrounding it. Due to Law’s transnational history, writing on this film comes out of Australia as well as Asia and the US. The reception of the film in Australia is markedly different to its international reception: among other awards The Goddess won Best Actress (Rose Byrne) at the Venice Film Festival in 2000, Best Director at the Chicago International Film Festival, and the FIPRESCI Critics’ Award for Best Film at the Tromso Film Festival in Norway. Most Australian criticism however tends to reflect Tony Mitchell’s argument that the wary reception of the film in Australia might have been due to the film’s ‘uncertainties in dealing with its more normative Australian aspects.’ These kinds of criticisms about cultural authenticity – that the film ‘is not enough of an Australian Story’ – reflect Audrey Yue’s arguments about the difficulties inherent in Asian Australian texts being read through an ethnic lens: they ‘are either perceived as too stereotypically Asian ... [or] not Asian enough.’ I attempt to create a conversation between the various international interpretations of the film, and show how this can enrich our understanding of the intercultural potential created by the film itself. Much of the international literature centres on how The Goddess highlights the transnationalisation of Hong Kong cinema, and Australian criticism tends to focus on how the film transnationalises Australian cinema. I attempt to find a middle ground between these perspectives and show how the film reflects the transnational nature of both Australian and Hong Kong cinemas. This chapter does not conduct an in depth study of the criticism itself, however. Instead, I use both national

---

approaches to illuminate the unique cross-cultural forms of becoming taking place in this film.

*Asian Australia and Inter – Asia*

Born in Macau in 1957, Clara Law moved to Hong Kong with her family at the age of ten. She graduated in English at the University of Hong Kong and worked at Radio Television Hong Kong for four years. Within this organisation several Second Wave directors honed their filmmaking trade skills. In 1982 she went to study at the National Film and Television School in England. Upon Law’s return in 1985 she entered a prolific period of film making, and in the 1990s several of her films were characterised by meditation on the nature of pre-reversion Hong Kong identity. As Hoi F. Cheu writes,

> Her diasporic character was not formed after her relocation to Australia, for she contemplated the themes of immigration and cultural dislocation even in her early films. Her ‘diasporic multicultural cinema’ is a product of Hong Kong’s unique social political situation. Anyone who watches Hong Kong movies, particularly those made between 1982 and 1997, the years before the British returned the city to China, will find that Clara Law’s films are thematically connected to the city’s postcolonial transition.

For instance, in *A Farewell to China* a young couple from mainland China immigrate to the US; in *Autumn Moon* Pui-Wai Li anticipates moving to Canada; and in *Wonton Soup* (1994) a Chinese-Australian visits his girlfriend in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, in *Floating Life* (1996) a family from Hong Kong adjusts to their new life in an Australian suburb while another of the same family Yen Chan (played by Annette Shun Wah) lives in Germany with her German husband and mixed race child.

In 1995 Law moved to Australia with her partner and collaborator Eddie Fong. Much of Law’s family immigrated to Australia in the 1980s, and Dian Li notes the varied motivating factors for Law’s move: ‘Her personal fear of the handover was a factor, but perhaps more

---

importantly Law had found herself at increasing odds with the demands of the Hong Kong film industry for generic repetition and quick profit. Hong Kong cinema was also going through a slump during the 1990s, which was exacerbated in 1997 by the Asian financial crisis. In Law’s 2009 film Like a Dream, an Australia/China/Hong Kong co-production, and her most recent film The Unbearable Lightness of Inspector Fan (2015), a Hong Kong-Chinese co-production, Law seems to be returning to the industry she left in the 1990s. Indeed, many attribute the rebound in the Hong Kong film industry, in 2009, to the recent trend towards Hong Kong-China co-production. However, as Mariana Szeto notes, this comes at the expense of ‘mainlandization’ which can be a danger to the Hong Kong industry.

In contrast to Law’s films that focus on Chinese migrants, The Goddess attempts to communicate more explicitly with the Australian film tradition, especially in its adoption of both an outback narrative and the road movie genre made famous by films such as Walkabout (1971), Mad Max (1979), Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994). In The Goddess JM (Japanese Man), also known as Yoshiyasu Yanagiya (played by Rikiya Kurokawa), is a hedonistic consumerist from Tokyo who also has an obsession with collecting reptiles. He steals a large sum of money electronically, and flees to Australia in order to buy a 1967 Citroën DS nicknamed ‘déesse’ in French or ‘the goddess.’ At the house in Australia, where Yoshiyasu had intended to buy the Citroën, he finds instead the blind BG (Blind girl), or Deirdre Svidraigalov (Rose Byrne) whose initials are D.S. Deirdre’s uncle, who was to sell Yoshiyasu the car – despite the fact that he was not the rightful owner – has, according to Deirdre, shot his wife and himself during an argument about the money to be exchanged for the car (it may be the case that Deirdre herself shot her aunt and uncle). Deirdre offers to take Yoshiyasu on a five-day road trip into the outback where the owner of the car lives – that way Yoshiyasu can buy the car off them. Throughout this road trip we see flashbacks to both characters’ pasts and the growing relationship between them lead to sexual intimacy.

---

9 Mirana M. Szeto, 'Sinophone Libidinal Economy in the Age of Neoliberalization and Mainlandization: Masculinities in Hong Kong Sar New Wave Cinema,' in Sinophone Cinemas, ed. Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo (Basingstoke: Basingstoke, 2014), 126.
The owner of the car is Deirdre’s father, also her grandfather, who sexually abused both herself and her mother. In this sense, Deirdre’s blindness can be read as both a consequence of incest and also a gender inversion of the Oedipus myth, where Oedipus blinds himself on discovering that he has married his mother. The father has grown deranged in his old age, living alone in an underground mine. Deirdre’s confrontation with her traumatic past climaxes as she descends the mine, finds her father/grandfather, and holds a gun to his head, battling her strong desire to kill him. She decides, in the end, to let him live and goes on to continue the road trip with Yoshiyasu in the Citroën; he has her cover his eyes as they drive blindly together into an unknown future.

As mentioned earlier, a large portion of the academic writing on The Goddess comes from outside Australia, primarily Asia and the US (unlike the other films I focus on). Most of these critics locate the film within the internationalisation of Hong Kong Second Wave cinema. The second wave of Hong Kong cinema (1970s-1980s) followed a movement called the Hong Kong New Wave (1980s-1990s) which was influenced by not only French New Wave Cinema, but also the emergence and popularity of Cantonese language television in the 1970s and 1980s in Hong Kong. Cheu argues that in this period of the increased popularity of Hong Kong style in its television, pop songs etc. ‘Hong Kong’s local culture was formed.’

In the late seventies Cantonese films increased in number, and by 1980 they dominated the Hong Kong film market. It was during this time that several young film makers such as Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Patrick Tam made a name for themselves. Many of them were trained in television companies or what were dubbed the ‘Shaolin Temples’ of the New Wave.

In 1984 Sino-British negotiations established the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. Amidst the atmosphere of political uncertainty a second wave of directors emerged which included people such as Wong Kar-wai, Mabel Cheung, Law, and Stanley Kwan. According to Yingchi Chu, the second wave became ‘a forum for the construction, exploration, and questioning of Hong Kong’s sense of nationhood.’ However, these director’s films do not

---

11 Cheu, Cinematic Howling: Women’s Films Women’s Film Theories, 128.
necessarily explore nationhood in a limiting sense. Due to the nation’s history, as a British colony as well as its linguistic and cultural distinctiveness from mainland China, Hong Kong has a hybrid cultural history that garners ambivalent senses of belonging and identity. By pointing out the transnational interconnections in this wave of cinema we come to a more complicated and nuanced notion of the ‘Asia’ within Asian Australian. As Law’s diasporic preoccupations testify to, Hong Kong national identity was often one characterised by displacement, unbelonging and/or transnational interconnections. As Cheu observers,

Hong Kong films are a bit of everything, yet do not quite fit into anything. The city’s people, in general, trust the illusion of democracy implanted by Britain’s colonial government more than China’s capitalistic communism, so they are caught in a double political contradiction. Whether they stay in Hong Kong or emigrate to other countries, they always feel dislocated. In fact, most people in Hong Kong come from somewhere else in China, and usually retain knowledge of their geographical origins.\(^\text{15}\)

Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam point out how global economic changes have fostered globally connected film industries, such as Hong Kong’s, that create culturally hybrid products which cross national and linguistic borders: ‘as Hong Kong filmmakers do business throughout the Pacific, with Hollywood, and the rest of the world, the good, the bad, and the ugly of global film culture find their reflections within Hong Kong films.’\(^\text{16}\) For Esther Yau Hong Kong films create ‘culturally androgynous worlds,’\(^\text{17}\) and are ‘about the circulation of hybrid cultural discourse in a world that is presumably without borders.’\(^\text{18}\) On a slightly different note, Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo use Shu-mei Shih’s conceptualisations of the ‘Sinophone,’ to set up what they call ‘Sinophone Cinema’. ‘Sinophone’ encompasses ‘a range of Chinese language cultural productions that have emerged on the margins of China and the global Chinese diasporas.’\(^\text{19}\) Rather than focusing on nationality or ethnicity, Shih

\(^{15}\) Cheu, *Cinematic Howling: Women’s Films Women’s Film Theories*, 127.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 19.
considers how marginal Chinese identities evolve in different places and times: the ‘sinophone’ is ‘a place-based, everyday practice and experience, and thus it is a historical formation that constantly undergoes transformation reflecting local needs and conditions.’\textsuperscript{20} Yiman Wang sees Sinophone Cinema through the seemingly deliberate mixed metaphor of ‘a network of alter-centres or nodes that interweave into a symphony or cacophony.’\textsuperscript{21} Law’s work typifies this ‘Sinophone’ tradition because of its examinations of the unique marginal identity of Hong Kong, as well as its attention to the diasporic experiences of Hong Kong migrants.

In Meaghan Morris’s exploration of Hong Kong action cinema, she criticises the ‘implicitly national cinema approach’ of much ‘multicultural’ American and British film criticism that takes a ‘global Hollywood’ stance – seeing American stories writ onto the world stage.\textsuperscript{22} In Morris’s introduction to \textit{Hong Kong Connections} she prefers Esther M.K. Cheung and Chu Yiu-Wai’s model which, rather than assigning Hong Kong cinema with any single name or label, attempts to ‘take account of the ‘various kinds of mutations that Hong Kong is caught up with [including transnational cinema, and we might include sinophone, and New and Second wave cinema],’ and to emphasise ‘the multiplicity of cinematic expressions’ to which this variety continues to give rise.’\textsuperscript{23} In highlighting the various transnational and national dimensions of the movements in which Law’s work might be conceptualised I draw attention to the various Asian cultural dynamics that she converses with and therefore brings to her Australian cinematic productions. Catherine Simpson, Renata Murawksa and Anthony Lambert point out, in \textit{Diasporas of Australian Cinema}, that ‘diasporic publics and subjects might superimpose ‘a network of transnationalities on to a territorially bound nation state.’\textsuperscript{24} Thus, Asian diaspora is ‘a starting point to consider how Asian Australian cinema offers ways to rethink the transnationality of Australian cinema.’\textsuperscript{25} As we can see, this film mixes the complex cultural questions inherent in the changing and fluid nature of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{20} Ibid.
\bibitem{23} Ibid., 11.
\bibitem{24} Khoo, Smaill, and Yue, \textit{Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Asian Diasporas}, 9.
\bibitem{25} Ibid., 7.
\end{thebibliography}
the concepts of Asia and Australia and their relationship to film. By highlighting the Hong Kong (and more broadly Asian) cultural questions governing this film, I broaden the cultural and critical framework of Australian or national approaches to cinema – as recent Asian Australian Studies projects have done. In addition, by placing *The Goddess* within Asian contextual concerns, we can see how diasporic Australian cinemas show how Australian cultural products reflect not simply limited national concerns but broader regional ones too.

As Cheu notes: ‘In the Goddess of 1967, the diasporic sensibility [of Law’s oeuvre] is transferred into otherness and morphed into metaphor. The theme of cultural dislocation comes forth through a meeting between a young Australian blind girl (BG) and a Japanese man (JM).’26 The theme of dislocation or displacement reflects, for Li, a ‘pathology of place’ typical of the Hong Kong Second Wave. Li relates this so called pathology to the anxieties surrounding the 1997 hand over and the ambiguous senses of belonging and place it created. These ambiguous representations of place are for Li ‘a strategy to negotiate between the self and a transnational space in constant mutation.’27 He goes on to say,

*The Goddess of 1967* not only exhibits the typical characteristics of Chinese transnational cinema described by Sheldon Lu such as funding, distribution, targeted audience and film festival endorsements, but it depicts the formation of a transnational subjectivity that truly transcends national and cultural boundaries. 28

In an interview with Elise McCredie, Law describes her relationship to place as such: ‘I think I’m attached to things in bigger terms, things that are beautiful…but I’m not especially attached to any place.’29 As Law and the aforementioned critics point out, *The Goddess* explores the transnational experience of diaspora and displacement. A Japanese male’s move to Australia speaks to larger Asian, even global, experiences of migration and international movement. These cross sections between Australian and transnational experience disrupt the easy categorisations of an Asian Hong Kong second wave cinema and an Australian cinema.

26 Cheu, *Cinematic Howling: Women’s Films Women’s Film Theories*, 129.
28 Ibid., 136.
In addition, embedded within the notion of Asia we see a complex interplay between different Asian perspectives. Law’s use of Japanese characters in *The Goddess* and *Autumn Moon* speaks to certain inter-Asia interconnections. In *Autumn Moon*, the Japanese character Tokio symbolises the modernity of his namesake Tokyo ‘to help highlight the transitional state of pre 1997 Hong Kong.’ Law uses the same blue filter on skyscrapers and urban cityscapes in both films to highlight the dreary monochromatic modernity of both Hong Kong and Tokyo. For Shen, ‘the insertion of such Japanese figures, whether into the Hong Kong or Australian context, brings out an intercultural zone,’ and for *Autumn Moon* this intercultural mixing is highlighted by Japan and Hong Kong’s shared mixture of Asian and Western social identities. As Chen writes, Japan, through its process of modernisation and Westernisation – starting in the 19th century with the Meiji Restoration and revamped of course in the post-WW2 rebuild – precipitated a scenario in Asia where ‘the periphery (Japan) sought to replace the center (China), significantly altering power relations in the region.’ Furthermore, according to Sun Ge,

> The awareness of the Asia question as being problematic was only sensed by those countries situated on the peripheries, as opposed to in the centre, which had undergone both struggles for survival and cultural crises. Hence, it is not at all a coincidence that we learn more about the question of Asia from Japanese intellectual history than from China’s.

The question of whether to become Western or become Asian has motivated Japanese nationalism and scholarship for most of its modern period, as Sun notes. It also sparked similar questions about Asian/Western national identities in the region. In *Autumn Moon* Japan could signify, through Tokio, a unique Asian/Western hybrid identity that Law looks to as a kind of example in the lead up to the transition. Indeed, the wistful and entrancing denouement of the film, where Pui-Wai and Tokio celebrate their own cultural variations on the shared custom of the moon festival, creates a distinctly inter-Asia sentiment. For some Asian intellectuals Inter-Asia cultural ties create important interconnections in the region.

---

31 Ibid.
For example at the turn of the 20th century Sun Yat-sen highlighted the shared Confucian values, and what he called the ‘kingly way,’ in various Asian countries in order to put forward his notion of ‘Great Asianism.’ Others highlight the cultural and economic ties that linger in Asia due to the historic tributary system implemented by China, framing the trans-state suzerainty network as something that predates Western sovereignty and which still lingers in inter-Asia relations. Although Wang Hui notes that historical suzerainty/sovereignty and tributary/capitalist divisions are not as clear cut as they might seem.\(^34\)

Lisa Yuk-Ming Leung highlights the popular success of Japanese television in Hong Kong, especially in the 1990s with the release of dramas such as *Tokyo Love Story* (1991) and *Long Vacation* (1996). She writes that ‘Japanese idol dramas have swept throughout Asia — Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, China, Singapore, and Thailand.’\(^35\) She examines the ways in which Hong Kong audiences translate the Japanese *ganbaru* mentality (striving for something better) into their everyday local experiences. Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh highlight that Japanese dramas and ephemera are part of ‘a trendy pan-Asian youth culture.’\(^36\) Although the influence of the Korean wave in recent times has probably eclipsed Japan’s popular culture influence in the region.\(^37\) In addition, Koichi Iwabuchi argues that the ‘intense sympathy many young East/ Southeast Asians have come to feel toward the characters in Japanese Dramas,’\(^38\) creates a sense of ‘cultural proximity’ not necessarily as a result of past cultural ties but as a result of a shared experience of modernity.\(^39\) Perhaps the presence of Japanese leads in Law’s films can be partly attributed to the romantic ideal that Japanese characters embodied at this time. Of course Iwabuchi is quick to point out that the success of Japanese dramas is ‘interwoven with the power relations and geopolitics

---

\(^36\) Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, ‘Vcd as Programmatic Technology: Japanese Television Drama in Hong Kong,’ ibid., 227-8.
\(^39\) Ibid., 12.
embedded in the history of Japanese imperialism and colonialism.\textsuperscript{40} He sees the culturally odourless Japanese consumer products disseminated in Asia as covering over still unresolved issues in inter-Asia relations related to the Second World War: ‘the most notorious is Japan’s avoidance or refusal to take responsibility for its part in the war and its inability to offer an official apology and compensation for its victims.’\textsuperscript{41}

As Australian critic Tony Mitchell notes, ‘The thematic risks in [The Goddess’s] Outback encounters, and its uncertainties in dealing with its more normative Australian aspects no doubt influenced its rather wary reception in Australia; responses elsewhere appear to have been less cautious.’\textsuperscript{42} This wary reception extends to the critical receptions of those like Mitchell. He claims that Law is ‘[unfamiliar] with the film’s outback setting,’\textsuperscript{43} that the film is a ‘loosely defined road movie,’\textsuperscript{44} a film ‘much less fully realised than its predecessor, partly because it is reaching across to different cultural bases from Law’s familiar grounding in Chinese cultural formation.’\textsuperscript{45} While Mitchell sees Law’s reaching across into the cultural bases of Australia and Japan as risky and essentially a failure, I consider this aspect to be the strength of the film. Mitchell’s critiques of the film’s form – its ‘lack of structural cohesion,’ its inability to engage the audience’s sympathy, its ‘inconsequential exchanges’ between its protagonists, its ‘overly dramatic set pieces’ etc. – are difficult to argue with.\textsuperscript{46} However when Mitchell argues that ‘the characters in The Goddess of 1967 are rather dwarfed and overwhelmed by the film’s Outback environment and do not manage comparable impact to the Chan family in Sydney [from Floating Life],’\textsuperscript{47} one does have to ask: what exactly is the appropriate relationship to the Outback Mitchell imagines will create sufficient Asian impact on Australia? Perhaps it is exactly the ‘unfamiliarity,’ which Mitchell highlights, that we should take interest in. Should we not explore the consequences and uniqueness of this tentative cultural conversation with Australia, rather than point out its lack of cultural authenticity? In addition, the film is often conceived of within national discourses. In The Cinema of Australia and New Zealand Wendy Haslem’s analysis centres on how Law’s films

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism, 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Mitchell, ‘Hong Kong-Australian Imaginaries: Three Films by Clara Law,’ 102.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 98.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 102.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
have ‘enriched Australian filmmaking culture’\textsuperscript{48} by bringing the Second Wave interests in cultural identity and transformation to Australia. In ‘Desert training for whites,’ Hillary Harris highlights that Deirdre’s intercultural relationship with Yoshiyasu allows ‘a homeless refugee from white modernity [to] begin the long process of re-making home in the desert’ – thus focusing on how relationships with the ‘other’ further a white protagonist’s ties to ‘home,’\textsuperscript{49} where ‘home’ becomes symbolic of Australia. Like most of the Australian critics, Mitchell does not ask why the film had such international success. It may be that the Australian critics are over-invested in the national symbolism and metaphor they want the film to engage with. This may not reflect an explicitly nationalist agenda, however it does reveal the embedded perspectives of some Australian scholarship.

I recall here Wenche Ommundsen’s argument about the limits to Australian critics’ transnational horizons. She asks us to consider transnational criticism that we don’t necessarily agree with as still ‘culturally productive.’\textsuperscript{50} I ask us to think about this film in the same way. Rather than criticising Law for her supposed inability to speak to Australian film and cultural values, perhaps we should be asking questions about the nature of the Australian viewership’s values. The weakness of the aforementioned critiques lies, for me, in their inability to think outside of a narrowly defined national audience reception. They also conceive of the film within a largely national paradigm; the metaphorical readings of Australian nationhood in the film, I argue, only take into account part of the film’s unique messages. The transnational elements also need adequate attention.

As mentioned earlier, my analysis does not offer an in depth examination of the transnational criticism itself. Rather, I have attempted, in the textual analysis that follows, to use the transnational criticism to draw attention to the different national and cultural concerns governing this film. The film explores becoming others and cross-cultural identification for both the Australian and Asian characters. It combines the national perspectives of Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia to focus on an intercultural interaction between these points of view. In a way that furthers my argument for this section, the two focal perspectives of Japan and Australia are changed by each other, and the two characters


\textsuperscript{49} Harris, ‘Desert Training for Whites: Australian Road Movies,’ 109.

\textsuperscript{50} Ommundsen, ‘Transnational (II)Literacies: Reading the “New Chinese Literature in Australia” in China,’ 85.
Asian Australian Interconnections

One of the most ‘touching’, brilliant and painful sequences in the film is the dance sequence where Deirdre and Yoshiyasu visit an old pub that Deirdre’s grandmother used to frequent. Deirdre asks the bartender in the dimly lit, sparsely populated pub whether he knows of a woman called Esther (Deirdre’s grandmother). She used to dance at the pub back in 1969, she says. When Deirdre opens the question up to the pub her search for her family history in this space – and in a sense her search for her own personal history – is abruptly cut off when an elderly male says, ‘There were three Esthers in ’69…I screwed them all,’ and laughs cruelly. Deirdre wants to dance, and when the juke box turns on, playing ecstatic rock music she shouts at Yoshiyasu, ‘Can you teach me how to dance?’ He has trouble showing her at first, but in a way that recalls the earlier touching sequence he takes her hands and traces his body with them as he dances. Light shines like a spot light on the two of them as they take up the dance floor; it is as if they are on a theatre stage. No-one else is dancing. Yoshiyasu shows Deirdre, through the sense of touch, how to move her body and her feet. As she learns how to move and to dance in time with Yoshiyasu her demeanour changes and the two of them feel the excitement and joy of moving and connecting in this intimate, isolated event of dance. But what makes this scene so powerful is its synergy with a later scene where Deirdre’s father dances with her mother, as a child, in this same pub. In this scene, when Deirdre’s father is not yet a sexual abuser, he hides the pain of the loss of his wife Esther (Deirdre’s grandmother) by dancing desperately and furiously with his daughter. He holds her up and turns her around in harsh movements that show the pain and disillusionment he tries to suppress – his actions also foreshadow the violence he will later inflict on his daughter. The father at once wants to dance and connect with his late promiscuous wife, but he also wants to cover up the pain of loss, he wants to crush it with his love of his daughter – he uses his daughter as a substitute for his wife so that he can feel through her a love that was perhaps never reciprocated. This scene, and the film itself, does not represent an apologia for sexual abuse. Law attempts to paint as broad a picture of this father figure as she can. While some commentators have called the film ‘a cold and
misanthropic work,'\textsuperscript{51} I agree with Cheu who says that Law makes sure not to ‘moralize’ in her depiction of this grandfather character.\textsuperscript{52} Law says:

Even with this really monstrous, or you know this character that has gone totally the wrong way I feel that I understand him, you know, and have a kind of compassion for him. For how his life has taken a turn that leads him into such action.\textsuperscript{53}

Law creates a balanced representation of the father, ‘leaving the audience to ponder the missing links,’\textsuperscript{54} and decide on their own opinions of the character. In the dance scene with Yoshiyasu, part of Deirdre’s desire to dance is a desire to connect with her lost, absent grandmother, a grandmother whose loss led to the cruel abuse that her grandfather/father inflicted on herself and her mother. She also channels her mother’s dance with her father in this same pub. Deirdre’s dance with Yoshiyasu is tinged with the fleeting moment of innocent and yet devastating connection between her father and mother.

Deirdre and Yoshiyasu seem to bask in the warmth of the spot light and the incredibly intimate space that it creates. They revel in the fun of the dance, and they revel in each other’s presence too. Deirdre jumps on Yoshiyasu and kisses him, he picks her up and spins her around, he howls with joy as the dance sequence continues. The camera pans and follows Deirdre in her ecstasy and then stops and observes as she lets herself go, moving with the music, moving as her mother, with Yoshiyasu. But the exquisite joy of Deirdre discovering dance, discovering her body, Yoshiyasu, as well as the joys of her grandmother’s life, in hindsight, is also layered, in a masterful way, with the pain and tragedy of Deirdre and her father’s pasts. Not only that, but she also dances as a form of liberation from that man, just as her grandmother Esther did. She is her grandmother, her mother, and herself, escaping the clutches of her father and embracing Yoshiyasu in the process. Her ecstatic freedom of expression carries deep pain as well as an intergenerational moment of emancipation from suffering. Her liberation from her father and her growing closeness to Yoshiyasu are furthered by the later sex scene as well as the denouement of the film.

\textsuperscript{51} Mitchell, ‘Hong Kong-Australian Imaginaries: Three Films by Clara Law,’ 98.
\textsuperscript{52} Cheu, \textit{Cinematic Howling: Women’s Films Women’s Film Theories}, 138.
\textsuperscript{53} Special features of \textit{The Goddess of 1967} DVD.
\textsuperscript{54} Cheu, \textit{Cinematic Howling: Women’s Films Women’s Film Theories}, 138.
Yoshiyasu, thus, represents an alternative masculinity to the perverse Australian one that Deirdre wishes to escape from.

As the two get closer to Deirdre’s former home, her anxiety increases. She nervously eats sweet foods, reminding us of the connection between consumption (and ‘dessert’) and loss that we see in *Japanese Story*. In addition, her need for sex becomes pronounced and she asks Yoshiyasu to sleep with her in another motel that they stop at on their journey. While the first half of the film does have its fragmented elements, and the motivations of the characters are not fully evident, the lead up to the denouement movingly links the physical and psychic narratives so that the potentially disjointed narrative aspects cohere, indicating a clear emotional direction to the film. This scene indicates the hold that Deirdre’s father has on her mind and body, but she attempts, in the lead up to her confrontation with him, to free herself from that hold and reclaim her body and sexual desire for herself. The pain of this sex act is evident when Deirdre cries abjectly as she sits on top of Yoshiyasu.

This scenario, with the white woman on top, recalls the power imbalance explored in our analysis of the sex scene in *Japanese Story*. Olivia Khoo reads the scene with Deirdre ‘on top’ as showing that ‘Cross-cultural exchange and understanding is made to be heterosexually resolvable, but only through a reconfiguration of gender relations applied to a hierarchy of race.’ The film certainly contains a level of Orientalism that may reflect a need to appeal to the white Australian part of Law’s audience. The sexually naïve and anxious Yoshiyasu does differ from the sexually adventurous, passionate and promiscuous Asian masculinities in *Autumn Moon* and *Floating Life*. Although, we should note that, in these previous films, Law also provides a particular feminist critique through the disconnection that these sexually aggressive males feel. Their lack of emotional contact with women has sent them into personal crises: in *Floating Life* Gar Ming’s obsession with the length of sex suggests problems with premature ejaculation. This crisis of masculinity is tied to anxieties around reversion; Gar Ming says, ‘The pleasure still only lasts three seconds. Will it be the same in 1997? Will I be the same in 1997?’ In *The Goddess*, Yoshiyasu does have a seemingly disaffected relationship with what may be a girlfriend back in Tokyo; Law makes little suggestion of emotional intimacy between them. With Deirdre, although Yoshiyasu feels

---

hesitant at first, and on the bottom (in the sex scene), he does eventually take an active role in the sex and he contributes to Deirdre’s own enjoyment of sex and her body, in the wake of her sexually abusive past. Shen argues that in this scene, ‘[JM] and BG are given equal exposure and sexual initiative.’

In a parallel to the earlier scene’s primordial sharing of the sense of touch, as well as the touch of the dance sequence, Yoshiyasu traces Deirdre’s body with his fingers, allowing her to feel ‘in touch’ with her body again. He also licks her face and lips, in a way that highlights the minute details and pleasures of sensual touch. He slowly allows her to reconnect with her sexuality and as she climaxes she experiences an eruption of pleasure rather than anguish. The primacy of her experience to the act is clear when after sex the two sleep in separate beds and she says ‘Thank you,’ and he ‘You’re welcome.’ It isn’t until after her confrontation with her father that the film makes explicit the emotional connection that has developed between the two. Thus, Yoshiyasu provides the circumstances to allow Deirdre to develop a new relationship with her body and sexuality. He does not take from her, as her father did, and the sex does not focus solely or primarily on his own pleasure or arousal.

Yoshiyasu represents Asian masculinity that moves towards an understanding of the need for emotional connection in sex, and thus a more negotiated, equal relationship with women. Szeto points out that much pre-1997 Hong Kong cinema attempted to relieve male inferiority complexes, brought on by colonial domination, by depicting ‘masculinist, nationalist Hong Kong superheroes,’ and ‘economic superiority and male chauvinism’ that belittled the West. So while Law does seem to accommodate white audiences by partly pacifying the Asian male so as to make him more palatable, Yoshiyasu also represents a new kind of masculinity that undermines the misogynistic undercurrents in Law’s more masculinist characters. He takes seriously women’s experiences of their bodies, emotions and of sex. In this sense, the sex between Yoshiyasu signifies a moment of becoming for him. By identifying with this white woman’s sexual experiences Yoshiyasu forges a new masculinity. Asian masculinity is revitalised by movement to Australia, as compared to the troubled masculinities in crisis in some of Law’s previous films. New co-ordinates for

---

57 Szeto, ‘Sinophone Libidinal Economy in the Age of Neoliberalization and Mainlandization: Masculinities in Hong Kong Sar New Wave Cinema,’ 128.
masculinity and new nodes of identification have fashioned new possibilities for Asian identity. Yoshiyasu’s identification with Australia, through Deirdre, catalyses his transformative process. Deirdre herself – although not clearly emotionally connected to Yoshiyasu by the end of this scene – is also going through her own process of identifying with Yoshiyasu, and transforming herself. Both characters cement their transformations in the last phase of the film, where Deirdre confronts her father.

The story of Deirdre’s confrontation with her traumatic past represents, as others have argued, a confrontation with Australia’s colonial past. Harris writes,

The white grandfather embodies western modernity’s most privileged discourses of scientific rationalism, technological triumphalism and Enlightenment individuality all in their most socially destructive, self-aggrandising forms. He is an oenologist who makes wine only from chemicals, not nature, and a miner who takes from the earth but is never seen giving anything back. He is a father and grandfather who destroys familial ‘potentials’ of trust, mutual empowerment and individual sovereignty by dictating a family structure organised through incest.58

The father’s assertion that ‘we can do anything out here’ highlights the mentality of both terra nullius and the arrogance of notions of Western progress. He is the Kurtz equivalent in this ‘heart of darkness’ narrative that journeys to the centre of colonial perversion. The father speaks with an Irish accent not an Australian one and this shows how he represents a distant aspect of Australia’s colonial past – although the association between Ireland and the coloniser may not be a clean one. Said for instance, in his essay ‘Yeats and Decolonization,’ draws parallels between the Irish postcolonial condition and those of the postcolonial Third World.59 The film confronts Australia’s colonial past, something which reflects Australian filmic preoccupations – Shen compares The Goddess to Walkabout just as Rooney does with Japanese Story.60 Law explores a kind of Australian decolonial story through Deirdre’s dis-identification with her ‘colonialist’ father in order to embrace identification with the Asian future that Yoshiyasu represents. Of course, like Japanese Story, the lack of Aboriginal people in this film makes this decolonial ethic seriously limited.

58 Harris, ‘Desert Training for Whites: Australian Road Movies,’ 108.
We can read this film as exploring white Australia’s re-evaluation of its own identifications with colonialism, rather than one explicitly about white Australian mistreatment of Aboriginal people – yet again, however, this reading leaves much to be desired.

When Deirdre descends into her father’s mine in the desert, the films takes us into the mind or the heart of colonial Australia, Shen describes this as the “‘darkness within, or ‘darkness within the heartland.’”61 The underground mind that the father lives in symbolises the suppressed, colonial unconscious in the Australian psyche. We see old, unclean furniture and crockery, rotting food and rodents. In addition, Deirdre’s father is trapped in the past; he says that ‘Esther will be home soon and Marie,’ referring to his wife and daughter, both of whom are dead. The father’s temporal dislocation means that he embodies a sick, decaying colonial mentality that cannot wrench itself from the past. Deirdre holds a gun to her father/grandfather’s head but eventually lowers it and – in a shot that displays Yoshiyasu in the foreground and the father in a background cave – Deirdre symbolically turns from her father and embraces Yoshiyasu. As Deirdre refuses to continue cycles of abuse, as Cheu writes, ‘freedom from the imprisonment of the past necessitates a profound reconstruction of the self in the future.’62 She disidentifies with the colonial mentality at the heart Australian identity, and chooses instead to embrace a future with Asia. Law envisions an Australian future that liberates itself from its previous colonial ideals; Deirdre can ‘seek alternative models of subjectivity.’63 Deirdre pursues a new node of identification and thus becomes other in the process. In addition, rather than killing off the father and erasing history, the fact that he lives on suggests the still lingering and unresolved problem of Australian colonialism and its past – especially in relation to Aboriginal people. While the film shares both Japanese Story and Bondi Tsunami’s inadequate erasures of Indigenous issues, the father’s ongoing presence seems to at least signal the continuation of colonial identification.

Deirdre and Yoshiyasu both let go of aspects of their former national and cultural identifications and identify with the other in their processes of personal transformation. The film also signifies Law’s own process of identifying with the space of Australia and imagining

61 Ibid., 361.
62 Cheu, Cinematic Howling: Women’s Films Women’s Film Theories, 142.
63 Harris, ‘Desert Training for Whites: Australian Road Movies,’ 109.
a cross-cultural future there. Yoshiyasu’s journey may represent Law’s own process of becoming Australian. In comparison to her previous meditations on the painful and disorienting feelings of dislocation leading up to the reversion, this film offers a hopeful message of belonging – or at least co-operation. Shen writes that ‘Law manages to break away from her memory, mourning, and nostalgia for Chineseness, and ease away from her melancholic identification of being a Chinese migrant.’64 Law resolves – at least temporarily – what Li calls her oeuvre’s ‘pathology of place,’ by settling in Australia. The mixed cultural perspective of Law’s diasporic experience enables a more engaged communication between Asian and Australian points of view.

While the first two films primarily explored the Australian experience of difference, this film shows us how to imagine accommodating both points of view. Australia reaches out to Asia here but, as the same time, so too does Asia reach out to Australia. This film signifies both the transnationalisation of Australian cinema, as well as the transnationalisation of Hong Kong cinema. Analysing this film with both these trajectories in mind increases our sensitivity to the interesting cross-cultural engagement happening in this film. This cross-sectional analysis is often lost in approaches that prioritise single national readings.

Where Japanese Story and Bondi Tsunami offered moments of becoming, but ultimately retracted from robust cross-cultural identification, The Goddess of 1967 offers a lasting vision of intercultural engagement. Yoshiyasu does not die, he continues on his road trip with Deirdre. They don’t know where they’re going: Yoshiyasu has Deirdre cover his own eyes and says ‘stop me before I crash, ok?’ and she replies, ‘honestly, I’m as blind as you.’ Their intercultural connection, their becoming, is the beginning of a process of ongoing engagement. This road movie does not lead to the transgressive potential of the road being harshly crushed and forced into the limiting norms of the dominant culture. Rather the road continues on in to the future and the disruptive energy of the intercultural narrative continues to do its work of reshaping national and cultural identities. This highlights the importance of connecting moments of becoming with ongoing cultural engagement – even if we don’t know what this engagement will bring. As Yoshiyasu and Deirdre drive blindly into the future, they reflect Morris’s words on those who enter into transnational spaces

---

64 Shen, ‘Flying One’s Way Home: Clara Law’s Letters to Oz,’ 361.
with no guarantee of what will happen, what the space will create, or what knowledge or identities will be produced; their position ‘is that of one who accepts to have no choice but to ‘extend and propagate toward the outside’ in a condition of chronic uncertainty about the outcome.’

The overall process of becoming others in this section has shown us initial, tentative interactions between Australians and Japanese and increasing confidence in identifying across difference. Where Japanese Story and Bondi Tsunami shied away from maintaining the disruptive transgressive power of interactions with others in their narrative resolutions, they also represent important beginning steps in the process of intercultural engagement. Perhaps it is only through smaller, bite sized moments of cultural consumption that Australians can finally feel comfortable enough to embrace a fuller vulnerability in the face of difference. The Goddess of 1967 offers a hopeful message for a future of Australian/Asian interaction and sets up my next section’s focus on individuals who have sustained cultural interactions with Japan and become Japanese through embodying Japanese culture and identity.

---

65 Morris, Identity Anecdotes: Translation and Media Culture, 183.
Section II: Embodying Difference and Ghostly Possession
In this section on embodiment and spiritual possession, I investigate how intercultural theatre allows actors and audience members alike to interface with cultural difference, thus leading them to experience mixed forms of subjectivity and identification. Ric Knowles, in his book *Theatre and Interculturalism*, explores ‘theatrical attempts to bridge cultures through performance, to bring different cultures into productive dialogue with one another on the stage, in the space between the stage and the audience, and within the audience.’

Intercultural theatre produces, for many, an interstitial space that opens up subjectivities to hybridities, multiplicities and mixedness. In outlining her version of the intercultural, Patrice Pavis invokes Appadurai’s ‘mixed, multi-ethnic and multiple identities, [that] are no longer based on fixed identities, on defined belongings, but on clusters, on regroupings of practices.’ The intercultural actor – according to Claudia Nascimento – ‘welcomes difference in her own body.’ Intercultural theatre therefore enables ‘cultural border crossings’ which create a space for cultural identities to affect and transform each other. In the following texts, actors, characters, and audiences embody and perform Japanese identities, behaviours, and sensibilities. The trope of spiritual possession – which features in all three texts – functions as a metaphor for the process of cross-cultural identification: moments of spiritual possession in these texts exemplify embodied experiences of ‘becoming others’.

In Paddy O’Reilly’s *The Factory* (2005) – a novel that centres on Japanese noh theatre (a traditional form of Japanese theatre from the nation’s early modern period) – the protagonist Hilda wishes to become Japanese and learns to perform noh as a way to embody Japanese identity. I read the common noh trope of spiritual possession into the novel and argue that the protagonist (and the author) possess Japanese bodies by writing them into existence. In Allan Marett’s *Oppenheimer Noh* (2015) – a noh play performed in English – actual Western noh actors do embody Japanese theatre traditions thus exemplifying, in the moment of performance, a form of the mixed subjectivity my thesis explores. The play places the ghost of J. Robert Oppenheimer – a scientist who contributed to the production of the atomic bomb – within a Zen Buddhist narrative of redemption:

4 Ibid.
Oppenheimer becomes the deity Fudô Myô-ô, thus embodying Japanese identity. In Mayu Kanamori’s *Yasukichi Murakami: Through a Distant Lens* (2014) we encounter yet another ghost, the ghost of Japanese inventor and photographer Yasukichi Murakami who lived in Broome and Darwin in the beginning of the twentieth century. Murakami speaks to Kanamori in the play, and the audience is asked in the finale to share in an uncanny staged attempt at possession: as she explains her own sense of Murakami’s ghostly presence inside of her, she asks the audience to imagine him inside themselves too. In this way, the audience identifies with difference through the body.

*The Factory*, *Oppenheimer Noh*, and *Yasukichi Murakami* exhibit sustained engagement with Japanese culture. In this sense they represent the next phase of intercultural engagement: they take place after the first contact scenario. Hilda, in *The Factory*, speaks fluent Japanese, has lived in Japan, and has studied Japanese culture at length. Allan Marett is a Zen Buddhist of forty years who has in depth knowledge of the noh theatre tradition – the pilgrim character in the play represents Marett (as I argue). And Mayu Kanamori has lived between Australia and Japan for much of her life – she herself is represented in the play, although somebody else plays her character. However, a key difference between the first two texts and the final text illuminates this section’s particular insight on becoming others. While the first two texts take place in the space of Japan, and thus highlight engagement with difference external to the nation, the final text takes place in Australia and highlights the Japanese identities that have existed in Australia since the nineteenth century. Kanamori’s play troubles the implicit separation between Japan and Australia that the first two texts set up (in the way that they differentiate between Japanese and Australian positions) by highlighting how Japanese (and thus Asians) are already part of Australia, and have been for a long time. *Yasukichi Murakami* brings the intercultural concerns we see in the first two texts to Australia, emphasising the importance of bringing intercultural questions to the Australian national space. My thesis highlights the need to disrupt the flattening out of difference that often takes place in multicultural frameworks, and this section as a whole highlights how – as argued in my introduction – becoming others intervenes in the failure of multiculturalism. In the previous section I drew attention to the need to tie processes of becoming others with ongoing engagement, and in this section I give examples of characters that take part in much more in-depth cultural engagements which take them physically to
Japan. However, I also show, in this section, how sustained engagements must take place not only between nations but also within them. Australian intercultural engagement with Japan changes both Japanese and Australian cultures. Thus, the other lives outside as well as inside the national self, and engaging with both is vital to the intercultural processes for which I argue.
4. Possessing Difference in The Factory

The theme of possession permeates *The Factory*, a novel about a white Australian doctoral student who aspires to become Japanese. In this chapter I explore how anthropological, ontological, and spiritual possession characterise Hilda’s relationship with Japan. Hilda’s Orientalist investment in Japan represents a foil for the novel’s message about the dangers of such possessive investment. The dismantling of Hilda’s Orientalist tendencies signifies an ethical acknowledgement of the limits to cross-cultural identification. At the same time, the novel thoroughly troubles any easy East/West binary that might be ascribed to the dynamics in which Hilda finds herself. Reductive characterisations of East/West dynamics come under scrutiny through the cultural interactions of Japanese and Australian characters. Hilda becomes culturally mixed in her identifications with Japanese difference through her acting in noh theatre. However, like *Japanese Story* and *Bondi Tsunami*, the novel’s ending (where Hilda severs ties from Japan and leaves the country) retracts from the possibility of future engagement.

In the first chapter of *The Factory* (2005) the Australian protagonist Hilda, writing from a Japanese prison says,

> I remember someone saying to me when I first came to this country, ‘You may speak perfect Japanese. You may live like the Japanese, sound like the Japanese, believe what the Japanese believe. But you will never be Japanese.’

This statement provides the spur for the novel’s sustained engagement with the nature of national, cultural, and racial identity. It highlights a familiar attitude towards closed national identities that we can see in both Japan as well as Australia. This closedness reflects Suvendrini Perera’s argument about Australia’s racial and geographical differentiation of itself from the continent of Asia.\(^2\)

---


The Factory problematises this border thinking with Hilda’s genuine desire to integrate with Asia, despite the ‘nationalising forces’ showcased above.\(^3\) The increase in rhetoric around the issue of Australia entering the so called ‘Asian Century’ and the various anxieties surrounding ‘Rising Asia,’\(^4\) highlight the topical nature of the novel’s attempts to become ‘part of Asia.’\(^5\) O’Reilly wrote the novel with the help of an Asia-link writing in residence scholarship. Asia-link, an affiliate of the University of Melbourne, focuses on ‘public understanding of the countries of Asia and of Australia’s role in the region,’ something echoed in its tag-line ‘Building an Asia-capable Australia.’\(^6\) In addition, the novel clearly represents what is being termed the ‘transnational turn’ in Australian literature,\(^7\) typifying the urge to turn Australia’s gaze to areas ‘beyond the nation.’\(^8\)

Through Hilda’s experiences in Japan, her authorial perspective – and her supposedly authoritative perspective as an academic studying the cultural commune Koba – undergoes a process of self-conscious questioning. She no longer maintains an authoritative Western gaze on Japan; her interactions with and inculcation within Koba undermine the Orientalist distinctions between East and West that motivated her initial PhD thesis. Hilda and Koba itself exhibit culturally hybrid sensibilities that intermingle with each other.

The novel’s parallels between nationalistic and transnational attitudes culminates, at its end, in Hilda’s retreat from Japan and the tacit acknowledgement that she will never, indeed, be Japanese. In many ways this represents an ethical acknowledgement of difference that undermines Orientalist tendencies in Western anthropological and ontological attitudes. While Hilda clearly shows mixed subjective identifications – she thus becomes others in this subjective sense – she cannot become others in a social/political sense: she cannot become Japanese or Asian racially, and according to the Japanese in the novel, she will never be truly Japanese culturally either. This highlights the problem of cultural appropriation that plagues much intercultural theatre. There is, however, a

---


\(^4\) Walker and Sobocinska, *Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, 1.


difference between a white person identifying racially as Japanese and being culturally Japanese; I think that this novel rightly shies away from Hilda identifying as Japanese (in a racial sense), but in the process it also symbolically shies away, in the finale, from the disruptive potential of identification with the cultural difference of Japanese culture. While Hilda clearly experiences cross-cultural exchange and identification, the novel cuts short the possibility of ongoing engagement. It does not bring the examination of identity, or the mixed subjectivities gained in Japan, to the space of Australia. In addition, the novel does not account for the potential that the mixed perspectives of Japanese Australians and mixed race Japanese Australians have for challenging the binarising sentiments of the novel’s separation of Australians and Japanese in its denouement.

In drawing attention to what I call the politics of possession in The Factory I highlight what I believe is the novel’s self-conscious engagement with Said’s ideas on Orientalism and specifically Orientalist possession. By exploring this investment in questions of Orientalism, I highlight one of the key barriers towards ethical cross-cultural engagement. Nationalising forces and racial ideologies still influence intercultural contact. Said writes of Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan:

   He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was ‘typically Oriental’ [my emphasis].

Said’s qualification that this possession works ‘not only’ on a physical level alerts us to the varied ways in which Orientalist possession functions. Possession is indicative of Orientalist ways of knowing and representing that Said considers to be forms of ‘dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.’ Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s extensive work on white Australian possession highlights that ‘one of the ways in which this possessive investment manifests itself is through a discourse of tolerance involving the right to exclude or include people within the nation thereby supporting the existence, protection

---

10 Ibid., 3.
and maintenance of white space.’ However in broadening my analysis to ontological and spiritual possession I focus on places where East/West binaries are crossed and mixed. O’Reilly signals forms of Orientalist thinking in order to subvert them. The novel thus exhibits ways in which othering discourses are overcome through identification with others. One of the central ways in which this cross-cultural identification works in this novel is through the corporeal practice of noh theatre: Hilda learns to adopt Japanese movements, and therefore learns Japaneseness through the body. In focussing on becoming others through the body I also draw attention to how the spiritual possession of bodies in the novel reflects the process of becoming others.

**Challenging Orientalism**

The novel begins with Hilda in prison recalling the moment of her arrest and detailing the gritty and stifling nature of her prison life. The reasons for Hilda’s imprisonment, while not yet clear, present themselves in the process of the novel as the events leading up to her arrest are explored. She writes the novel between the lines of a textbook inside the prison. Hilda, a PhD student of what seems to be anthropology or sociology, studied the cultural commune Koba and its authoritarian leader Yasuda. Created in the ‘70s, the commune quickly disintegrated after the controversial death of one of its members, Tetsuo. Hilda travelled to Japan to interview Yasuda and various members in order to understand the group, and why exactly it broke up. The novel splices together interviews with members, Hilda’s memories, and scenes in the prison. When Yasuda claims in an interview that he intends to create a second Koba, he makes Hilda join the group and document it in exchange for information about the first Koba for her thesis. She and her vivacious Australian friend Eloise, who comes along to Japan with Hilda after receiving a scholarship, join the group and learn various traditional cultural practices in an abandoned factory in a remote area of Japan. Possible inspirations for Koba might include the Yamagishi-kai communes in Japan, or the Suzuki Company of Toga theatre company run by Tadashi Suzuki. This latter company appears concerned with ‘how globalization has standardized systems

---

11 Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll, 'We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches: Protesting Cultures of White Possession,' 150.
and homogenized lifestyles the world over, and hopes to cultivate an appreciation for not only cultural and national distinctiveness, but also pre-modern sensibilities.

During Hilda and Eloise’s time in the commune Yasuda proves not to be forthcoming about information about the first Koba, and Eloise helps Hilda steal Yasuda’s private diaries from that time. In addition, tensions within the group rise as former members return, some of whom have designs of revenge. Keiko, a former lover of Yasuda’s in the first Koba, steals the diaries off Hilda and discovers that Yasuda knew of an abortion she secretly undertook; he hadn’t said anything to her about it. She considers this, and the derisive way he wrote about her in the diary, a betrayal, and vows to destroy Koba from within. Meanwhile, Hilda becomes further inculcated within the group, increasingly feeling as if she belongs there and can contribute to it. She sleeps with the Japanese male member Nao, and Yasuda seems to be making advances on her as well. The denouement of the novel takes place by a cliff where Keiko confronts Yasuda about the diaries. Keiko’s desire to exact revenge on Yasuda makes it clear that the second Koba cannot continue. Devastated by this, Hilda begs Keiko not to destroy the group, as she feels a sense of belonging. At this Keiko, recalling for the reader the accusatory statement quoted at the beginning of the novel, remarks ‘Go home Hilda…This is not your business. You don’t belong here. You never have, you never will’ (253). Hilda seems to enter a trance-like state that ends in the implication that she pushes Keiko off the cliff, thus explaining her subsequent imprisonment. At the end of the novel we learn that Hilda’s father has organised for her to carry out her sentence in Australia.

Hilda initially approaches the members of Koba as a researcher. She wishes to investigate the kinds of cultural and personal forms of investment within the group. When asked by Eloise what her thesis centres on she says,

‘Oh. Well it’s about narrative and identity. It’s about a group in a cultural field and its identity within that field. As in, can a narrative reinterpretation of their own group’s identity be dynamic enough for people to cope with…’

‘Excellent,’ [Eloise] interrupted. (13)

---

We never really know what Hilda might have said, but this answer seems to suggest two possible readings. It could indicate Hilda’s interest in the way the group narrates its own identity, and whether that narration can accommodate both the human elements that exist in the group and the desire for profit that begins to change the identity of the community. We could also read this as questioning how Hilda’s own thesis represents a kind of narrative interpretation; can it in fact preserve the identity of the group, or will it become a distortion of sorts. Hilda’s Japanese interviewees often question Hilda’s motives. For example Yumi, a member of the first Koba, says,

‘I hope I am telling this story to the right person ... You are a foreigner and a stranger. It’s easy to speak to you. But how will it be twisted around when you hear all the different versions of the story from different people. Whose will you believe? Whose history will be recorded?’ (74)

The novel clearly alludes to the politics of representing a cultural Other within a Western academic and cultural framework. The postcolonial turn in literary and cultural criticism provided us with strong arguments highlighting the ways in which cultural others were incorrectly represented and understood within academic Western discourses.

As mentioned before, Hilda describes her work as about ‘narrative and identity. It’s about a group in a cultural field and its identity within that field.’ This highlights that desire to ascertain and document Japanese identity as well as notate and explain it within an anthropological framework. We hear the supervisor’s voice in her emails to Hilda when she says ‘when you come to pulling all these stories together [interviews], I think that the act of refiguring the narrative will be a challenge – as a PhD should be!’ (99). We see a need to mould knowledge about Japan, and Japanese people’s opinions about themselves into a coherent anthropological claim or thesis. This in turn reflects Said’s words on Orientalist studies,

What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere;
most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics.\(^{13}\)

However, Hilda’s gradual lack of objective distance from the group undoes her ability to truly create an appropriate anthropological inquiry. She not only cannot complete her studies because of her imprisonment, but she agrees with Eloise to steal Yasuda’s diaries rather than obtain this information by consent or through the ethical means expected of her ethnographic work. In addition, Hilda’s desire to be Japanese, or desire to possess Japaneseness, highlights something very Orientalist about her attitude towards her studies. The suggestion that she killed Keiko indicates, even further, the clear lack of objective distance on Hilda’s part. Both of these characterisations serve to expose and subvert questionable and even insidious impulses of the Orientalist academic gaze.

Not only does the novel’s dismantling of the Western gaze on Japan critique Orientalist ways of knowing, but Koba’s own culturally hybrid positioning shows the lack of clear cut boundaries between East and West. Yasuda attempts to stabilise Koba’s identity by comparing Japanese values against Western ones:

‘What is it to be Japanese in these strange times? Our industries grow like mushrooms and yet our students revolt and make bombs. We sit on chairs but we sleep on futon, we eat hamburgers yet we prize sashimi, we wear jeans every day but for important moments we pull out our best kimono. There is nothing wrong with taking what we need from other cultures – Japan has always made this practice. The difficulty arises when we allow our own traditions to lapse. When we lose faith in what grounds us in the Japanese soil: the dance, the song, the ritual.’ (21)

Alastair Bonnett writes that ‘the assertion of a fundamental difference between Japanese and Western approaches has been used to locate the unique nature of Japanese identity and Japanese modernity.’\(^{14}\) This highlights the co-dependent relationship of East/West binaries. However, Yasuda’s proclamations conceal the fact that Koba does not exist in a

---


Japanese vacuum. The audience for the first Koba’s performances of noh, kabuki and Japanese music became increasingly international; Yasuda takes the group on tours in Asia where they enjoy much critical and popular success. As Keiko says, ‘And the foreigners too. They went crazy for us. All they had ever known of Japan was the high aesthetic. The Noh, the Zen garden, the tea ceremony. We made them jump from their seats and scream’ (172). The international audience of the group reflects that of the Suzuki Company of Toga mentioned earlier. The company is based in the secluded village of Toga in Central-West Japan. Its founder Tadashi Suzuki seems to have a philosophical interest in national and global cultural interchange: he writes, ‘Nowadays, at first glance, it is hard to differentiate between Chinese, Korean or Japanese youth based on fashion or behavior. Similarly, when I taught in Russia and the United States, I had the impression that students there behaved in more or less the same way.’ And yet, Suzuki writes, people still desire and identify with local or national traditions. Thus, his company attempts to find the middle ground between local and global forces by staging cross-cultural, multilingual works all over the world: ‘Despite the growing appropriation of art for political purposes, the theatre and all other cultural activities still provide a way for people to collaborate while appreciating differences in nationality and ethnicity.’ While Koba does not stage multilingual or intercultural texts, like the Suzuki Company of Toga, they did perform their works for international audiences thus globalising Japanese culture. In this sense they did exhibit some of the international ethic of the Suzuki Company. However, when Koba did enjoy increasing success some of the members started to ask questions about where all the money from the tours was going; they began to suspect that Yasuda kept the money for himself. They ask for wages instead of simply having their communal expenses paid for them. This question of money leads the reader to believe that Yasuda is motivated not simply by a desire to preserve Japanese culture but also by greed brought on by the allure of transnational capital.

The very fact that the group includes Hilda and Eloise shows the lack of preservation of racial or cultural homogeneity that Yasuda purports to be maintaining. Yasuda believes that Koba stands to gain from Hilda’s presence and her writing on the group. At one point he says as much to the members:

---

When [Yasuda] reached me he put a paternal hand on my shoulder, then called out to Kanno at his table, ‘Did I tell you that Hilda here is going to document the new Koba? She is our historian. We will become known worldwide.’

Around me in the queue people burst into spontaneous applause. (113)

The anthropological dynamics between East and West do not represent a one sided dominator/dominated relationship; Yasuda attempts to use Hilda’s work as a springboard for the group’s fame.

That Hilda learns noh from the instructor also represents a clear digression from traditional protocol. Noh performers traditionally begin learning from Japanese masters (who are sometimes their fathers) from a young age, and foreigners who train later in life are considered outliers in some noh communities.¹⁶ In addition, during the finale of the novel, we see the members throw a party in which the noh instructor, apparently inebriated, lets his traditional guard down and encourages everyone to dress up in the way that he believes actors do in their parties in New York:

‘Put it on over your clothes if you like, the way foreigners do, dressing up,’ he said to the woman holding the costume. ‘Isn’t that right Hilda? Foreigners play dressups in this kind of thing. Parties of fancy dress.’ He leaned towards the woman and whispered proudly, ‘I used to live in New York you know. For six months. I saw this at a party of actors.’ (243-4)

Thus Koba and its members embody a culturally mixed identity. Those in the group do not actually preserve a Japanese essence untainted by Western influence. This in itself problematises the easy binarisation of East and West in many studies of Orientalism. The members exhibit mixed subjectivities that include identification with cultural difference – as the noh instructor’s comments clearly indicate. Hilda embodies this mixed subjectivity particularly clearly; in the section to come on ontological possession I outline how Hilda’s desire to be Japanese leads to her becoming others and therefore having multiple nodes of identification.

Ontological Possession

As indicated earlier, the novel structurally criticises Orientalism by exposing Hilda’s problematic desire to be Japanese. Keiko’s stinging words that Hilda does not belong, recalling the earlier accusation ‘you will never be Japanese,’ prompt Hilda to murder Keiko (or so it seems). A recent article by Maggie Thorpe, about Okinawan American mixed race artist and intellectual Laura Kina’s exhibition ‘Under my Skin’, entitled ‘You don’t have to be mixed-race to have a mixed identity,’ presents an example of this not uncommon desire to be Japanese. Thorpe, a white American, writes,

I became infatuated with Japanese culture when I was 8. Growing up in the southwest, I was like many white American youth, feeling ‘vanilla’ and ‘boring’ because I did not have a culture that was easily definable. So I found something else that appealed to me ... [In Japan] I wished people would stop staring at me. I wanted to melt into the subway crowd and disappear. When I was immersed in the Japanese countryside for a few weeks and dressed in traditional yukata for a local festival, I ignored the stares and imagined that I looked like everyone else.

Thorpe comes close to conflating racial mixedness and cultural mixedness and her attraction to Japan may reflect how cultural forms of appropriation signify, as bell hooks says, an inherent ‘lack’ in whiteness that must consume difference to give itself substance,

Cultural appropriation of the Other assuages feelings of deprivation and lack that assault the psyches of radical white youth who choose to be disloyal to western civilization.

hooks gives examples of white male students at Yale who fetishize sex with people of colour and she sees this desire of racial others as a kind of appropriation – what she calls ‘eating the other.’ Hilda’s sexual relationships with Nao and Mizuno, a fellow prison inmate, reflect the kind of sexual possession indicated by hooks. Hilda’s first sexual encounter with Nao follows her admission of starting to let herself become part of the group. When Kanno,
Koba member, asks her about her dreams and aspirations, though tempted to talk about her PhD project, she admits,

Deep down I had begun to feel a stirring that overtook my theoretical ideas, my work. I had begun to love the classes and the labour, the structural days and the feeling of achievement when I learned a dance step well or recited my lines perfectly. And I knew how old Koba had succeeded at the beginning – maybe I had knowledge to give. I had felt a whisper of desire that I might help this Koba to work. (203-4)

Almost immediately after this she writes, ‘Tomorrow, I thought, we will bring a blanket and lay the folds on the earth in front of the shrine and we will make love for the spirits of the forest who will inhabit our bodies and, I thought, I will writhe with ecstasy...Tomorrow, I thought, the forest will hear me shriek’ (205). Thus her sexual possession of Nao actualises her desire to become Japanese, or to ‘possess’ Japaneseness. We see a foreshadowing of spiritual possession as well, something I will take up shortly. The leader, Yasuda, also seems to offer inclusion into Japaneseness; he tells Hilda at one point, ‘You must give in. Listen to what I say. Give yourself over completely to Koba’ (146). The reader’s knowledge of Yasuda’s sexual relations with several Koba members gives his words a distinct sexual inflection.

However, just as the novel questions the authority and cogency of Hilda’s Orientalist anthropological gaze on Japan, so too does it complicate the significance of Hilda’s sexual and ontological possessiveness. While the aforementioned dynamics clearly have Orientalist resonances, they also highlight cultural proximity and identification with the other on a subjective level. I do not wish to read sexual relations between a white Australian and a Japanese person as necessarily Orientalist possession either. Hilda does not at any point racially or nationally identify as Japanese, but she does feel affinity with Japanese culture or cultural difference. It seems that while O’Reilly overtly signals Orientalist desire, she also shows how Japan slips out of the grasp of this possessive desire: perhaps because it is based on a false bifurcation of East and West. Like Koba, Hilda’s cross-cultural identity exemplifies the blurring of boundaries. She can speak fluent Japanese and understands Japanese cultural codes:
‘Yasuda san’s quite traditional,’ I said softly to Eloise. ‘You might need to be less casual. Bow a little more you know? Speak more politely to him...I think you should turn and face Yasuda – not sit with your back to him?’ I whispered. ‘But don’t stare him in the eye. That’s rude here.’ (107)

Hilda’s awareness of Japanese authority reaches an extreme point in prison: she breaks with the ‘individualism...selfishness...[and] jumped-up pride’ (241) that Yasuda reads as Western and makes herself invisible:

I ate my food with my elbows held close to my body. I was trying to fold my body in on itself, shrink each gesture to a minimum, keep my eyes focussed on objects. I kept my head bowed low when I was marched to the bath. My gaze followed the rise of the iron steps and the curve of the banister. I marched in time with the person in front of me, trying to match my steps perfectly with hers so that even the sound of my footsteps disappeared. (27)

This sedimentation of Japanese behaviours in the body parallels her process of learning noh through the embodiment of traditional Japanese bodily behaviours; something to be further elaborated in the analysis to come. Not only does Hilda come to feel part of the group and by extension Japanese culture, but members of the group come to see her as belonging there as well. When Hilda reminds Keiko of the date of Koba’s inception Keiko says (in contrast to her later rejection),

‘Isn’t she wonderful?’...‘She has all our history in that pretty head. You know, I asked myself when I first came to the new Koba, what on earth are foreigners doing in this group? It seemed so stupid – traditional Japanese culture performed by white girls. But this one,’ she pointed at me, ‘this one is a treasure. She understands what the first Koba was about.’

With everyone smiling and nodding at me I was burning hot enough to sweat. They liked me. (217-8)

The culturally hybrid identities of Hilda and Koba testify to the indistinct and porous nature of the boundaries between Japan and Australia. O’Reilly emphasises the complexities of ontological possession by weaving it into the significance of Hilda learning noh theatre. When being taught by the noh instructor she says, ‘I can do this, I thought. I can do it. Even
though I am not Japanese I can be part of this’ (221). By reading spiritual possession, a
common trope in noh theatre, into O’Reilly’s treatment of noh I extend on this section’s
treatment of ontological possession. I therefore outline more explicitly the process and
potential of ‘becoming others’ that I see taking place in the novel.

Noh and Spiritual Possession

While the noh instructor at Koba initially refuses to teach foreigners and women (noh is
traditionally performed only by men), he eventually agrees to teach Hilda under the
condition that she never perform in public. The process of learning noh involves Hilda
internalising and embodying particular forms of bodily behaviour as well as Japanese values
related to form and aesthetics. The instructor expects her to, in a sense, become Japanese:

‘Bend your knees!’ [the instructor] shouted at me. ‘Your stupid long Western body is
too high. Get down! Get down to the ground! Be part of the Japanese soil!’
My knees were aching like the arthritic bones of an old woman. I slide my feet along
the floor for fifteen steps, then on the next step swivelled on the flattened soles of
my feet to face the imaginary audience.
‘How many steps did you take?’ he shouted at me.
‘Sixteen?’
‘Yes you fool. Sixteen. But stop counting with your mouth!’
I took a deep breath.
‘Close your mouth and move like a Japanese,’ the teacher shouted at me, so I
pressed my lips tight and lowered my eyes and shuffled forward. (220-1)

This process of embodying Japaneseness reflects Nascimento’s description of acting: ‘the
history of actor training in the twentieth century reveals that actors study how to
incorporate different ways of moving, speaking, and, ultimately thinking as a means to tell a
story that is not her own.’19 As Suzuki, of Suzuki Company of Toga, notes, ‘culture is the
body’:20 he stages noh and Kabuki in order to transmit culture through what he believes to
be the pre-modern animal energy of the body. This points us to an overlap in Western and

19 Nascimento, Crossing Cultural Borders through the Actor’s Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge, 54.
Eastern forms of acting and embodiment. In the early stages of noh instruction for instance, ‘the child actor learns through imitation and repetition. The father dances sections from a play with the child; the father singing the words while the child struggles to imitate his motions. Frequently the father manipulates the child’s limbs, accustoming them to the proper positions.’²¹ We see this instruction through imitation in Hilda’s learning as well:

‘Can you repeat what I have done?’ he asked
‘I can try,’ I answered. I assumed the Noh position and both my knees cracked. The teacher didn’t laugh.
‘With the mask or without?’ I asked.
‘Without,’ he said. ‘I want to see by your face that you understand the role. The mask can come later.’
‘I haven’t learned the lines yet,’ I told him.
‘I know,’ he said. ‘So you will repeat them after me and try to master the actions of a woman in distress.’ (231-2)

Intercultural theatre involves the actor’s ‘embodiment of foreign elements,’ for Nascimento this leads to a ‘cultural border crossing’ and a sense of ‘double belonging’ in the actor.²² O’Reilly transposes this embodied level of identifying with difference, with Japan, onto the narrative level of the novel. The story of betrayal that the noh instructor teaches Hilda mirrors the betrayal held within Yasuda’s diaries. In the denouement, the movements made by Hilda and Keiko seem to imitate the minute and meaningful gestures in noh performance,

I can read the meaning in our movements, the significance in every gesture... Her head tilted and she gazed into my eyes...In my right hand I cupped Koba, our family, and I offered it to her. She opened her palms to accept my gift but let her hands drop and Koba, curled up, discarded, drifted to the ground where her pointed toe nudged it to the edge of the cliff and over (253).

The logic of this symbolic gesturing towards the events of the novel, the words of the play as it were, reflects Ze-ami’s writing about what noh acting should be,

---

²² Nascimento, Crossing Cultural Borders through the Actor’s Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge, 10.
Acting consists of the movement of the actor’s body. If an actor moves his body, responding with his mind to the words and lines of a play...he will come to act naturally. For example, if he moves his head at the word ‘looking’ in the text, if he points or withdraws his hand at the word ‘pointing’ or ‘withdrawing’, and if he takes up a posture of listening at the word ‘listening’. *Noh* acting should firstly use the body, secondly the hands, and thirdly the feet.\(^{23}\)

Note that the previously quoted passage from *The Factory* moves discussion of the postures and gestures of the body from the head, to the hands and then finally to the feet as in Ze-amī’s formulation. The trance-like or dream-like nature of this sequence where, ‘we danced all the love and sadness and loss I had felt when I read the journal,’ (Note again the closeness to the text) mirrors the dream scape of the *Mugen Noh* which Sekine calls the ‘dream play,’\(^{24}\) because of its preoccupation with ghosts; the *shite*, or main actor, ‘appears first as a person of the place and then returns in his or her true form as the ghost of someone from long ago.’\(^{25}\) It also highlights the way in which Hilda performs the script or the tragedy of Koba in her body. The textual and bodily elements thoroughly mix here, and intercultural crossovers flow through Hilda, the Koba members, and the novel itself. The structure of the novel in fact resembles the noh’s structure: Like the ghost of a noh play, Hilda endures, in jail, ‘penance for a violent action committed in mortal life.’\(^{26}\) She tells the audience of her story and of the grudge that she cannot let go of – as the *shite* generally does – and then experiences a process of redemption and renewal through Buddhist beliefs.

After the dance Keiko tells Hilda to go home, ‘This is not your business. You don’t belong here. You never have, you never will.’ The sentence that follows simply reads, ‘And I pushed her away’ (253). The trance goes further as what might be shock develops into a very still, almost Zen-like attitude towards the scene,

> There is a moment when the mind lets go. At that moment a person has nothing left, not even desire. It is a point where the cycle of individual existence has ceased. This, I believe is what the Buddhists call nirvana. The state when all desire has left you.

---

23 Masaru Sekine, *Ze-Ami and His Theories of Noh Drama* (Gerrards Cross: C. Smythe, 1985), 88.
24 Ibid., 32.
I reached that state on Dance Mountain (254).

Many noh plays thematically converse with Buddhist sutras and concepts. The notion of enlightenment – liberating oneself from the cycles of karma – has particular significance.

Noh plays will sometimes focus on the ghost or *shite* spiritually possessing the bodies of other characters. The famous play *Aoi no Ue*, centres on the mistress of Genji (of *Tales of Genji*), Lady Rokujo, ‘spiritually possessing the pregnant body of Aoi [Genji’s wife] and attempting to force it into miscarriage.’\(^{27}\) The play then thematises the exorcism of Lady Rokujo from Aoi’s body, followed by the ghost’s enlightenment. As in *Bondi Tsunami*, we can read Hilda’s enlightenment as ghostly or deathly through Barbara Low’s linkages between ‘nirvana principle’ and Freud’s principle of the death-drive;\(^{29}\) Hilda does describe her enlightenment as ‘a point where the cycle of individual existence has ceased.’ This ghostliness also resembles a kind of spiritual possession in the way that Hilda embodies the apex of Japan’s cultural politics/identity (enlightenment) as represented in noh. She embodies more of this than the Koba members in fact do. In addition, we might see the novel as possessing Japanese bodies by animating them with the author’s subjectivity. That is, Hilda’s and by extension O’Reilly’s authorial voices give life to the Japanese characters in this novel: the authors possess these Japanese bodies in that their representations determine how the characters think, talk, and behave. This possession symbolically ends in Keiko’s death, a kind of exorcism; the author’s subjectivity no longer enlivens Keiko’s body. Through this act of exorcism and subsequent enlightenment, the ‘ghost’ writer O’Reilly within the authorial voice of Hilda no longer haunts Japan, just as the *shite* no longer haunts the place of the tale’s happenings in *Aoi*. Hilda writes on the last page of the novel, ‘My father has agreed to pay the money for the transfer…I will go home and serve the rest of my time in a prison in my own country’ (255).

Nascimento attempts to argue against the perception that acting resembles a character possessing an actor’s body, as she puts forward a version of acting that involves intentional


\(^{28}\) I choose this play as an example due to the shared theme of pregnancy and similarity of the focus on miscarriage to the abortion in *The Factory*.

\(^{29}\) Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology*. 
choices and long periods of training. However, it remains a captivating metaphor in thinking about the possession within this text, especially if we conceive of writing others as a form of possession as well. Hilda’s (and O’Reilly’s) metaphorical exorcism from Keiko’s body symbolises an ethical distancing from the appropriative possibilities of becoming others. In intercultural theatre, and becoming others through acting, ‘the actor welcomes difference in her own body without claiming to become a ‘genuine’ ambassador in the representation of the Other’s culture.’

By disidentifying with Japanese culture and succumbing to the accusation that she will never be Japanese, Hilda establishes a respectful distance in her identification with Japan. The same might also be said for O’Reilly who, in the figure of Keiko, no longer possesses the subjectivity of her Japanese characters. Writing the other also involves becoming others, taking on their speech, mannerisms, and values. By retracting the embodiment of Japanese characters that takes place throughout the novel, O’Reilly shows us a desire to identify personally with Japan, but not identify as Japanese. She makes explicit this differentiation in the finals stages of the novel.

Intercultural theatre acting ‘is the art of simultaneously playing/being Self and Other’:

In this professional crossing of borders, the intercultural artist encounters many performance traditions that are originally foreign to her but that, in time, she is able to transform into familiar practices. At the same time, because her body is the actual site for this meeting, the subsequent work the actor produces will inevitably bring forth a hybrid form between the Other’s cultural sources and her own...crossing borders is an integral part of the process of reinventing one’s identity as much as a reflection of contemporary performing arts and our daily lives’ reality of difference.

This elaboration, which describes Hilda’s process almost perfectly, resembles the ways in which I have argued for mixed subjectivity: a becoming of others that leads to multiple forms of consciousness and nodes of identification. While O’Reilly keeps respectful distance in her version of becoming, the geographic and subjective rupture created by Hilda’s spirit returning to the ghostly ‘white nation’ of Australia leaves me feeling disappointed by the novel’s inability to imagine ongoing engagement with Japan. While Hilda’s identity will no

---

30 Nascimento, Crossing Cultural Borders through the Actor’s Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge, 18-9.
31 Ibid., 62-3.
doubt remain thoroughly mixed, the novel’s acquiescence to the nationalist and racially motivated belief in the inseparable difference between Australian and Japanese identity relinquishes some of the disruptive potential of Hilda’s cross-cultural experiences. In contrast to The Factory, Marett’s Oppenhimer Noh offers an example of intercultural theatre that remains committed to an ongoing cultural exchange with Japan. Kanamori’s Yasukichi Murakami goes a step further in showing overlapping forms of identification between Japan and Australia experienced by the Japanese Australian diaspora. In the next two chapters, I continue to consider how intercultural theatre facilitates a space to become others by asking how Oppenheimer Noh and Yasukichi Murakami explicitly address and complicate the boundaries between Japan and Australia that are ultimately reinforced in The Factory.
5. Ghostly Becomings in Oppenheimer Noh

In this chapter we continue with the theme of Western actors performing noh; this time we explore a noh play written in English by the Australian academic Allan Marett. Like *The Factory*, the noh narrative in Marett’s play deals with haunting and embodiment. I open up the questions of intercultural theatre and acting embodiment further, and consider how Marett might propose a form of ongoing engagement in his version of cross-cultural exchange between Japan and Australia. While the play features the American nuclear scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer who was involved in the Manhattan Project that constructed the US’s first atomic bomb, Marrett based the pilgrim character’s journey on his own pilgrimage to Hiroshima. I therefore consider the play an example of an Australian’s exploration of their relationship to Japan.

I begin by outlining my understanding of intercultural theatre, and highlight the ways in which *Oppenheimer Noh* reflects this approach. I then consider the actors’ embodiments of difference in this play and how this leads to the mixed subjectivity I have been proposing. Finally, I examine how the play intelligently demonstrated the difference between ‘identifying with’ and ‘identifying as’. As a result of this differentiation, the play can envision a future of ongoing engagement with Japan where Australians identify across borders and become culturally mixed. The transformation in this play exemplifies the process of white Australians becoming others: it marries this becoming with real ongoing engagement on the part of the characters (rather than a speculative future of engagement, as in *The Goddess*) and does so by having the characters ethically identify with Japan and not as Japanese.

*Intercultural Theatre*

For Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert intercultural theatre represents ‘an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions.’¹ The intentionality and the focus on

cultural exchange differentiates it from multicultural or postcolonial theatre which may be using policy defined forms of cultural relationships or have oppositional relationships to imperial power structures. Lo and Gilbert define intercultural theatre (and multicultural and postcolonial theatre) as sub-genres of the umbrella term ‘cross-cultural theatre’: ‘cross-cultural theatre encompasses public performance practices characterized by the conjunction of specific cultural resources at the level of narrative content, performance aesthetics, production processes, and/or reception by an interpretive community.’ In invoking the intercultural here I focus on intentional forms of cultural contact and exchange which lead to the production of mixed subjectivities.

Patrice Pavis – one of the more influential proponents of intercultural theatre – argues that globalisation has weakened the boundaries of national and cultural identity. Pavis suggests intercultural theatre reflects the increasing fluidity of culture in the following way:

The slow, inexorable disintegration of nation states (at least as far as real power is concerned) confirms the disappearance of isolated cultures, bound to nation states and geared to large distinct entities. From that moment on, the intercultural becomes the general rule, it is no longer controllable or manageable by nation states and by intellectuals who claim (in vain) to represent them.

Like much intercultural theatre studies material, Pavis’s work acknowledges the influence of postcolonial studies (and its questions of cultural appropriation) on the issue of cross-cultural representation. Rustom Barucha elaborates on a potential problem of intercultural theatre’s representations of non-western culture:

The problems arises … when the preoccupation with the ‘self’ overpowers the representation of ‘other’ cultures … [and] when the Other is not another but the projection of one’s ego. Then all one has is the glorification of the self and a co-option of other cultures in the name of representation.

---

2 Ibid., 31.
However, as Lo and Gilbert rightly point out, these forms of postcolonial critique ‘risk instigating a kind of paralysis insofar as they suggest that virtually no form of theatrical exchange can be ethical.’\(^5\) While intercultural theatre from the ‘60s and ‘70s received a great deal of criticism for its appropriative elements, Nascimento argues that much of this criticism does not take into account the large amount of research and cross-cultural collaboration that many of those involved in these projects undertook. The extent of this intercultural learning process cannot be grasped simply in the stage performance. In addition, the actor’s process of learning the movements and customs of other cultures itself signifies a nuanced and multifaceted form of intercultural exchange: as Nascimento says, ‘I see that the intercultural actor’s work cannot be labelled as cultural appropriation, as the active learning of foreign performative elements in time makes them part of one’s professional and personal cultures.’\(^6\) Nascimento highlights the intercultural actor’s ongoing labour of learning about other cultural beliefs and behaviours. While appropriative impulses that are blind to privilege should still a concern us, intercultural theatre criticism should also acknowledge the fruits and benefits of cross-cultural collaboration and intercultural engagement.

In the midst of the to-ing and fro-ing between postcolonial critics and critics of postcolonial critics, the ‘important issue,’ for Pavis, ‘remains the human encounter, which was and remains a fundamental feature of intercultural approach.’\(^7\) This encounter takes place at many levels in the theatre space: as Knowles argues it happens ‘on the stage, in the space between the stage and the audience, and within the audience.’ As we saw earlier, Pavis argues that these interactions lead to ‘hybridities, multiplicities and mixedness.’\(^8\) Knowles invokes Deleuze when he surveys ‘a new kind of rhizomatic (multiple, non-hierarchical, horizontal) intercultural performance-from-below that is emerging globally, that no longer retains a west and the rest binary.’\(^9\) Lo and Gilbert also reference Deleuze, but conclude with Bhabha and his point that ‘assignations of social difference – where difference is neither one nor the Other but something else besides, in between – find their agency in an

---

\(^5\) Lo and Gilbert, ‘Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,’ 41.
\(^6\) Nascimento, *Crossing Cultural Borders through the Actor’s Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge*, 18.
\(^8\) Ibid., 14.
interstitial future that emerges in between the claims of the past and the needs of the present.\textsuperscript{10}

What Lo and Gilbert’s invocation of Bhabha hopes to circumvent, however, is a tendency in intercultural and transnational forms of criticism to strip cultural flows and exchanges of their consequences for power and politics: they call these “weaker” forms of postmodernism, which tend to result in an abstract, depoliticized, and ahistorical notion of “difference,” or, in effect, a masked “indifference.”\textsuperscript{11} Rather than ‘seamless fusion’ Lo and Gilbert prefer ‘Bhabha’s clarification of postcolonial hybridity as based on an agonistic relationship,’ which preserves the specificities of difference, whilst acknowledging the porousness of localised cultural perspectives.\textsuperscript{12} This tension between fusion and difference, recalls the discussion of bounded and porous identities in my introduction. Borrowing from Gadamer, I showed how individuals have fore-meanings and fore-structures that shape their interactions with others. These fore-structures delineate lines of difference between people whilst also being porous and changeable in themselves. Residual essentialisms, or nodes or clusters of identification, structure intercultural interaction, but interactions can lead to redrawing or reconstituting lines of difference between people. In fact, the imagined boundaries of difference enable the transformative process of cross-cultural identification and becoming others. Without these thresholds, change cannot be accounted for.

In the interest of positing \textit{Oppenheimer Noh} as intercultural theatre, I now explore the ways in which the production creates an interface between Japanese and Western (at times specifically Australian) cultural perspectives – or an intercultural conversation – which in turn creates mixed cultural identities. The play initially frames Japanese and Western subject positions in opposition, but throughout the course of the play these positions mix and overlap with each other and characters are transformed in the process. I explore the significance of acting and embodiment in this process of becoming other, and then examine the intercultural aspects within the script.

While the play was written by Allan Marett, the project is in fact a collaboration between Marett, who was Professor of Musicology at the University of Sydney and Professor of Music

\textsuperscript{10} Lo and Gilbert, ‘Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,’ 49.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
at Hong Kong University (now retired in both capacities); Richard Emmert, a long time noh actor, Kita School certified instructor, and founder of the English language noh company Theatre Nohgaku; and Akira Matsui, a master actor and teacher from the Kita School.\textsuperscript{13} Emmert and Matsui have been staging cross-cultural noh productions for decades. In 1985, the three collaborated on an earlier noh play in English entitled \textit{Eliza}. This play explored the story of Eliza Fraser, a Scottish woman whose ship was shipwrecked off the north coast of Queensland and after whom Fraser Island is named. She alleged that she had been captured by Aboriginal people and was later found by an escaped convict who led her to white authorities. \textit{Oppenheimer Noh} combines the complexities of Buddhist philosophy (which Marett is knowledgeable in), the specific musical requirements of noh, and the subtle intricacies of noh’s acting and performance – Emmert and Matsui are masters of the latter two areas. Thus, the three collaborators bring their respective expertise to bear on the creation of this play. In addition, as Sarah Waisvisz and Brenda Carr Vellino point out, the intercultural collaborations of Emmert and Matsui’s ongoing work create the opportunity for sharing (both ways) culture specific knowledge.\textsuperscript{14} This production, which focuses on US and Australian personas within the context of Japan, clearly exhibits diverse cultural perspectives – all of which can learn from each other.

English language noh productions are relatively rare and occur at the margins of the traditional Japanese noh scene. As I outlined in the last chapter, noh’s \textit{shite} actors – those actors that play the lead roles – generally start training from childhood or adolescence. Their performance techniques and knowledge are deeply sedimented in their minds and bodies. The Noh Training Project, headed by Richard Emmert, offers regular training in Tokyo and a three-week training camp in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. There is a wide range of skills among the students: the majority are beginners with some intermediate students and others who are semi-professionals that have practiced with Emmert over many years.\textsuperscript{15} Some of the students from the Noh Training Project also appear in the English Language noh

However, the level of noh training in these international, culturally hybrid organisations raises questions about English language noh’s place in the noh tradition. Ashley Thorpe asks, ‘Can non-Japanese ... study Noh ‘properly’? ... How can the rigorous and intensive instruction offered by a master to a student at a young age in Japan be replicated elsewhere, and in a matter of weeks, rather than years?’ Not to mention the fact that noh generally has a fixed canon of Japanese plays from the early-modern period that actors and musicians learn inside out. These anxieties around Western performances of noh reflect those of the instructor in The Factory who initially refused to teach Hilda.

However, there are Japanese noh practitioners and producers such as Matsui and Suzuki Tadashi, mentioned previously, who stage and participate in cross-cultural noh productions; thus the noh playing field is by no means an entirely culturally pure one. The fictional Koba collective’s performances of noh certainly reflect intercultural attitudes in their use of white actors and their international touring. While English language noh may not currently be at the performance level, in noh terms, that the traditional noh companies have achieved, that does not mean that intercultural noh lacks its own value. The form may be decontextualised in the efforts of those like Emmert, but the moment of intercultural encounter created in this work has important benefits too. Just as I wanted to loosen the burden of adhering to Australian film conventions in Clara Law’s film, I do the same with the burden of Japaneseness in Oppenheimer Noh. Both texts show us the disruptive and innovative potential of unconventional cross-cultural encounter.

At the outset of the play we are introduced to a pilgrim in the island of Shikoku: this actor is the waki or secondary actor. The pilgrim announces mysterious feelings of grief and is compelled, through a vision of the Buddhist deity Fudô Myô-ô, to travel to a fox temple in Hiroshima. I see this character as an iteration of Marett himself. As he writes on his blog ‘Oppenheimer Noh Project’:

In 2013, while walking down the Pacific coast of Shikoku, the smallest of the four main Japanese Islands, as a Henro pilgrim, I (like the pilgrim (waki) in the play) was

16 Ibid., 331.
17 Ibid., 322.
overcome with an increasingly heavy and incomprehensible weight of grief. In particular, each contact with the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kannon, images of whom proliferate along the pilgrim path, seemed to simultaneously prise open my heart and increase my weight of grief. One morning I woke to find myself weeping uncontrollably. Tears stream seemingly unstoppably from my eyes and down my cheeks alarming my wife, Linda, and confounding me. For a long time I couldn’t identify their source. Finally a word began to form in my mind: ‘Hiroshima.’ Through my tears I finally spoke the word, ‘Hiroshima’, and said, ‘we have to go there.’

Marett and his wife underwent a pilgrimage to Hiroshima and commemorated the death of 6000 children who were conscripted to work at munitions factories in Hiroshima.

In the space of the stage, through dance and the chorus’s chanting, the pilgrim travels to Hiroshima where he reaches the fox temple that Fudô had sent him to. There he meets a priest – the shite or principal actor – who explains to the pilgrim the history behind the temple:

Long ago, a monk came to Hyakujo, the first head priest of this temple, and asked, ‘An enlightened person, one who has seen into the emptiness of all things, does he or does he not fall under the law of cause and effect?’ To this Hyakujo replied, ‘Such a person does not fall under the law of cause and effect.’ For this reply, he was condemned to be reborn five hundred times as a fox.

The priest reveals that he is in fact the ghost of Robert Oppenheimer who became over-immersed in the subatomic world, ‘where the law of cause and effect seemed not to hold.’ Losing sight of cause and effect, of karma, he allowed the science to contribute to the deaths of thousands. Like Hyakujo, he exists in a cycle of punishment: returning, full of grief, every year to the fox temple in Hiroshima on the anniversary of the bombing. Oppenheimer leaves and the pilgrim rests as the two locals arrive to perform ancestral rights for their father who was killed in the bombing. They discover the pilgrim there and retell him the

---

18 Allan Marett, 'The Bodhisattva of Compassion,' in Oppenheimer Noh Project (The University of Sydney, 2015).

19 Thank you to Allan Marett for sending me a copy of the manuscript.
story of this place. In their version the fox returns to human form when answering to the same question: ‘The law of cause and effect can never be evaded, not by anyone.’

The locals leave and Oppenheimer returns to the pilgrim who then confronts Oppenheimer about why he didn’t reveal the true end to the story. Oppenheimer replies, ‘Because in my heart I cannot believe it.’ The pilgrim invokes Fudô Myô-ô, who appears on the stage, to save Oppenheimer from the cycle of karma that entraps him. The companion actor or tsure plays Fudô. In Buddhist teachings Fudô sits ensconced in flames, ‘In one hand he holds a sword with which he cuts off impediments (bonno) to enlightenment. In the other hand he hold a snare with which he catches delusive thoughts.’\(^{20}\) In order to reconcile himself with his guilt over the bombing of Hiroshima, Oppenheimer must embody the figure of Fudô: he must enter the flames which symbolise the flames of the bomb, thus taking on the consequences of his actions. He must also exist to selflessly contribute to the enlightenment of others, as Fudô does. In the play Fudô gives Oppenheimer the sword and snare, and Oppenheimer performs a dance that actualises his newfound reconciliatory ethic:

Each flash of sword  
Cuts off ignorance.  
Each cast of snare  
Brings peace to tortured hearts.  
Dancing for all beings,  
The great unmoving one  
Dancing for all beings,  
The great unmoving one.

As we can see in the text Fudô and thus Oppenheimer sit still whilst paradoxically dancing. I will return to the significance of this later when I offer my textual analysis of the piece.

**Acting and Embodiment**

Before that, however, I want to explore the embodied cross-cultural aesthetics and personas that actors perform on the stage. As Knowles points out, intercultural theatre

\(^{20}\) Allan Marett, ‘Fudô Myô-ô’ in *Oppenheimer Noh Project* (The University of Sydney, 2015).
provides contact between cultures on the stage, between the stage and the audience, and between audience members. I would argue that it also takes place within the subjectivity and body of the actor, and indeed the subjectivity of each audience member.

In her book *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Rosi Braidotti positions the body as ‘striking back’ in the fairly recent focus on the body in academic fields like feminist criticism – these focuses displace the European tradition of privileging of the mind over the body. Braidotti points out a movement away from the notion of superior rationality, as exemplified in the Cartesian dialectic, and highlights how her primary interlocutors, Deleuze and Irigaray, ‘are committed to thinking through the radical immanence of the subject.’

For example, Braidotti points out the unique corporeal experience of motherhood and maternity: ‘the material/maternal feminine can provide alternative figurations of intersubjectivity, for instance through the complex symbiotic relationship between mother and child. The placenta as well as the umbilical cord can function as an alternative way of figuring interconnectedness.’

Here I wish to highlight again the uniquely corporeal experience of culture and difference through the performance of ‘different’ cultural behaviours. As shown earlier, Nascimento argues that the intercultural actor ‘welcomes difference into her body,’ and this behaviour becomes part of one’s personal culture. Take also Anna Deavere Smith’s one-woman play *Twilight: Los Angeles* in which Smith performs the identities of interviewees from various racial and ethnic backgrounds that talk about the 1992 Los Angeles Riots: ‘Smith thought that she could embody the ‘other’ if she occupied his patterns of speech and that re-enacting another’s speech revealed more about the ‘other’ than could be accomplished in the ‘self-based’ method of psychological realism.’ Thus Smith became the other through bodily mannerisms and speech rather than through an entirely cerebral approach to acting.

The embodied aspects of acting interest me in *Oppenheimer Noh*, but I see the intercultural aspects of embodiment as not only experienced by the actor but also by the audience.

Watching a white actor perform, with dead seriousness, the incredibly slow, intricate, and

---

21 Braidotti, ‘*Metamorphoses,*’ 20.
22 Ibid., 24.
extremely Japanese forms of behaviour in the play makes for quite an unusual experience – especially when one experiences this for the first time. While the feeling soon disappears, the apparent discord between the white body and the Japanese costuming and movement does make one think about the relationship between the racialized body and cultural identity. However as one adjusts to the scene, the naturalness and earnestness of this cultural cross-over creates an engaging intersubjectivity. The body becomes the site for intercultural hybridity. The audience realises that, in order to perform the extremely disciplined movements of noh, the actor must contain deeply sedimented Japanese behaviours in their body and mind. But those knowledgeable about noh – those unlike myself – must read this as a Westernisation of Japanese form, rather than a ‘Japanisation’ of Western bodies I did. The heterogeneity of cultural positions in the audience makes for thoroughly intercultural possibilities in reading the play and the bodies within it.

Ashley Thorpe highlights how actor’s bodies – their physicality, their voice – can produce unique meanings that differ from other actor’s bodies:

the physical differences of each actor can become a productive tool to enable individual expression within a framework that might otherwise be considered quite rigid. I guess I’m thinking most obviously here about when there is one mask – and we do this in the Project – put on by different people. It has a completely different effect, and if that then becomes multiplied by the body, and by the voice, then the capacity for individual expression is quite large.

Clearly the racial appearance of the actor influences the meaning of the noh performance as well. As Lo and Gilbert write: ‘The body in intercultural theatre is ... subject to multiple inscriptions, producing an unstable signifier rather than a totalized identity. It is a site of convergence for contesting discourses even though it may be marked with the distinctive signs of a particular culture.’ We can clearly see a convergence of the racialised body and the acculturated body, and this produces ambiguous, mixed assemblages.

25 In the premier I attended on September 30, 2015 at the Sydney Conservatorium of music the waki pilgrim role was played by David Crandall.


27 Lo and Gilbert, ‘Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,’ 47.
In the Ai Kyogen – which is a comic interlude – we see two local characters: one wears Japanese traditional dress and the other a Western tuxedo with tails. Waisvisz and Vellino witnessed a similar costuming choice when they saw *The Gull* an English noh production in Canada also created by Emmert and Matsui: Waisvisz and Vellino called costuming a ‘jarring juxtaposition of intercultural costuming choices.’\(^{28}\) However I didn’t see it as such. At the performance I attended, the actor in tails, Gary Watson, was of Caucasian appearance and the other character was played by Yoke Chin, a Malaysian-born Chinese performer. The two also displayed quite a significant height difference. The striking difference between these actors, in terms of costume, race, and appearance meant that the audience had to suspend disbelief in their ability to imagine these actors as Japanese siblings – which were the roles they performed. Of course it is not impossible that such a pair could be brother and sister, and Japanese for that matter, but the casting choice does seem to subvert stereotypes about what Japanese (as well as white or Malaysian for that matter) bodies should be. Their Japanese identities are exemplary examples of mixing between the local and global. Not only do these racially and culturally diverse actors embody Japanese performance techniques in themselves, thus experiencing and showcasing their culturally mixed acting subjectivities and corporealities, but their bodies symbolically represent racially and culturally hybrid iterations of Japaneseness.

Just as Anna Deavere Smith’s work highlighted the importance of speech to the embodied experience of ‘becoming others’ through acting, the use of English language chant in *Oppenheimer Noh* represents a key aspect of the acting performance. Noh chant derives from Buddhist chant, but as Cynthia Gendrich and Woodrow Hood point out noh chanting in English may resemble C19th Western declamation, which actors used for purposes of projection in Western outdoor theatre (noh was traditionally performed outdoors, although this is rarely the case nowadays). There does seem to be a difference in intonation between Japanese and English noh chant: I noticed a clear change in phrasing when the *waki* actor pronounced ‘Fudô Myô-ô’ in amidst his English lines. This may be due to the limitations of the English language, but it may also be that English noh does not have a clear precedent for transposing Japanese chant intonations onto English. Robin Thompson claims, in reference to English language noh: ‘Despite the attempt to retain the standard 7 -5 syllable patterns of

---

\(^{28}\) Waisvisz and Vellino, 'The Steveston Noh Project: The Gull as Intercultural Redress Theatre.'
Japanese poetic literature, the lack of correspondence between the stress patterns of the English language and the musical phrasing, and between musical and semantic units, makes it difficult to follow the text without recourse to the libretto.\(^{29}\) The *Oppenheimer* text varies in its use of meter: some passages are written in verse, others are written to be spoken. The libretto indicates forms of Japanese noh chant and song that the performer uses to deliver the lines. However, the extent to which these noh variations are executed in English is not entirely clear. In any case, the English noh chant resembles the slow, deliberate Japanese noh chants with their peculiar phrasing and intonation. In this sense it represents an unusual form of cross-cultural communication that the listener must accustom themselves to if they have not heard English noh chanting before. To interpret the chant in a very simple way: it sounds as if the actors attempt to speak English through the filter of Japanese noh intonation. In this sense the actor’s use of speech, like the noh gesture I alluded to earlier, highlights the way in which the Western body or persona performs sediminent Japanese forms of behaviour, but in this case through the aural medium of English. Not only that, but the audience’s ears must re-acustom themselves to the English language through the filter of Japanese intonation. Australian audiences go through a refiguring or realignment in their relationship to their own language, and re-establish a connection after a sense of intercultural displacement. They therefore re-evaluate their cultural identifications with English and end up forming a culturally mixed identification with it.

In considering, then, the bodily experiences of all these actors, we can see an actualisation of the idea that cultural identity might ‘become’ not through purely psychological experiences of subjectivity but through embodied, corporeal experience. The actors welcome Japaneseness and hybrid, interstitial cultural experience into their bodies. They thus ‘become others’ and experience, within themselves, multiple nodes of subjectivity interacting with each other. In Deleuze’s words they embody the experience of ‘multiple subjects of becoming.’\(^{30}\) Or as Gilbert and Lo argue, quoting Robert Young, ‘The hybrid counter-energies that result from the clash between the symbolic space’ [for us this would

---


\(^{30}\) Braidotti, ’Metamorphoses,’ 7.
mean the Australian or Western space/identity] and the culturally inscribed body can ... produce ‘a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, [and] the perpetual revolution of form.’ In addition to the actor’s intercultural process, the audience engages with the stage in important intercultural ways too. The mixed subjectivities of the actors challenge the audience’s own notions of cultural/racial/national identity. Who will they identify with in the play? Oppenheimer Noh may lead audience members to identify with Japanese culture or to the culturally mixed personas on stage. In the process, they may cultivate, through their viewing experience, the multiple nodes of identification mentioned above. The narrative, which I explore in a moment, will also influence this process of identification. What’s more, the difficulties in understanding and appreciating the complicated noh form means that audiences probably would need to learn about this traditional Japanese art form if they wish to continue enjoying it. As Waisvisz and Vellino write, a Western audience’s encounter with noh theatre ‘requires apprenticeship to its cultural and aesthetic norms, because its style is very different from that of Western theatre.’ If audiences wish to commit to an appreciation of English language noh then their ‘apprenticeship’ potentially creates an ongoing intercultural relationship. This is a relationship to the difference of Japanese culture, as well as to the mixed culturally hybrid potentialities of this example of intercultural theatre.

*Reconciliation, Science, and Becoming*

While one might read the play as a Westerner’s personal reconciliation with their own guilt complex associated with Hiroshima, Oppenheimer avoids a Eurocentric perspective by taking the persona through a Zen Buddhist narrative of redemption or reconciliation. The final moment of redemption takes place as an act of embodied becoming: Oppenheimer becomes the figure of Fudô Myô-ô. His act of becoming Fudô might be likened to an act of spiritual possession.

Allan Marett writes that Richard Flanagan’s Man-Booker Prize winning novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013) shows us that reflective testimonies on Australian

---

32 Waisvisz and Vellino, 'The Steveston Noh Project: The Gull as Intercultural Redress Theatre.'
relationships with the Pacific war still remain relevant. As mentioned earlier, the play reflects Marett’s own personal and spiritual journey through his grief for the bombing of Hiroshima. I see Oppenheimer’s narrative of redemption as an externalisation of internal psychological/spiritual examination and healing. The pilgrim feels inexplicably drawn to Hiroshima, and Oppenheimer returns to the spot every year as part of his karmic retribution. The chorus says of Oppenheimer:

... he turns towards the burning city,
And with deepest reluctance, walks the pain-filled way.
Weighed down with remorse and dread ...

This pull towards Hiroshima signifies a cyclical or karmic return to the space of trauma; the return catalyses the process of healing and/or reconciliation. The figure of Oppenheimer himself symbolises how Western relationships with Japan are haunted by the issue of the atomic bomb and Western responsibility for it. In my chapter on After Darkness I go into more specific detail about the issue of reconciliation itself, as well as that of Japanese wartime responsibility.

The core source of wrongdoing on the part of the West, as figured in Oppenheimer, comes back to an arrogant dismissal of the Buddhist law of cause and effect. As Marett writes:

The Dalai Lama has said that one of the key issues facing science is the mysterious relationship between the world of conventional physics, where time, space and causality operate ‘normally’ and the quantum world of sub-atomic figures, where time and space collapse, and causality ceased to function.³⁴

Western Nuclear criticism, which I draw on for my analysis of Dreams of Speaking in the section to come, has explored the ramifications of this quantum world on our versions of reality.³⁵ Critics often point to the ‘uncertainty principle’ which governs the impossibility of determining the position of subatomic particles. This leads to the claim that it is impossible to define objects and reality in fixed terms. Anna Balakin writes that the uncertainty principle shows that the laws of causality do not hold: she highlights – with her focus on art

³³Marett, ‘The Bodhisattva of Compassion.’
³⁴ ‘Foxes and Karma,’ in Oppenheimer Noh Project (The University of Sydney, 2015).
– how the principle ‘confirms the surrealists’ intuition that there can be a nondeterminist understanding of reality.’

Some theorists have linked quantum mechanics with the disruptive work of deconstruction, thus showing the places where meaning and reality (as we understand it) break down. Marett relates this unquantifiable nature of the subatomic to Zen Buddhist notions of nothing or emptiness; as he says, Zen Buddhists have long contemplated the ramifications of recognising the emptiness of the world.

Realisation of the empty one world, or 'enlightenment' as it is sometimes called, lies at the heart of Zen practice. It is the gate (the 'gateless gate') through which Zen students must pass in order for their practice to become genuine. But seeing into the insubstantiality of all things and the boundlessness of Buddha nature can be a dangerous business, particularly for the novice. It is all too easy, once a student has had some experience of emptiness, for a dichotomy to spring up, a new dualism that pits the relative world and the empty world against one another — a dichotomy that pits cause and effect against the realisation of emptiness. The student may become careless about the relative world, the world in which karma operates, and as a result real damage may be done, to themselves, to their loved ones, or even society more broadly.

Thus Oppenheimer’s error lies in failing to recognise that his scientific work had real world consequences. The real life of Oppenheimer raises more complexities as he became a vocal critic of the nuclear weaponry program. However, in this play he stands in for Western science as a whole.

The unique nature of the way Oppenheimer Noh teaches its key characters, and by extension its audience, a Japanese Buddhist lesson in accountability and ethics deserves particular attention. In addition, while the moment of redemption takes place through a Western character’s moment of becoming a Zen Buddhist deity, the play displays clear boundaries between identifying with Japan and identifying as Japanese. If we read Oppenheimer as a symbolic representation of Western karmic ‘guilt’ over Hiroshima, then Oppenheimer’s transformation signifies an interior process – within the pilgrim – of

---

37 Marett, ‘Foxes and Karma.’
changing forms of cultural identification. The pilgrim themselves remains unmoving at the sidelines of the action for a large part of the play. Although the pilgrim might be read as an incarnation of Marett, they do not take centre stage (they are the waki after all) and they do not ‘become the other’ in the same way that the figure of Oppenheimer does. Thus the character that symbolises a real world persona (the pilgrim) does not embody the other, only the character that symbolises a personal or interior process does. What we see then is an internal process of identification with Japan and Japanese culture, not an external identification as the other. This presents us with perhaps the most explicit metaphorisation of Kristeva’s contention that the foreigner lies within. The different, competing, or agonistic cultural identities within Marett negotiate their relationship to each other and, finally, become each other.

In the final part of the play, the chorus begins to take on the voices of the other characters. They take on the voice of the pilgrim (in this example, speaking to Oppenheimer):

   Why then did you not tell me how the fox was freed,
   When it shed its ignorance it also shed its pain
   And was returned once more to human form.
   Why did you not tell me that part of the story?

They take on the voice of Fudô: ‘I liberate all beings./ I wield the rope to ensnare all mistaken views.’ They also fluctuate between the voice of Oppenheimer and the narrator: ‘This is what will free me from the wheel of pain!/ And so at last he sees that all must pay their dues.’ The chorus already exhibits a multitude of voices, but the way in which the chorus takes on the voices of all the characters symbolises the extent of the intersubjective mixing of identities taking place within the mind and spirit of the pilgrim.

The pilgrim comes to terms with the grief within them, the grief associated with the West’s use of the atomic bomb, by taking responsibility as Robert Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer in the play is a reflection of the pilgrim’s guilt complex. The pilgrim chooses, through the figure of Oppenheimer, not to escape the law of cause and effect – not to forget the injustices of the war – but rather to embrace responsibility by stepping into the fire: ‘It is no small thing for/ Oppenheimer to bear upon his body the pain/ That he inflicted here.’ The pilgrim embraces the ramifications of the wrongdoing, and in the process aims to help others in
what we may read as the process of reconciliation (or indeed as the play suggests, the
process of spiritual healing). By stepping into the fire, Oppenheimer also embodies the deity
Fudô Myô-ô. By melding the symbol of Western guilt (Oppenheimer) with Asian selflessness
(Fudô), the pilgrim experiences not an agonistic or oppositional conflict between these
cultural positions – but rather a surrender to responsibility and a reaching out for the
welfare of the other. The process of becoming other – where Oppenheimer becomes Fudô –
represents a radical acknowledgment of empathy for the other, and a commitment to
ongoing responsibility and compassion. Rather than regarding the other as separate and in
opposition to the self, they become a reflection of the self – in Kristeva’s terms, the pilgrim
has recognised the other within, the other as the self. Oppenheimer’s embodiment of
difference plays out in the finale: in his explosive – albeit paradoxical – dance as Fudô:

      Dancing for all beings,
      The great unmoving one
      Dancing for all beings,
      The great unmoving one.

The character of Fudô sits in the background of the stage on an elevated platform,
unmoving, whilst Oppenheimer wields Fudô’s weapons and performs the final dance – thus
emphasising this dual position as unmoving and dancing. This is the most elaborate and
dramatic dance in the play: the build-up of physical tension throughout the play finds its
catharsis in this physically explosive dance. It emphasises the final climactic moment of
becoming other. The paradox of unmoving dance brings together the interrelationship
between reconciliation, cause and effect, and becoming. Fudô is static and yet constantly
moving, much like the subatomic particle which we see as self-contained but which is
impossible to pin point. This ties into the balance that Zen Buddhists must strike between
nothingness and the ‘relative’ world. There is no hard position on both sides, but a
negotiation of the two.

Finally, Fudô’s image exhibits the paradoxical dynamics of becoming others. Becoming
represents both the supposed separateness of the self and its inherent identification with
others. There is no hard boundary between self and other here, they are paradoxically
intertwined. The balance between self and other also highlights our need to ethically
negotiate our political responsibility to the other’s difference whilst also acknowledging our
personal identification with them. As Gadamer suggested, we cannot escape the boundaries or horizons of our knowledge; they always play a role in the moment of interaction. And yet, those boundaries are never hard boundaries, they are always changing and in flux. Fudô, who remains still whilst also dancing, emblematises this self that is bounded whilst also in motion. This productive paradox disenables hard and fast answers to the complexities of intercultural interaction and responsibility. Rather, it highlights the ongoing nature of the process of intercultural exchange. Like Oppenheimer becoming Fudô: we become others, we learn from them, our identification with them is defined by constant movement, and yet we are responsible to the other in our identification. The pilgrim’s recognition of the otherness within the self creates empathy for other in the moment of self-recognition. In addition, it broadens the boundaries of subjectivity by realising a mixed identity. The rich symbol of the unmoving dance encapsulates the pilgrim’s internal/personal process of becoming others. His embodiment of this figure that exists to help others – thus representing an active attitude towards reconciliation with Japan – exemplifies not a radical break from Japan, as in *The Factory*, but an ongoing engagement with the lives of others: an ongoing engagement with the Japanese.

*Yasukichi Murakami: Through a Distant Lens* is a documentary theatre piece by the photographer and artist Mayu Kanamori. Kanamori takes the audience through her journey of discovering the lost photographs of Yasukichi Murakami, a photographer and inventor who moved to Australia from Japan in 1897 and died in Tatura Internment Camp in 1944. She discovers details about his life, interviews his descendants, and converses with his ghost. In the process Kanamori uncovers the history of pre-war Japanese residence in Australia. She eventually finds many of Murakami’s photographs in his home town of Tanami: he had them back to his family during his life in Australia. The photographs present a record of Asian Australian history and therefore the culturally mixed realities of Australian cultural life.

Unlike *The Factory* and *Oppenheimer Noh*, *Yasukichi Murakami* takes place mostly in the space of Australia. It brings the questions of intercultural engagement (that we saw in the previous two texts) to Australia, thus compelling us to consider how to implement becoming others as intercultural engagement within the multicultural space of the Australian nation. This focus on Australia as a site for intercultural engagement draws attention to my contention that while intercultural interactions in overseas spaces can lead to significant cross-cultural identification, Australian cultural space must also be able to accommodate these transgressive and transformative experiences — especially because they have the potential to transform Australian cultural identities.

I employ Avtah Brah’s concept of ‘diaspora space’ to frame the Australian space depicted in this play as one proliferating with mixed diasporic cultural influences. The host space reshapes the diaspora, and the diaspora reshapes the host nation. The diasporic space of Australia thus leads to transformative moments of cross-cultural identification that change limiting racial and cultural conceptions of Australian identity. In making these observations however, I do not argue that Kanamori creates a superior version of intercultural engagement or becoming (by virtue of her Asian Australianness) to the ones explored earlier in this section. Rather, I simply observe her ability to imagine intercultural engagement in the space of Australia, and suggest that her ability to bring transnational and national
concerns together in this way speaks to the mixed national and cultural perspective of the diasporic individual.

By highlighting, through photography, the relatively unknown history of Japanese residence in Australia, Kanamori gives the audience a window into the Asian presence that has long been part of Australian life. In this sense, we interface with the ‘foreigner within,’ the foreign presence that is often disavowed, the foreigner whose difference is often flattened out or assimilated. By bringing out this hidden or suppressed foreigner – not without but within the nation – the play identifies and externalises the other melancholically lost to the nation. In addition, by bringing into the present a past history and temporality, the play highlights how the ghosts of the past haunt the mainstream discourses of the present – thus paralleling the racial or cultural other that haunts national identification.

This sense of loss resonates with the focus on ghosts and ghostly possession that we see in this play and other texts in this section. The ghostly presence of Murakami exemplifies the lost history of Japanese residence in Australia as well as the racial or cultural other smothered by white Australian cultural hegemony. Not only that, but, Murakami also signifies the Japanese ethnic identity within the Japanese Australian self. Kanamori searches for Murakami and his legacy in order to search for Japanese Australian identity: this scenario parallels my own process of discovering an ethnic identity that was disenabled by the cultural power of whiteness. The temporal as well as cultural mixture in this play reaches a climax when the audience shares in a moment where Kanamori feels the spirit of Murakami inside her. This moment of spiritual possession typifies the move to awaken to the other within, and become other. Diaspora space, in *Yasukichi Murakami*, enables a radical moment of cross-cultural identification in the Australian audience and thus a moment of becoming mixed.

*Diaspora Space*

In Avtar Brah’s influential book *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) she draws attention to the complicated multiplicities of what she calls ‘diaspora space’:
Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition.\(^1\)

In highlighting the contested terrain of the syncretic forms of identification created by diasporic experience, Brah also shows how the diaspora space is not limited to those who move. This space also involves that of the ‘host’ country:

My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is ‘inhabited’, not only by those who have migrated and their descendents, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’. The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native.\(^2\)

Thus the unique cultural position of the diaspora influences and reshapes the culture to which diasporic people move. Brah’s position resonates with that of Fran Martin et al who argue that Asian diasporic experience in Australia proves the inseparability of the concepts of ‘Asia’ and ‘Australia’. They see culture in Australia as fundamentally imbricated with Asian culture, and stress that everyday experience in Australia is essentially intercultural and transnational.\(^3\)

Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo use Brah’s concept to talk about diasporic theatre. They describe diaspora as

a relational space, a zone of interaction that is inflected by memory and imagination as well as the materialities of migration. Such relationality has long been taken as a fundamental aspect of space in theatre, which encompasses complex interaction

---


\(^2\) Ibid., 209.

\(^3\) Martin, ‘Australia’s “Asian Century”: Time, Space and Public Culture.’
between the material site(s) of a performance and the locations it may conjure. In this respect, performance brings space into being as a dynamic cultural entity that is situated and temporalized at any given moment to convey distinct but flexible meanings to an audience. ... theatrical space lends itself well to the imaginative (re)mapping that tends to characterize diasporic expressions of subjectivity.\(^4\)

Kanamori’s play centres on the lives of diasporic people in Australia and thus exemplifies how diasporic theatre ‘allows under-represented groups to enact personal and cultural histories and to rehearse new forms of being ‘in place.’”\(^5\) But Yasukichi Murakami does more than this; as an example of diasporic space, the stage also becomes a space that influences, changes, and mixes Australian cultural space. It has the ability to imagine Australia as a diasporic space, ripe with cultural mixture and transformative potential. The play does this by immersing us in the intercultural engagements of the past, thus leading us to re-evaluate the character of Australian cultural life. It brings the transgressive intercultural space that we see on the road (in the previous section) to the stage, and imagines the space of Australian culture as an intercultural one. It brings the intercultural space of The Factory and Oppenheimer Noh to the Australian nation and shows us that we can both influence and be influenced by this space of cultural mixture. Kanamori’s journey also represents the continuation of Law’s vision for ongoing intercultural engagement in the space of Australia. Here we see the disruptive possibilities of this journey reshaping and reconstituting Australian and diasporic identities.

Photographies of Diaspora

One of the primary ways in which Kanamori highlights the intercultural, diasporic realities of Australia is by drawing attention to the long history of Japanese migration to Australia. In the popular imagination Australian history is a history of white Australia. And yet numerous historical inquiries into Australian history have found that history to contain robust transnational realities. Walker and Sobocinska’s work attempts to account for this relatively unknown Asian Australian history:


\(^5\) Ibid., 153.
Asia was never simply an external force to be resisted, placated or engaged. Even during the high point of the White Australia Policy several communities, particularly the northern port towns of Broome, Darwin and Cairns, had large Asian–Australian populations that sometimes outnumbered white residents ... Furthermore, while Chinese migrants were stigmatised, particularly at times of social stress, they were neither altogether voiceless nor without supporters willing to speak up for them. Alongside the master narrative of antipathy, there were always stories of adaptation, accommodation and mutual respect as Chinese, Japanese and Malays lived and worked alongside white neighbours. 

_Yasukichi Murakami_ brings this history to life through the quest to discover the lost photographs of Murakami. The play opens with a re-enactment of Murakami’s funeral. The voice over of a priest says:

> There is a time for everything, 
> ... 
> _a time to be silent and a time to speak,_
> _a time for war and a time for peace._

The focus on temporality in these opening lines of the play highlights the significance of folding the past into the present. The play represents a time to speak about the past and to reflect on the experiences of war and internment. Reflecting on past times gives us pause to reconsider the present as well as the future. Kanamori represents herself on stage as Mayu, who is played by Arisa Yura. She tells us about Murakami’s journey to Australia, and draws parallels between Murakami’s life and her own: Kanamori is also a diasporic Japanese photographer living in Australia. Murakami took portrait photos of people in Broome and Darwin, and Kanamori takes wedding photos. The intersection of their stories draws explicit links between the history of diaspora in Australia and the present day experiences of Japanese Australians. Images of Murakami’s portraits are projected on to a screen behind the stage. Mayu says,

> These portraits of Japanese, who lived in Australia in the early 1900’s are

---

6 Walker and Sobocinska, _Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century_, 13.
proof that these people once lived here.
The silent voices of Japanese in Australia.
I keep hearing them.
Voices of the many forgotten Japanese who lived here.
Forgotten, because the violence of the war has wiped out the memory of those that came here to work and make this place their home.

The Japanese Australian community is still a dispersed and largely invisible Asian community, as compared to the more established communities of Chinese and Korean Australians – as Masako Fukui observes in her radio play ‘From the Pearlers to the Bankers: The History of Japanese Australians.’ The community is not unified and is small in numbers. A 2011 census showed that 35 378 Japanese born people resided in Australia. This is compared to 318 969 Chinese born people, and 74 538 Korean born people. Clearly these numbers do not account for the second and subsequent generations that make up a large percentage of the ethnic communities in Australia as well. Fukui interviews various Japanese Australians for their thoughts on the lack of Japanese Australian community building, but ultimately she does not come to a clear conclusion about why this is the case: ‘there seems to be an invisible line dividing Japanese Australians that only we Japanese seem to be able to discern.’

The details of Murakami’s life show us a transnational Australia different to the dominant history of a homogenous white Australia. During his life in Broome Murakami owned a photography studio in what was known as Jap town – it is now called China town. Broome hosted a large number of Japanese pearlers at the time within a thriving Japanese community. An image of China town is displayed behind the stage and Mayu walks around as if on the streets of Broome. ‘I have come here to find answers,’ she says and interviews Pearl Hamaguchi who is a Japanese-Chinese-Scottish-Indigenous-Australian – one of the descendants of these early Japanese settlers. The image on the screen changes to portraits

---

8 Community Relations Section DIAC, 'Community Information Summary: Japan-Born,' ed. Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2011).
of an Indigenous woman – Hamaguchi’s recorded voice plays: ‘When us girls would walk down to China Town, with strict instructions from nuns, not to make eye contact with the heathen Asiatics, We’d pass Murakami’s photography shop. And he’d be waiting for mum.’

The documentary theatre style transports the audience spatially and temporally to early twentieth century Broome, allowing us proximity to the interesting intercultural interactions of this early diaspora space. The stage becomes Broome, the space for an interview, and a personal reflection on past cross-cultural contact. Murakami appears to have taken six portraits of Hamaguchi’s mother. Hamaguchi continues, relaying her mother’s story about Murakami: ‘Oh, I said. What did he look like? Oh, she said, he was very good-looking. And I’m thinking, but mother, why didn’t you… (laugh). She said I think he had a crush on me.’

Despite the value systems that attempted to restrict interaction between people of different cultural and racial backgrounds, these forms of interaction and mixture obviously took place. In fact, several intermarriages between Japanese men and Aboriginal women occurred in Broome during this period.¹¹

Murakami was a successful businessman in Broome; there is even a street named after him. He entered into business partnership with one Captain Ansel Clement Gregory. Their story begins with a cross-cultural act of good faith and deepens into a long term co-operative partnership. As (the ghost of) Murakami says to Mayu:

[O]ne day a dishevelled white man came to see me to borrow some money. I’d never seen this man before. And I wasn’t lending money to a white man then. But he said he was a pearler. Lost his fleet in a cyclone and swam ashore from his shipwreck. He needed some money urgently for his shipwrecked crew. I thought I’d probably never see him or my money again, but he looked like a decent man, wanting to help his crew. So I took a chance and gave him the money.

The two ran the Dampier Hotel in Broome, a pub frequented by the Japanese pearlers. Murakami owned a car that he used as a taxi to ferry drunk Japanese pearlers from the pub to their homes. They also made money together through pearling. Murakami helped pay for Gregory’s first luggers, but Japanese were not allowed to own luggers: the two had ‘silent’

or secret dealings in order to allow Murakami to profit from pearling along with Gregory. Murakami says to Mayu, ‘The pearling masters were all white, and most of them did not trust us Japanese, Malays, Koepanger, Chinese, Filipinos, Aborigines...Gregory was different.’

In real interview audio material with Joe Murakami, the son of Yasukichi Murakami, we learn about the diving suit invented by Joe’s father. Pearl diving was an exceptionally dangerous profession, death was common, and part of the danger lay in the equipment itself. Murakami comes on stage to explain his design:

I developed a different diving dress

[In] my design

The upper and lower sections were made from better waterproof material

And use a different way of breathing –
the exhaled air could not mix with the inhaled air.

That way the air for breathing would be always pure.

The diver inhales through his nose and exhales through his mouth, by way of a mouthpiece and tubes into the helmet

And in the top of the helmet, an external exit valve, so the exhaled air can be passed into the surrounding water.

While Murakami was interred a French man named Gangon patented a diving suit that used the exact same breathing technology. Murakami was unable to appeal the patent due to his internment. Nevertheless, Murakami’s invention speaks to his ingenuity and his contribution to the pearling community in Broome.

In 1935 Murakami moves to Darwin which also has a thriving polyethnic community:

In 1911, when Palmerston was renamed Darwin, the Chinese formed the largest ethnic group. Out of a total of 1387 inhabitants, the Chinese population of 442 outnumbered the 374 Europeans. The 77 Japanese, recorded as crew members of the pearling fleets, constituted the largest group of Asian fleet members. Other
ethnic groups at the time included: 52 Filipinos, 49 Timorese, 21 Malays, 7 Javanese, 4 Siamese, 5 Singalese and 5 South Sea Islanders.  

His success as a portrait photographer continues in Darwin, as do his business dealings with Gregory – who has also moved to Darwin. He mingles with the high society there and is a prominent figure in the city: ‘They had friends in high places, they sent their children to convent school, were invited to parties at Government House.’

Murakami’s success and roles in the communities of Broome and Darwin, highlight the particular transnational history of these Australian cities in the early twentieth century. Unlike in the first section where Japanese men are either unable to contribute to Australian society, or are imagined doing so in the future, in this play Murakami has a long term presence within Australian communities.

Mayu’s interactions with his ghost bring the present in contact with this transnational past. In addition, his presence, tied as it is to the space of Australia, suggests unequivocally that he belongs to Australia. He is part of the landscape, part of the nation’s memory and history, part of the culture. The stage itself represents a changing heterotopic and mixed temporal space that exemplifies the mixed spatial and temporal co-ordinates of diaspora space. Towards the end of the play – when Mayu travels to Tanami, Japan – she muses on diasporic feelings of longing and belonging:

When people like Murakami, myself and all of us who have left our ancestral home lands go on holiday, we often go back to where our loved ones live to reconnect and rekindle that love. And then we go back to another life in another place with others to love.

These mixed feelings about place and the networks that we have in different diasporic spaces highlights what Lo and Gilbert called the seminal motif of displacement in diasporic stories: these stories register ‘the loss of place and belonging that migrancy entails.’

---


13 Lo and Gilbert, ‘Diasporas and Performance,’ 152.
ambivalent feelings about space and place highlight the varied forms of personal and cultural investment that national spaces can have – and also how individuals can have multiple sources of such investment. As Thomas Hammar observes ‘national identity is not a zero-sum game, which means that individuals do not have a limited number of ‘identification units’ that they have to divide between different groups and that, therefore, the increase in identification with one country proportionately reduces ties to the other.’

The Australia that we see in this play represents a diaspora space mixed with various practices, identities, and feelings of belonging.

**Worldly Possessions**

Despite Mayu’s comprehensive exploration of Murakami’s life, the ghost withholds information about himself and his life. When Mayu starts to ask about his relationship with and feelings towards his first wife Eki, Murakami becomes decidedly cagey. He married her because ‘she needed help with her business,’ in order to ‘help her and all the Japanese community.’ ‘She was a great photographer,’ he says. Mayu also speaks with the ghost of Eki – who is represented through a pre-recorded video that is projected onto the stage screen. When Mayu starts to get close to the reason for Murakami’s divorce with Eki – ‘Yasukichi was no longer listening to me,’ – and to the circumstances around Eki’s death, ‘I was tired, becoming sick’ – the ghost starts to fade away. ‘But did you get better? Did Murakami san care for you? You were still his wife...Eki san?’

Additionally, the ghosts are evasive in regards to the lost photographs. When Mayu asks about where the photographs are, Murakami only says:

*MURAKAMI:* My photographs aren’t the only things that disappeared from history.

*MAYU:* What do you mean?

*MURAKAMI:* What do you think, Mayu san?

Mayu’s questions to Eki on this subject receive a similarly cryptic response:

*EKI:* And I thought you were looking for Yasukichi’s missing

---

photographs?

**MAYU:** I...I’m looking for the truth

**EKI:** *(Nods/Beat)* And how do you plan on finding that?

**MAYU:** I don’t know.

There are so many...gaps.

**EKI:** Yes.

Life is full of...gaps.

Eki’s response highlights what becomes one of the key concerns of the final section of the play: the question of what the truth of the play is. The ghosts appear sceptical of Mayu’s need for information and they question her motives. When Mayu apparently pries a little too deeply into Eki’s past, Eki snaps back aggressively.

**MAYU:** Eki san, did you ever want children of your own?

**EKI:** Did you?

*MAYU doesn’t wish to answer this, or she can’t*

You were too busy Mayu san. Looking for the truth.

And now, you have all this time, time to stalk Yasukichi.

*Mayu is offended.*

**MAYU:** I’m not...stalking him. I’m looking for his photographs.

**EKI:** And what if you don’t find them?

**MAYU:** I want to tell his story. Show people his photographs. Make a performance. I want people to remember him for what he did.

His art.

*Eki gives a short cynical sigh.*

**EKI:** And then, you will find peace?

*Again MAYU cannot answer this.*

**MAYU:** I thought you’d want me to find them.

*Beat*

**EKI:** You want to be remembered, for your art too, I suppose.

**MAYU:** It’s about...contribution.

**EKI:** Is it?

A contribution, for who? You? Or Yasukichi? And for the
wider good?
Let us talk about truth Mayu san.
How many people are actually going to see this performance of yours?

Beat

What will it show them?

Mayu’s contribution can be seen in the way that she corrects the historical record, for example in correctly attributing to Murakami photos in the National Archives that he took but were labelled under a misspelt name. She contributes – through her play – to the recognition of Murakami’s work and legacy, as well as to awareness of the unique transnational history of Japanese residence in Australia. However, as I see it, the play also strives to achieve another particular aim: it also attempts to contribute to the recognition of, or perhaps the attainment of, a Japanese Australian identity. This is never explicitly stated in the play, however the many links between the past and present in Yasukichi Murakami do urge us to think about the nature of the Japanese community in the present day. In a previous performance art work entitled ‘In Repose’ Kanamori performs hybridised Japanese rituals for the dead at the Japanese War Cemetery in Cowra in order ‘connect the living to the dead so that the departed may find peace away from the natal land … By putting the dead to rest, the work offers an opportunity for the present generation of immigrant Japanese to create a sense of ethical belonging,’.15 Similarly in Yasukichi Murakami, by acknowledging the presence of previous generations of Japanese Australians such as Murakami, Kanamori adds to a sense of belonging and identity for current day Japanese Australians.

As we saw in the introduction, Rey Chow explores how the trauma of the internment experience solidifies a shared history of struggle in Japanese American communities. It creates a story and an identity that brings the community together.16 Due to the fact that almost all internees were forcibly repatriated to Japan in Australia, no such shared history exists in the post-war Japanese Australian migrant community. By exploring pre-war

residence as well as internment, the play attempts to encourage a sense of what Japanese Australian experience might be, and it asks us to relate to these experiences. However, this desire for ethnic identity proves rather elusive. Mayu cannot retrieve all the information she wants from Murakami and Eki: there are many gaps, as Eki says, that cannot be filled. Murakami parallels the difficulties of attaining truth in history to the difficulty of capturing truth in photography:

Photographs – they reveal, and at the same time, conceal the truth.

In that split second when the shutter falls, we grasp all that is real, all that is hidden and all that may be forgotten.

A great photographer leaves in the photograph, a trace of what we thought we had grasped.

Mayu san, sometimes, you have to listen to see.

Sometimes we have to learn to know there are things we cannot photograph.

The impossibility of any hard truth that can be captured and contained reflects the impossibility of truly attaining a perfect, authentic ethnic identity. Vincent J. Cheng highlights the anxiety in our contemporary world around needing to claim an authentic, distinctive cultural subjectivity:

It is along these lines, perhaps, that we might speculate on the cultural forces behind the continuing reification of authenticity and ethnic identitarianism in the world today—at a time when one might be tempted to imagine the need for such militant identity politics to be less necessary, with distinct cultures gradually melding into a transnational global culture: rather than needing now to depend less on cultural differences and identities, previously distinct cultures suffer an anxiety about the perceived loss of identity and subjectivity, thus requiring the continuing construction and maintenance of fantasomatic identities and authenticities so as to continue to be able to assert difference and superiority (rather than global sameness and what Irish
scholar Seamus Deane calls the ‘harmony of indifference’ [Heroic 15])—whether in the forms of World Cup soccer competitions, sectarian politics, or ethnic warfares.\textsuperscript{17}

Ambiguous feelings of authenticity are a not uncommon trope in Asian Australian theatre performance. William Yang’s photo-diary performance piece \textit{China} (2007) explores his own process of feeling both belonging as well as exclusion in the space of China – he ‘feels yellow’ and yet also feels moments of disidentification when he cannot understand the language or local cultural behaviours: ‘such moments shift claims of identification away from Chineseness as a stable identity to a relational process of \textit{becoming} Chinese.’\textsuperscript{18} The truth of the photograph remains something much more cryptic and fluid than we might like. While Mayu finds many of Murakami’s photographs in Tanami, and thus completes her quest of drawing attention to Murakami’s memory and life work, the meaning of these photographs is still uncertain. Does Murakami offer us a clear understanding of Japanese Australian experience? Can we gain a sense of Japanese Australian identity from this play? The play, in fact, offers a much more ambiguous position on this issue, one that carries with it a similar ambiguity to Yang’s identifications with China. This play asks us to be self-reflexive and to look deeper than surface level identifications. At the beginning of the play, when Mayu first meets Murakami, he tells her to use a tripod in order to capture the Japanese grave stones she is photographing in Cowra. He says,

\begin{quote}
Go and get your tripod, and set it up.
Put it on a slow shutter speed.
See what you find.
You may see something deeper. Beyond.
Maybe you will capture a movement of spirit, where all seems set in stone.
\end{quote}

These graves are not going anywhere.
The perfect subject matter on a morning like this.
Beautiful soft light…..
Still, silent, with history.
Look at all these people buried here.

\textsuperscript{17} Cheng, \textit{Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity / Vincent J. Cheng}, 6.
\textsuperscript{18} Lo and Gilbert, ‘Diasporas and Performance,’ 155.
Not only them. Forgotten, forgotten people.
Far away from their home, their families,
they came here, lived once,
and contributed to the history of this country,
to our history.

You owe it to them, Mayu san,
to take the time to listen.
Breathe, see, and listen.

How to give closure to the disruptive, exciting place of liminal cross-over that is diaspora space? How do we find a truth of cultural or national identification in amidst all the disruptive and mixed feelings of belonging and displacement? What do we breathe into and listen to, in order to give meaning to Mayu’s journey? As I read it, the closure comes from becoming others. It comes from embracing the experience of passing thresholds of becoming, rather than holding on to fixed modes of being. Stuart Hall identifies two ways of conceptualising cultural identity:

The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common; . . . [the] second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are.’ . . . Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past.¹⁹

The moment of becoming in this play occurs at its end, again, through a moment of ghostly possession. As Mayu takes photographs of the images that Yasuko has in Japan, she comes

---
across one where Murakami’s second wife Shigeno sits on a kart with their daughter Masuko. This is the last projected image the audience is given.  

Photographing Murakami’s photograph inspires an uncanny moment of ghostliness. She sees beyond the image, as if channelling Murakami’s call to ‘breathe, see, and listen.’ As Kanamori writes in her blog:

As I looked through the viewfinder onto this photograph to photograph it, I intuitively knew the exact spot Yasukichi had focused on – the eyes of young Kathleen. I too focused on her eyes, and she was returning my gaze. Or was it Yasukichi’s gaze? [In] the viewfinder, for a moment, I thought was Yasukichi. Or was it Yasukichi’s ghost photographing through me?

In this moment of possession, the audience becomes another. As they look at this image on the stage the audience feels Mayu’s and Murakami’s presences in their own gaze. For a moment they feel a heightened sense of being more than one person: they are multiple persons. This moment holds the revelatory truth of the play. It passes the audience beyond the threshold of the being one/self: they identify with the other in themselves. They have an expanded sense of cultural identity; they are many cultures at the same time. They discover

---

21 Ibid.
the Asianness imbedded within the Australian self and see that that self is multiple and mixed.
Section III: War and Reconciliation
This section explores three novels that centre on the Second World War and the theme of wartime reconciliation. As in many of the previous texts, these novels fold the past into the present in order to consider the ongoing ramifications of the past. They consider how reconciling with the wartime past can change current day intercultural relations between Australia and Japan, and offer a future of ongoing intercultural exchange.

In section I I examined the importance of bringing together becoming others and ongoing engagement, in section II I explored how transnational intercultural exchange should take place in the space of Australia not just overseas, and in this section I argue that comparative approaches to cross-cultural issues provide an important step forward in intercultural relations between Australia and Japan.

*The Narrow Road to the Deep North* examines Japanese mistreatment of Australian POWs on the Burma Railway. In this novel, Richard Flanagan offers a balanced look at the experiences of both Japanese officers and Australian POWs on the Burma Railway, and attempts to draw connections between the motivations and aspirations of soldiers on both sides. He blurs moral lines between good and evil, guilty and not guilty, and asks us to empathise with the predicament that both Australians and Japanese faced in the war. *Dreams of Speaking* explores a friendship between Alice, a white Australian academic, and Mr Sakamoto, a Nagasaki atom bomb survivor. The novel itself meditates on modernity’s co-existence with the unmodern, especially the persistence of past memories and histories in the present. By delving into the wartime past, specifically the dropping of the Hiroshima bomb, Gail Jones – like Marett – deals with a lingering Australian (or Western) guilt complex to do with the atomic bomb. As Alice comes to terms with Mr Sakamoto’s death at the end of the novel she negotiates grief and guilt for the bomb and finds a way forward through re-evaluating her identity in light of her intercultural friendship with Mr Sakomoto. While *The Narrow Road* looks at Japanese wrongdoing in Burma during World War II, and *Dreams of Speaking* considers Australian feelings of responsibility for wrongdoing toward Japan in the war, *After Darkness* explores examples of wrongdoing on both sides during this period: Piper highlights the atrocities of Japan’s chemical and biological warfare experimentation division Unit 731 alongside the Australian internment of resident Japanese. Piper uses the position of the mixed race Japanese Australians, or *hafu*, in the internment camps to undermine the notion of unidimensional national identification. In doing so she draws
attention to the possibility of cross-cultural contact leading to reconciliation. In addition, Piper’s own mixed race Japanese Australian position is reflected in her comparative approach to accountability and the Second World War.

The previous section examined two intercultural approaches to the relationship between Australia and Japan: white characters engaging with Japanese culture in Japan, and Japanese characters bringing Japanese culture and experience to Australia. Piper’s narrative opens a space for interrogating Japanese culture and history while also looking at the containment and suppression of difference in Australia. This comparative approach highlights, to me, the future of my own studies and future possibilities in cross-cultural analysis.

Along with looking at the comparative approaches toward reconciliation in these novels, this section also explores the potential for narratives of wartime reconciliation to create significant moments of becoming others. In *The Narrow Road* none of the characters undergo any personal reconciliation with their former enemies or any process of intercultural becoming. As I will argue, however, Flanagan’s novel does still suggest how becoming others could start a reconciliation process. In *Dreams of Speaking* and *After Darkness*, reconciliation enables characters to empathise with the predicament of the Japanese other and therefore imagine a future of cross-cultural engagement.
7. Sadomasochism and becoming woman in the Narrow Road to the Deep North

In this novel about the protagonist Dorrigo Evans’s experiences in a Japanese POW camp in the Second World War, Flanagan provides an unusual juxtaposition between love and war, between the search for true loving connection – for Dorrigo and his lover Amy – and – for the Japanese officers – the search for true oneness with the colonial nation. Dorrigo and Amy realise their love through mutual identification while the Japanese officers consolidate their communal identity through the disavowal and destruction of national and racial others.

Dorrigo seeks loving connections with women, and his service within the POW camp allows him to feel love for his comrades – his important role as the camp doctor gives him a sense of completeness that, in a sadly ironic way, he never feels after the war. By revisiting Butler’s work on the disavowed feminine in the hegemonic masculine self, I argue that Dorrigo’s love relationships and his service to his ailing comrades allow him to embrace aspects of himself that are coded as feminine and disavowed through masculine socialisation. He embraces emotional vulnerability and switches traditional gender roles in his affair with Amy, and as camp doctor he plays a maternal, nursing role as healer and protector of the POWs. Thus, he must become others, or realise in himself the disavowed ‘feminine’, in order to feel whole.¹

The Japanese guards chase oneness with the Japanese nation, or ‘Japanese spirit,’ but they ultimately fail. Theirs is a disavowal of the racial, cultural, national other, rather than a becoming of the other. Kota gains perverse feelings of grandeur when beheading POWs and prisoners – this act allows him to feel at one with the colonial Japanese identity. In the process, he destroys his own vulnerability as well as, in Kristevan terms, the foreigner within himself.

This novel compares Australian and Japanese characters’ similar desires for connectedness not only to show how they differ in their relations with others, but also to draw parallels between the Japanese and Australian soldiers. Flanagan highlights the abject suffering that

¹ By ‘feminine’ here I of course mean that which is coded feminine, not any essentialist notion of the feminine.
both sides experience. He evacuates the soldiers of any redeeming moral virtues, and blurs the lines between good and evil, guilty and not guilty. Thus, he asks readers to empathise with and identify with the predicament of the Japanese soldiers as well as the Australian soldiers (even if they don’t sympathise with the Japanese soldiers or condone their actions). By exploring the immoral, unredeeming nature of war, Flanagan undermines any jingoistic or nationalistic narrative of mateship and virtue. Instead, he undoes national identification in order to draw attention to the shared predicament of suffering that war engenders.

In the post-war period, Dorrigo leads a deeply unsatisfying married life: he doesn’t reconnect with Amy after the war as he believes her to be dead. When he finds out later that she is alive, he doesn’t think it right to enter into her life after all these years. However, towards the end of the novel he redeems his marriage somewhat when he saves his wife and children from a bush fire. The episode momentarily reconnects him to love and his former saviour role. If Dorrigo’s ability to love others represents an alternative or corrective to the Japanese soldiers’ destruction and rejection of the other, then this ending highlights a roadmap for intercultural relations. The novel does not depict, in its characters, any process of cross-cultural identification or personal reconciliation with former enemies: through comparison, Flanagan only hints at how becoming others (as in Dorrigo’s process of becoming woman) might help us re-imagine the failed relations between cultural others in this novel. In *Dreams of Speaking* and *After Darkness* we see how individual characters’ cross-cultural identifications lead to personal processes of reconciliation.

The title *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* comes from the title of haiku poet Bashō’s literary travel diary *Oku no Hosomichi*. The diary chronicles Bashō’s journey on foot from Edo (modern day Tokyo) to a northerly interior region of Japan called Oku. His work can also be translated as *The Narrow Road to the Interior*. Flanagan’s narrow road is the railway that connected Thailand to its northern neighbour, Burma (present day Myanmar). But this novel, through its reconciliatory intentions, also connects Australia to its Asian north. Not only that, but by suggesting that becoming others might be a way to improve intercultural relations, *The Narrow Road* takes Australians into their own *interior* identifications and dis-identifications with Japan to create the possibility of cross-cultural connection.
Sadomasochism in Love and War

Flanagan’s novel won the 2014 Man Booker Prize, as well as the 2014 Prime Minister’s Literary Award. Flanagan is a multi-award winning novelist and is one of leading figures in contemporary Australian literature. His fiction explores immigrant experiences, interracial relationships, Aboriginal Australian experiences, Australian negotiations with cultural difference and much more. Thus, his fiction explores national as well as transnational concerns in Australian cultural spaces and abroad.

Dorrigo Evans is a young military doctor from Tasmania who marries the well to do Ella out of social ambition rather than love. In a book store, he has a chance encounter with a mesmerising woman, Amy, who he later discovers is the young wife of his Uncle Keith. When he goes to visit his Uncle, Amy and Dorrigo begin a heated affair that will haunt Dorrigo for the rest of his life. The affair is cut short when Dorrigo is shipped off to World War II. He is captured by the Japanese and forced to tend to POWs who work on the Burma Railway under the hideous conditions of the Japanese death camps. The novel shows the reader one day in the hellish life of the camps; it culminates in the cruel death of ‘Darky’ Gardiner, a mixed race Aboriginal soldier. At the end of the war we see the fate of the Japanese soldiers: some are sent to death, others escape retribution and attempt to continue on with their lives. Dorrigo is a reluctant national war hero. He has multiple affairs, difficulty letting go of the memory of Amy, and struggles to be emotionally present in his marriage and family life. In the finale of the novel he saves his wife and children from a massive bush fire. This act seems to reconcile him, if only momentarily, not only with his wife and family but all that he has lost through war, suffering, and the perils of love.

In this part of the chapter I will focus on how sadomasochistic tendencies feature in Flanagan’s representations of both Dorrigo’s love and the attitudes of the Japanese military officers. In a scene where the camp commander Major Nakamura is visited by his superior Colonel Kota, the two recite haiku to each other to summon a sense of their connection to ‘Japanese Spirit.’ It’s obvious that this Japanese spirit is tied to the domination of those that the imperial Japanese deem inferior:

They recited to each other more of their favourite haiku, and they were deeply
moved ...not in knowing the poem but in knowing the poem demonstrated the higher side of themselves and of the Japanese spirit – that Japanese spirit that was soon to daily travel along their railway all the way to Burma, the Japanese spirit that from Burma would find its way to India, the Japanese spirit that would from there conquer the world. (131)

The fact that this communion with nation hinges on a relationship of domination indicates a clear feeling of lack on the part of the Japanese: they are not complete as Japanese colonial subjects unless dominating another. The realities of this colonial identity mirror Erich Fromm's analysis of the psychology of Nazism: he argued that sadism and domination created a false sense of integrity in the self that was used to assuage the pain of primordial loss (separation from the mother) or ‘aloneness’. Infants begin life as ‘part of the mother’ but ‘slowly the child comes to regard the mother and other objects as entities apart from itself.’ This individuation brings a sense of fundamental aloneness. Fromm sees Nazi Fascism and the authoritarian character as indicative of a sadistic impulse that attempts to soothe the loneliness of individuality:

Sadism [aims] at unrestricted power over another person more or less mixed with destructiveness; masochism as aiming at dissolving oneself in an overwhelmingly strong power and participating in its strength and glory [Fromm's characterisation of the German people under Nazism]. Both the sadistic and the masochistic trends are caused by the inability of the isolated individual to stand alone and his need for a symbiotic relationship that overcomes this aloneness.

Nakamura and Kota attempt to dissolve into the power of the Japanese nation and, as I will explore in a moment, they use sadistic acts of domination to expunge the fundamental loss highlighted by Fromm. But in a highly unusual, and at times confronting, comparison, Flanagan shows how the Australian protagonist also suffers from the effects of this primordial loss. This is confronting because it highlights very personal similarities between

---

4 Ibid., 190-1.
the sadistic oppressor of the POW camp, and the POW themselves. Throughout his life, Dorrigo attempts to expel the pain of separation from the mother: not so much through domination, but through promiscuity.

The very first paragraph of the novel shows us a moment of loving wholeness – a childhood memory of Dorrigo in a church, sitting with his mother and grandmother: 'Blinding light and him toddling back and forth, in an out of its transcendent welcome, into the arms of women. Women who loved him' (1). This feeling of unconditional, complete love – a love before primordial loss – is a feeling Dorrigo will chase for the rest of his life, especially with women.

The gendered nature of the pre-Oedipal ideal of oneness bears significance too. Julia Kristeva distinguishes between what she calls the semiotic and symbolic stages of subject development. The semiotic stage can be likened to what Fromm describes as the infant being ‘part of the mother’; it is before Freud or Lacan’s ‘castration’. For Kristeva, the moment of separation or castration takes place when the infant enters into the symbolic order of language. Language and the symbolic are coded as masculine; they break the oneness with the mother:

...there occurs here a primordial separation giving access to the possibility of a subject position (an ‘I’) within language. The differentiating moment that transforms the infans into a subject of the symbolic (a subject of signification) is castration. For Freud and Lacan, the infans’ relation to the maternal body is severed by the father’s law, i.e., the threat of castration.5

Kristeva’s semiotic is where the infant is bound to the maternal body, prior to the masculine influence of language, law, and the state. Thus the return to the semiotic is a return to the maternal or the feminine. This parallels the exploration, in my introduction, of Butler’s writing in The Psychic Life of Power where she argues that the disavowal of femininity and homosexuality are central to the possibility of heterosexual masculine identification. In a

queering of gender and sexuality, Butler urges us to embrace the disavowed gendered elements within our identification.

I argue that Dorrigo’s desire to dissolve his individuation and return to a feeling of oneness with the feminine other, a return to the semiotic state, represents a becoming feminine or becoming woman. I explore examples of the feminine coded nature of his relationship with love, and highlight how his process of becoming a gendered other responds to the Japanese officers’ inability to become national or racial others. The narrative interweaving and intertwining of two otherwise wildly incompatible scenes (of love and violence) works to construct a series of parallels between the two characters. Dorrigo’s ability to love others is directly paralleled with the Japanese officers’ rejections of others – almost as if to provide a corrective. Dorrigo’s process of becoming woman creates a roadmap for thinking about the reconciliatory potential of this novel, something I will explore towards the end of this chapter.

**Japanese Sadism**

Colonel Kota arrives at Major Nakamura’s camp in order to give him orders to intensify the pace of work on the railway. Nakamura is delirious with lack of sleep, he consumes amphetamines to push through the physical and psychological effects of his work. While Nakamura complains that POWs are already sick and overworked and can’t be pushed any further, Kota emphasises that the railway must be built – ‘even if everybody dies’:

> And Nakamura could see that, in this sacrifice too, there was no other way for the Emperor’s wishes to be realised. What was a prisoner of war anyway? Less than a man, just material to be used to make the railway, like the teak sleepers and steel rails and dog spikes. If he, a Japanese officer, allowed himself to be captured, he would be executed on his ultimate return to the home islands anyway. (118)

In order to make sense of this relationship to death and the devaluing of POWs lives, Kota shares a memory from his time in Manchuria. It is a traumatic memory on which Kota feeds to fuel his colonial domination of non-Japanese people. During his military training, his troop visited a prison in Manchuria; the prisoners were scrawny as they hadn’t been fed for
days. The lieutenant in charge wet his sword and said, ‘Watch...this is how you cut off heads’ (122).

Kota is initially horrified, but as he watches other soldiers attempt to behead prisoners he takes in the technique and learns how to do it effectively. When he comes to doing it himself he is calm and poised, and he looks intently at the neck: ‘skinny and old, filth in its folds; I’ve never forgotten that neck’ (127). He beheads the prisoner in a clean stroke. Kota’s horror turns to mesmerisation: ‘His neck was dirty, grey, like dirt you piss on. But once I had cut it open the colours were so vivid, so alive – the red of his blood, the white of his bone, the pink of his flesh, the yellow of that fat. Life! Those colours were life itself’ (127).

The act seems to have a profound psychological effect on Kota:

And what I felt, Major Nakamura, the colonel continued, was something so large in my stomach that it was as if I were now another man. I had gained something, that’s what I felt. It was a great and terrible feeling. As if I had died too and was now reborn.

Before, I worried about how my men looked at me when I stood in front of them.

But after, I just looked at them. That was enough. I no longer cared or was frightened. I just stared and saw into them – their fears, their sins, their lives – I saw everything, knew everything. (128)

As Gretchen Shirm observes, there is something unnerving and yet fascinating about Flanagan’s description of the effect of killing: ‘The conversation between Kota and Nakamura is morbidly compelling, but deeply disturbing. Perhaps what is most difficult about that scene is the fascination with which the reader is compelled to read about something that is indescribably violent, written in such exquisite prose.’ But this ‘great and terrible feeling,’ and the clarity it seems to give Kota, wears off. He continues to behead prisoners in order to return to the initial feeling. It becomes like a drug, like the Philopon (amphetamines) that the Imperial Army gives to its soldiers. And he begins to fetishise the necks of others, associated as they are with the first memory of killing: ‘There were plenty of prisoners. If a few weeks had gone by and I hadn’t beheaded someone, I would go and find one not long for this world with a neck I fancied. I’d make him dig his own grave...’ (128)

---

This highlights Fromm’s point about ‘the dependence of the sadistic person on his objects; how weak and empty he feels unless he has power over somebody and how this power gives him new strength.’ This sadist feels chronically dissatisfied; the one-way domination of the other does not engender lasting fulfilment. We see this lack of satisfaction in a haiku that Kota shares with Nakamura. It is one of Basho’s:

_Even in Kyoto_

_when I hear the cuckoo_

_I long for Kyoto._ (129)

The persona of the poem never quenches or fully experiences the abstract ideal of what Kyoto represents: that ideal is illusive and transient. Kota adapts the sentiment of this poem and connects the ideal – the horror, wonder and power – of that first killing to Manchuria.

_Even in Manchukuo_

_when I see a neck_

_I long for Manchukuo._ (132)

Kota associates the thrill of killing with the power of ‘Japanese Spirit’, and the two share their favourite haiku together in order to commune with nationalistic fervour.

Colonel Kota recited another haiku by Kato, and they agreed that it was this supreme Japanese gift – of portraying life so consciously, so exquisitely – that they, with their work on the railway, were helping bring to the world. And this conversation, which was really a series of mutual agreements, made them both feel considerably better about their own privations and the bitter struggle that was their work. (131)

The beauty, power, and spirit that haiku inspires in the Japanese officers compels them to dominate others and thus inhabit the Japanese colonial identity. But as mentioned earlier, this is a chronically dissatisfied identity: it is predicated on the rejection and destruction of the other. And if, as Kristeva says, ‘the foreigner is within’, then it is predicated on the rejection and destruction of something inside the self – the other: the aspects of the self that are denied and disavowed in the construction of a particular cultural and national identity. Not only that but the sense of power that Kota feels from killing represents the
power of the moment of individuation through entry into the masculine coded symbolic realm. His act of ultimate masculine dominance is a rejection of the submissive, but also his own feminine or semiotic sensibilities.

While Dorrigo and Amy share with the officers a desire to overcome the loneliness of individuation, their relationship leads to being vulnerable to the other. It leads them to becoming those gendered aspects in the self that are denied by traditional masculinity and femininity. Thus their love relationship – and its sadomasochistic elements – offers an alternative to the rejection inherent in the Japanese officers’ relationships to the other. Dorrigo and Amy don’t perform sadomasochistic sex acts as such, however, Flanagan describes their fierce desire to be destroyed or ‘obliterated’ by their powerful sexual passion – reflecting Fromm’s words on the masochist’s desire to dissolve into an overwhelming power:

Her eyes grew brighter and brighter but were strangely unfocused. Her lips were parted just enough for her shallow pants to escape, a short, repetitive cascade of sighs in part response to him and in part to some ecstasy that was hers alone. It frightened him how lost her face seemed to be. As though what she really wanted from him was this obliteration, an oblivion, and their passion could only lead to her erasure from the world…And as she began violently clutching and pulling him into her, he understood that his own body was somehow making the same journey. (157-8)

Flanagan asks his Australian reader – who would perhaps traditionally identify with the protagonist Dorrigo – to acknowledge the connections between the fundamental desires and ambitions of the Australians and Japanese during the war. Rather than offering the typical narrative of a heroic Australian and a fundamentally different, evil Japanese officer, Flanagan almost forces the reader to face the fact that if they can identify with Dorrigo and Amy’s desires for satisfaction, they can identify with Kota’s too. The reader walks a fine, often unnerving, line between understanding the Japanese position and being rightly repulsed by it.
The comparison of the characters’ similar desires for emotional satisfaction develop through the way in which flashbacks to Dorrigo’s affair with Amy weave in and out of Colonel Kota and Major Nakamura’s conversation about their colonial careers and aspirations.

Amy, for example, yearns for an emotional connection that does not exist in her marriage. She felt pressured into her marriage after she got pregnant by Keith (who later became her husband). Even though she had an abortion, she felt as if she couldn’t escape her marriage: ‘Maybe I was ashamed. Maybe I just thought I was dirt. I did think I was dirt. I know I didn’t want to be a spinster. Maybe I thought we could make it right. Get pregnant again. And this time make it right. But it was all wrong. I hated him for his kindness. I hated him until he hated me back’ (147). Flanagan highlights the emotional staleness of the relationship, and Amy’s desire for Dorrigo. In an interaction between Amy and Keith where Keith talks at Amy about council politics Flanagan writes,

Say something real! Amy nearly cried out. But what that real thing was, what it might sound like, she couldn’t say anymore, besides, she didn’t really want his attention at all. And the more Keith rambled on about drains and the pressing need for sewers and modern planning regulations and water closets for all and national mechanisms, regulation and scientific administration, the more she longed for the brush of Dorrigo Evans’ fingers in the dark. (133)

Keith’s language of the state, governance, and law represents the symbolic order and its masculine emotional distance. Amy craves the emotional abandon that only her infidelity offers. Dorrigo offers an excessive emotional and sexual connection that reflects a more feminine coded emotional awareness in comparison to Keith stoic persona. Interestingly, Amy’s assertive sexual presence seems to bring out the feminine in Dorrigo; in their first encounter in the book shop she boldly approaches him and feminises him by forcing him into a passive role. Amy is surrounded by a ‘swarm’ of admirers in the bookstore, but chooses to talk to Dorrigo:

And when he looked up again he realised why the swarm had moved. The woman with the red flower had walked over to where he stood and now, striped in shadow and light, was standing in front of him.
Her eyes burnt like the blue in a gas flame. They were ferocious things. For some moments her eyes were all he was aware of. And they were looking at him. But there was no look in them. It was as if she were just drinking him up. Was she assessing him? Judging him? He didn’t know. Maybe it was the sureness that made him both resentful and unsure. (68)

Amy’s craving for something real is explicitly linked to Colonel Kota’s feelings that killing brings him closer to reality and to life. In describing a deep sense of wanting in Amy, Flanagan writes,

> She could not help but wonder what that wanting was – the wanting that ate away at her stomach, the wanting that sometimes made her involuntarily shudder, the invisible, nameless, terrible wanting that she feared might be the very essence of life [my emphases]. (124)

The novel creates a linguistic resonance between the characters; three pages later in the novel Kota calls the colours inside the prisoner’s neck ‘life itself’, and his desire is described as a ‘terrible’ one. By using Amy and Kota as examples for cross-cultural comparison, Flanagan disturbs the traditional association of the West with masculinity – the association of the East with femininity is also troubled by Kota’s representation. Moreover, Amy’s displays of masculine coded behaviour further disrupt gendered assumptions that might be attached to her. Flanagan’s comparison of Amy with Kota directs his Australian readers to recognise themselves in the Japanese characters or, rather, to recognise aspects of the Japanese characters in themselves. The gender transgressions of this comparison accentuate the cultural overlaps that Flanagan highlights.

Dorrigo’s desire for Amy is just as powerful as her desire for him. Sometimes, however, that desire is difficult to satisfy. We see this in a scene where the two make love on the beach. Their lovemaking is abruptly interrupted by the presence of a dog. Dorrigo feels suddenly that Amy is ‘very far away’ and ‘remote and removed from him’ (139). He is overcome with fear; ‘fear of losing himself, his freedom, his future.’ Amy becomes ‘charmless and ordinary’ and he feels ‘repulsion’ (140). Dorrigo later loses this feeling, but the experience highlights the internal battle he has with his own ability to love, desire, and feel satisfied. The two chase the feeling of love; they yearn for it, but also shy away from it. This chasing of
satisfaction mirrors, as I have mentioned, the way the Japanese officers’ chase satisfaction in their own ways. Kota attempts again and again to return to ‘Mancuhkuo’ as he proclaims in his haiku; he attempts to align himself with the emotional and psychology ferocity of his first killing – and the sense of completion or wholeness that it gave him, just as Dorrigo attempts to commune with Amy and return to a sense of loving wholeness.

As highlighted earlier they seem to seek a kind of obliteration through love-making that destroys the separation between them, as well as the integrity of their individual identities. Prior to the dog appearing at the beach Dorrigo feels a sense of union with Amy:

> Whatever had held them apart, whatever had restrained their bodies before, was now gone. If the earth spun it faltered, if the wind blew it waited. Hands found flesh; flesh, flesh. He felt the improbable weight of her eyelash with his own; he kissed the slight, rose-coloured trench that remained from her knicker elastic, running around her belly like the equator line circling the world. As they lost themselves in the circumnavigation of each other, there came from nearby shrill shrieks that ended in a deeper howl. (139)

The globe metaphor, where Amy’s belly is the world and the two ‘circumnavigate’ each other, suggests a circular wholeness in their connection. They are one body, one celestial body, united in their exploration of flesh. After the dog leaves, Amy pulls Dorrigo back into her, and he feels again this connection that he momentarily lost.

> A wild, almost violent intensity took hold of their lovemaking and turned the strangeness of their bodies into a single thing. He forgot those short, sharp shrieks, that horror of ceaseless solitude, his dread of a nameless future. Her body transformed for him again. It was no longer desire or repulsion, but another element of him, without which he was incomplete. In her he felt the most powerful and necessary return. And without her, his life felt to him no longer any life at all. (140)

Flanagan describes this union as a ‘return.’ This exemplifies the way in which Dorrigo seeks a return to oneness that resembles pre-Oedipal, semiotic lack of individuation. In fact, it appears that the two desire the death and destruction of their identities; this is a death necessary for the feeling of oneness they seek. It is no surprise that Kota’s sadistic desire represents a desire to return to the originary moment of beheading when he felt complete,
nor that he feels – in that first instance – ‘as if [he] had died’. The destructive urge highlights Fromm’s writing on masochism, although for Dorrigo and Amy one does not explicitly dominate the other. Instead, the two seem to play both roles and destroy each other in the process with Dorrigo inhabiting a surrendered disposition:

Her feeling for him he at first refused to believe. Later he dismissed it as lust, and finally, when he could no longer deny it, grew puzzled by its animality, its power and its scarcely believable ferocity. And if this life force sometimes felt too large and too inexplicable for a man with as low an estimation of himself as Dorrigo Evans it was also, he came to recognise, inexorable, inescapable, and overwhelming, and he surrendered himself to it. (156)

The irony of the sadomasochistic urges in this novel are that they are not satisfied with simple one-way domination (as we saw with the Japanese officers). Dorrigo must inhabit the feminine coded role of surrender in order to feel truly whole. Amy for her part surrenders, and loses herself in obliteration, only through her aggressive, overwhelming desire for Dorrigo. Thus, the two become each other in the sense that they become one. And they also transgress the roles that are usually ascribed to their gender. Dorrigo becomes feminine and Amy masculine: their gender identifications become queered in this way. Dorrigo must surrender, become vulnerable to emotion and love, and in this sense identify with and embrace those elements disavowed as feminine in the typical masculine identity.

This process reflects what I call, following Chen, becoming others. Dorrigo becomes the feminine aspects of the self that Butler argues heterosexual men must violently disavow. Dorrigo also becomes other through his role as camp doctor and leader on the Burma Railway; he negotiates with the Japanese camp commanders and makes extremely difficult decisions on behalf of the POWs. He becomes an authority figure, but also a role model; he becomes ‘the Big Fella’.

The men called Dorrigo Evans Colonel to his face and the Big Fella everywhere else. There were moments when the Big Fella felt far too small for all that they now wanted him to bear. There was Dorrigo Evans and there was this other man with whom he shared looks, habits and ways of speech. But the Big Fella was noble where Dorrigo was not, self-sacrificing where Dorrigo was selfish.
It was a part he felt himself feeling his way into, and the longer it went on, the more the men around him confirmed him in his role. It was as if they were willing him into being, as though there had to be a Big Fella, and, having desperate need for such, their growing respect, their whispered asides, their opinion of him – all this trapped him into behaving as everything he knew he was not. As if rather than him leading them by example they were leading *him* through adulation.

The novel foreshadows Dorrigo’s ability to enter into this perfect masculine role with another childhood memory early on in the novel. It is his first day of high school and the older boys play ‘kick to kick’; one person from one group kicks a football to the other group, the boys receiving the ball push and jump on top of each other to catch it – the boy who catches it kicks it back. On the second day Dorrigo joins and at one point he sees that the ball is his to catch. In a trance-like state he moves toward it:

> Time slowed, he found all the space he needed in the crowding spot into which the biggest, strongest boys were now rushing. He understood the ball dangling from the sun was his and all he had to do was rise ... he climbed into the full dazzle of the sun, above all the other boys. At the apex of their struggle, his arms stretched out high above him, he felt the ball arrive in his hands, and he knew he could now begin to fall out of the sun. (9)

The fact that he rises above the other boys ‘at the apex of their struggle’ clearly symbolises his later leadership role in the death camps. His ability to ‘rise’ to the role, this perfect masculine embodiment amongst the boys, places him inside the group of boys: he belongs.

> The smell of eucalypt bark, the bold, blue light of the Tasmanian midday, so sharp he had to squint hard to stop it slicing his eyes, the heat of the sun on his taut skin, the hard, short shadows of the others, the sense of standing on a threshold, of joyfully entering a new universe while your old still remained knowable and holdable and not yet lost – all these things he was aware of, as he was of the hot dust, the sweat of the other boys, the laughter, the strange pure joy of being with others. (10)

Flanagan uses the recurrent motif of sunlight here. We see it in the memory of his mother and grandmother as ‘blinding light’ and its maternal connotation returns when Amy sees
the sun as a ‘maternal force’ (153). Thus the sunlight, with its protective maternal power, also enables the possibility of the masculine self. Flanagan’s experience of masculinity directly contrasts with Kota’s. While they both enter into a psychologically powerful embodied masculine identity – for Kota this means the destruction of his own femininity. If we consider that individuation takes place as an entry into the masculine coded symbolic realm – as a castration: a rejection of the feminine or maternal that exists in the semiotic – then the individuation that Kota achieves through killing is predicated on the destruction of oneness (in the semiotic) through re-staging a hyper masculine coded act of differentiation (from the semiotic). The act differentiates the masculine self from the submissive – who symbolises the feminine. Kota projects and performs his own castration on others – and in the process he kills, again and again, the feminine inside himself, the vulnerable, the submissive.8

Dorrigo embraces feminised sensibilities in his role in the camp, which is one in service to others. He submits to the will and needs of others. It is only in this act of service, in this act of giving – and all its maternal connotations – that he can truly inhabit this masculine role.

...everyday he carries them, nurses them, holds them, cuts them open and sews them up, plays cards for their souls and dares death to save one more life. He lies and cheats and robs too, but for them, always for them. For he has come to love them, and every day he understands that he is failing in his love, for every day more and more of them die. (212)

That he can love in this role, again highlights that only through becoming feminine can he feel loved, whole, and complete. This is a perfection that he does not feel after the war; he ends up a chauvinist adulterer focused on his own satisfaction. Dorrigo becomes a national war hero; his character is modelled on the Australian war hero Weary Dunlop or Ernest Edward Dunlop – the real camp doctor and inspirational leader on the Burma Railway.9 But Dorrigo keenly feels the void left by losing his role in the camps. He has several dissatisfying

---8 Kota’s subtle homosexual advances on Nakamura complicate this reading of his masculinity: ‘In another world, Colonel Kota began. Men ... men love’ (132). This may suggest either a denial of female sexuality and the feminine, and/or holes in the armour of Kota’s hegemonic masculine identity.

affairs and holds on to the memory of Amy, whom he never reunites with:10 ‘Wealth, fame, success, adulation – all that came later seemed only to compound the sense of meaninglessness he was to find in civilian life. He could never admit to himself that it was death that had given his life meaning’ (351). Here again we see an explicit likeness, disturbing as it is, between Dorrigo and Kota.11 I note here that while I argue for Dorrigo’s feminisation, and even the queering of his masculine identity, there are obvious limitations to this queering. He still inhabits a hegemonic masculine ideal that cannot perform all feminised behaviours, and certainly not homosexuality. However, the ideal he craves represents something of a queering of the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine.

Thus the comparison between the Australians and the Japanese has two key functions. Firstly, Flanagan highlights the differences in the ways that Kota and Dorrigo and Amy relate to others and the otherness within themselves. Dorrigo and Amy offer a kind of corrective to Kota’s domination of others. Secondly, the similarities between Kota and the Australian lovers unnervingly shows that they are all yearning for the same thing. Flanagan asks the reader to see into the Japanese soldiers’ condition, through its similarity to that of the Australians. In a sense, he challenges his readers to identify with, or at least acknowledge, the root motivation of the Japanese officers – and he wants the reader to acknowledge that they share that motivation. This is a motivation for oneness, completion, and satisfaction. Obviously this acknowledgement serves not to condone Kota’s actions but, rather, it shows where he has gone wrong, and where we ourselves could also go wrong. We do not see characters undergo intercultural becomings or reconciliation, but by drawing comparisons between Dorrigo and Amy’s gendered forms of becoming and Kota’s rejection of the other, Flanagan hints at how opening up to and becoming vulnerable to the other (as Dorrigo and Amy do) might improve intercultural relations.

10 They were both told by their partners that the other had died. Even though Dorrigo sees her in public on the Sydney Harbour bridge during the period of the Vietnam war he, perhaps tragically, decides not to engage her, or is unable to act on the desire to. She has children, ‘perhaps she was happy in her marriage,’ ‘he could not barge into her life, causing chaos.’
11 Dorrigo’s dissatisfaction goes to the heart of Fromm’s questions in *The Fear of Freedom*. Why do people enjoy – in some sense – having their freedom taken away from them; why do they fear freedom? Fromm wants to understand why the German people wanted their freedom taken away from them under Hitler and totalitarianism. We may also ask why it is that Dorrigo feels most fulfilled in an environment of extremely restricted freedom, such as the death camps. This is, however, not the topic of this chapter.
In the analysis to come I further explore the ways in which Flanagan characterises the Japanese soldiers. The reader is asked to empathise with the predicament of some of the Japanese soldiers and, as above, we see the ways in which Flanagan’s narrative prompts readers to identify with Japanese people. The most compelling aspect of this comparison is the sheer tragedy of the lack of redeeming outcomes for, or qualities in, those on either side of the war. While Dorrigo represents an inspiration to the POWs, so much of his efforts lead to nothing, only loss – and his post-war life only deepens his personal weaknesses. The Australian soldiers themselves are flawed, sometimes very unlikeable, and at other times despicable. Thus, Flanagan almost compels his readers to disidentify with any national or nationalistic narrative or identity, instead he privileges the miserable shared condition of war, and the inherent similarities and injustices of the predicament that both Australians and Japanese found themselves in.

*War and Reconciliation*

Nakamura provides one of the first justifications for the Imperial Army's actions in a conversation with Dorrigo. Addressing the lack of freedom experienced by the POWs, Nakamura points out that the British Empire was created through exactly this kind of stripping away of freedom. Nakamura says, through his interpreter, 'Your British Empire, Major Nakamura say. He say: You think it did not need non-freedom, Colonel? It was built sleeper by sleeper of non-freedom, bridge by bridge of non-freedom' (77). Later in the novel Dorrigo contemplates whether or not to keep a sketchbook of a recently deceased soldier, 'Rabbit' Hendrix. He tells his fellow soldier 'Bonox' Baker,

> What do the hieroglyphs tells us of what it was like to live under the lash, building pyramids? Do we talk of that? No, we talk of the magnificence and majesty of the Egyptians. Of the Romans. Of Saint Petersburg, and nothing of the bones of the hundred thousand slaves that it is built on. Maybe that's how they'll remember the Japs. Maybe that's all these pictures would end up being used for – to justify the magnificence of these monsters. (255)

After the war Dorrigo helps publish the scrapbook, writing his own introduction to it.
These ruminations draw attention to the impossibility of ascribing clear cut dividing lines between good and evil in representations of war and empire. Flanagan muddies the moral ramifications of Japanese imperialism and its oppositional relationship to the British and Australian forces. Not only that, these passages lead us to question how war is remembered.

As Megumi Kato observes, the POW narratives that came out after the war differed from the conventional representations of the pre-war ‘yellow peril’ genre of writing. For the first time, Australians depicted themselves in a way that toppled the fantasy of white supremacy: these narratives showed the uncomfortable reality of Australians as dominated by and enslaved by a supposedly inferior race. Australian proximity to the Japanese also changed the nature of Australians’ perceptions of the other: ‘It would be easy for the Japanese to be categorised as the powerful captor-master with an incompatible racial and cultural background. However those described in POW memoirs are seen as more than the stereotypical barbaric enemy as depicted in invasion novels, for they now had names (even if only nickname) and faces.’\textsuperscript{12} Flanagan’s novel certainly goes some way to disturbing the ‘incompatible’ racial difference often ascribed to the Japanese in war narratives. Christina Twomey observes the change, over time, in Australian perceptions of the POWs. She points out that ‘POWs were not the subject of any state memorial activity’ until the 1980s. It was not until the ‘memory’ boom of the 1980s, when PTSD became a diagnosable psychological condition, that memories of POW suffering became more mainstream. Twomey highlights the culturally constructed nature of national memory, especially the way that it changes with the contextual influences of the time. She points out a tendency for memory of POWs to be co-opted by conventional wartime narratives of Australian ‘mateship, humour, and derring-do’: ‘That kind of testimony had proliferated so much by the 2000s, and its themes became so familiar, that it could be argued that it thereby lost any radical potential to unsettle nationalist and celebratory narratives about war.’\textsuperscript{13} As we will see Flanagan’s novel does not contain the usual nationalistic framings in remembering the POWs. Instead, he unsettles the typical narrative of heroism, and evacuates the story of almost any guiding

\textsuperscript{12} Katō, \textit{Narrating the Other: Australian Literary Perceptions of Japan}, 92.

moral principles. As James Ley observes, Flanagan’s exploration of the camps ‘suspends moral norms.’

Flanagan challenges stereotypes by showing us the human side of the Japanese officers. While Kota remains a sinister, cruel figure throughout the novel, Nakamura and the prison guard nicknamed the 'Goanna' are not as easily reducible to these characteristics. These characters cannot be excused for their actions, but the circumstances in which they operate are often far outside their control. The first of Colonel Kota's orders to Nakamura is to increase the size of the railway cuttings by a third, meaning that a further three thousand cubic meters of rock must be cut and carried away. Nakamura points out that they don’t have enough saws or axes to clear the forest, the chisels the prisoners use to cut the rock by hand (with the help of faulty hammers) are blunt, and that there isn’t enough coke to sharpen them. He asks for some machinery but Kota rejects the request, saying there are no tools or machinery to be provided. The next order is that the railways is to be completed in October instead of the previous December deadline – despite the fact that these orders were given in April and only reached Nakamura in August. Not only that but they are in the middle of the monsoon season making progress slow and disease rife. The third order is that one hundred of these soldiers are to be seconded from his camp to work at a camp one hundred and fifty kilometres away. Of the eight hundred and thirty-eight prisoners, Dorrigo deems only three hundred and sixty three fit for work on the railway. The one hundred prisoners set to move to the other camp will do so by foot in the monsoon – many to die of exhaustion. As we see later in the novel, Dorrigo must choose one hundred prisoners fit enough to have a chance at surviving the journey, thus reducing the man power of his own camp. Kota cannot provide more POWs, and probably not many coolies either.

The horrific conditions take a psychological toll on the officers as well as the POWs. As mentioned earlier Kota survives on little sleep and uses amphetamines to keep him going. The amphetamines drive Nakamura to states of paranoia such as being convinced invisible ticks are crawling under his skin:

They were so small that no one else could see them. That was part of their hellish

---

nature. He wasn't sure how they got under his skin but suspected they laid their eggs in his pores and they incubate under the skin, to be born and grow and die there. One had to scratch them out. Siamese ticks, unknown to science. (93)

Ley argues that, just as the Australian soldiers are powerless, ‘the Japanese soldiers are themselves powerless, in the sense that they are subject to a strictly enforced hierarchy and an ideology of unquestioning obedience. The impossible demands made by the commanding officer, Major Nakamura an irritable and unpleasant but oddly pitiable character - are forced on him from higher up the chain of command.’

The cruel camp guard the Goanna is in fact a colonised Korean forced into the Japanese army. His name is Choi Sang-min, and his sister was a comfort woman. Seen as racially inferior in the Imperial Army he was conditioned by a cruel training scheme heavy in corporal punishment. He was rewarded for becoming animalistic in his ability to give beatings, 'such an animal was the only human thing he had ever been allowed to be' (339-40).

The uneven power structures that the Japanese guards and officers navigate, highlight the difficulty in assigning clear cut blame to them. As we will see later, the post war tribunal process only exacerbates the ambiguity of guilt – while Choi is sent to his death, Kota and Nakamura escape tribunal, and the Emperor and Unit 731 are never punished. The reader may not sympathise with these characters, but they may at least empathise with the predicament in which some of the Japanese find themselves. Flanagan wants to direct the narrative away from the conventional good and bad stereotypes about the allies and axis powers in the war and draw attention, instead, to the messy moral ambiguities of war and its memory. This further encourages the reader to not simply reject Japanese characters out of a sense of their fundamental difference, but to recognise the shared effects of the incredible injustices and cruelties of war, uneven though these effects may be.

Not only does Flanagan call our conventional narratives about the Japanese into question, but he also undoes some of the ways in which the ANZACS are remembered as morally

15 Ibid.
unimpeachable war heroes. For example 'Rooster' MacNeice is a jingoistic soldier loyal to colonial ideals. He's racist, vindictive, and hateful.

Hate was a powerful force for Rooster MacNeice. It was like a food to him. He hated, wogs, wops, gyppos and dagos. He hated chinks, nips and slopes, and, being a fair-minded man, he also hated poms and yanks. He found so little in his own race of Australians to admire that he sometimes found himself arguing that they deserved to be conquered. He returned to reciting *Mein Kampf* under his breath. (202)

It is the only book to be found, he reads it to retain his sense that he is an educated man that reads books. He purports to hate Hitler and the Nazis but 'he didn't say he was surprised by how much of Hitler's manifesto made sense to him' (203).

The sheer scale of suffering in the one day the novel gives us of the POWs lives leaves the reader with the impression that the true nature of what they suffered lies far beyond our imagination. The day culminates in the cruel beating and subsequent death of 'Darky' Gardiner at the hands of Choi. Gardiner is too ill to work that day. He collapses on the way to the railway construction area – 'the line' – and is found by Kota who goes to behead him. Kota tries to recite a haiku in the moment, but he forgets the words and does not go through with the execution. Kota then orders a head count of the POWs on the line and it comes up nine short, in a later count everybody is accounted for. Some of the POWs had decided to take the day off work: they hid in the bushes on the way to the line and intended to re-join the group on the walk back. Kota hears that the prisoner he encountered collapsed on the way to the line. Gardiner, is 'hiding out in hospital' (284) – Choi had in fact ordered him to the hospital when encountering him collapsed after his encounter with Kota. Nobody owns up to skipping work and, enraged, Kota orders the beating of Gardiner. In fact it was Rooster MacNeice's idea to skip work with some of his comrades. He doesn't own up to it out of a grudge against Gardiner that is partly racially motivated and partly about an episode where MacNeice felt humiliated by Gardiner. MacNeice thought that Gardiner had stolen a smuggled duck egg off him – in an environment where the POWs are very malnourished the duck egg is an extremely rare commodity. After eating this particular duck egg that MacNeice believed was his, Gardiner had placed half of the egg shell on MacNeice's crotch as MacNeice slept, much to entertainment of the other prisoners. MacNeice’s racist hatred
of Gardiner compounds his feelings of humiliation. MacNeice tells himself that he was right not to help Gardiner because of the duck egg. But after Gardiner’s death MacNeice finds his own duck egg in his kitbag.

Gardiner’s beating, which eventually leads to his death, is partly a result of Australian POWs skipping work and not owning up to it. As Rob Mackinlay points out, ‘the book deal endless blows to this concept of mateship.’ Clear clearly these soldiers can’t be blamed, but the senselessness of Gardiner’s death leads us to question, again, the clear cut moral boundaries so often associated with narratives around the war.

The senseless abjection of Gardiner’s death only emphasises the lack of any redeeming morality in the situation. The duck egg gives him uncontrollable diarrhoea: after consuming the egg he cannot reach the toilet and collapses out of exhaustion in a pool of mud and his own excrement. On the line the sole of his boot falls off and he cuts himself; this leads to the most deaths in the camp – cuts lead to infection which lead to tropical ulcers and eventually death. Gardiner is not allowed time to heal but instead is subject to a seemingly endless beating in front of all the POWs. Dorrigo cannot intervene as he is performing an amputation. This amputation itself, is performed out of necessity but with the full knowledge that it would probably not save the patient’s life. After some hope in the operation, when the wound is stitched up and seems to hold, the wound opens again and the patient dies. Dorrigo’s efforts were in vain and Gardiner’s beating is already under way; when he arrives Nakamura refuses to stop the beating, despite the fact that Gardiner is ill. Dorrigo must watch Gardiner’s devastating punishment – for Dorrigo, this is another reinforcement of his inability to save his comrades.

They found [Gardiner] late that night. He was floating head-down in the benjo, the long, deep trench of rain-churned shit that served as the communal toilet. Somehow he had dragged himself there from the hospital, where they had carried his broken body when the beating had finally ended. It was presumed that, on squatting, he had lost his balance and toppled in. With no strength to pull himself out, he had drowned. (310)

In Mackinlay’s words, the experiences of the POWs are ‘chaotic and without the obvious presence of a guiding, positive force.’\(^\text{17}\)

The lack of moral justification for the senselessness of war extends to the post-war period and the uneven justice of the US occupation's Tokyo Tribunal. We have already seen how the colonised Korean guard is sent to his death for carrying out the orders of his oppressors. Choi cannot make sense of the laws, he had never heard of the Geneva Convention, and he cannot understand why he is being punished for one beating (Gardiner's) when he had received innumerable beatings from Japanese officers. Colonel Kota escapes any punishment by pinning the blame for Gardiner's death on Choi. Kota ends up in an influential management position at the Tokyo Blood Bank. He escapes all retribution. Nakamura manages to evade the US soldiers and never faces trial. He ends up, by chance, working under Kota in his post war life.

Flanagan focuses on Nakamura's post-war existence: his abject poverty in the immediate post-war period, his stability when he gets a job under Kota, his marriage to Ikuko. He becomes a 'good man' (395) who loves his wife:

\[\text{[Nakamura and his wife] had two daughters, healthy children who, as they grew up, came to deeply love their gentle father. At the age of six, their younger daughter, Fuyuko, nearly died after being hit by a school bus. Fuyuko's overriding memory of that time was of her father by her bedside day and night, head bowed. He almost seemed to his daughter to be of another world, misbuttoning shirts, forgetting to wear a belt, and concerned not to hurt spiders, which he would catch and take outside, or mosquitoes, which he would refuse to swat. (374)}\]

Can we forgive Nakamura? Can he be redeemed for his past? Can he still be a good man after the war? Nakamura dies in a deranged state that we might see as indicating his suppressed guilt; he has 'final ravings', a 'bad temper', and enacts 'vicious attacks on [his wife] and ...daughters, who were nursing him, for even the simplest things such as stroking his cheeks or just smiling (411). Flanagan leaves the reader with the open question of whether Nakamura can be forgiven – or the question of what kind of life is appropriate for him. He certainly does not present a damning indictment of Nakamura and his post-war

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.
existence. He shows us the human realities of his life.

Thus, rather than representing all the Japanese as unredeemable demonic psychopaths, Flanagan attempts to make sense of the soldiers, their decisions and experiences, by contextualising them. In this way, he leads the reader to consider and try to understand the Japanese perspective. The reader experiences what they do. While this does not lead to an absolution of Japanese actions it at least paves the way for the possibility of reconciliation. Flanagan does not depict individual characters going through their own reconciliation processes, rather he asks us to identify with the predicament of the Japanese characters and perhaps undergo our own processes of becoming.

The tentative and tenuous nature of the cross-cultural becoming that Flanagan presents parallels the tenuous love that Dorrigo has for his wife Ella. In saving his family at the end of the novel, he momentarily feels purpose and love, feelings that had been so divorced from his post-war life. His interpersonal becoming and its transitory nature offers a kind of road map (a narrow road, perhaps), in this novel, for intercultural reconciliation. It does not in itself reflect intercultural becoming, however, amidst all the open questions about how to make sense of war, how to live a good life and be a good person, how to relate to Japan and the Japanese, Dorrigo’s momentary connection with his wife and family offers the tiniest morsel of redemption for him and hope for the possibility of ongoing connections with others.

Bridging love and reconciliation

While writing the novel, Flanagan thought explicitly about the links between love and war. On a trip to see the remnants of the Burma Railway he came to realise that *The Narrow Road* must be about love: ‘Why? Because great love stories seek to demonstrate the great truth about love: that we discover eternity in a moment that dies immediately after. War stories inevitably deal in rupture and death. War illuminates love; love redeems war.’18

A pontificating message about the need for reconciliation may seem out of touch with the devastating meaninglessness of the suffering that we witness in this novel. Flanagan doesn't

provide a version of love that returns Dorrigo to a blissful, permanent state of loving wholeness. Neither does he suggest a cross-cultural reconciliation that absolves past wrongs and takes us joyfully into the future. However, his explicit comparison of love and war culminates in the cryptic moment of Dorrigo’s reconnection with his wife and family. Ella and their children are trapped indoors while a bushfire engulfs the area; Dorrigo hears about the fire and drives up to the area to save them. He knows full well that the chances of finding them and returning safely are very slim. In a dramatic, almost cinematic, climax, just as Ella had given up hope of survival Dorrigo arrives to save the day.

They started running to him and he to them, through the smoke and heat and flames. When they met, Dorrigo grabbed Stewie, swinging him with one arm onto his hip. His free hand he opened out wide, cupped Ella’s head and clutched her face hard against his. He held her against him and the girls against them both, as if they were entwined roots holding up a decayed tree. It was only a moment before he let her go and they all fled to the car. But it was more affection than his three children had seen their father show their mother in a lifetime. (445)

Though bereft of purpose after the war, this incident returns Dorrigo to his saviour masculine role – again achieved through service to others. He finally experiences again the sense of purpose that he had as camp leader, and this revisiting of becoming reunites him with his lost ability to love. Ella looks over at her saviour and realises 'she knew nothing about him'; he seems 'such a mystery' (448). Flanagan captures the poignancy of this moment in a paragraph at the end of the incident that represents one of the clearest parallels to the novel’s many similarities to Anna Karenina:

And in the back seat the three now silent, soot-smeared children absorbed it all – the choking creosote stench, the roar of wind and flame, the wild rocking of a car being driven that hard, the heat, the emotion so raw and exposed it was like butchered flesh; the tormented, hopeless feeling of two people who lived together in a love not yet love, nor yet not; an unshared life shared; a conspiracy of affections, illness, tragedies, jokes and labour; a marriage – the strange, terrible neverendingness of human beings.

A family. (449)
As explored earlier in this chapter, love leads to becoming others in Dorrigo – becoming feminine. It’s an interpersonal overlap that has many similarities to the crosscultural overlaps, created by the novel, that might lead to reconciliation. Dorrigo’s role as saviour takes him back to feelings of having purpose and of sharing love: both of which necessitated becoming woman, becoming other – as well as, paradoxically, becoming masculine. Love, and the particular version of relating to others that it offers, constitutes not a rejection of others but an opening to the other and an opening up to the other within the self. Love in this moment of the novel is a temporary moment of interpersonal connection that parallels my argument that intercultural contact can lead to moments of intercultural connection that 'refigure individuals' to use Sun Ge’s words. Incidentally, Sun Ge’s writing on the transcultural takes Japanese wartime reconciliation as a major theme. The becomings that I associate with intercultural connection do not constitute the end goal, they are in fact the beginning. They allow for the possibility of an ongoing relationship and the possibility of meaningful reconciliation and co-operation.

Flanagan’s characterisation of the family illuminates this particular interpretation of relating to others. This moment of connection doesn’t solve all the problems in the relationships, it doesn’t even offer a clear direction for the future, but it does offer hope for the power of interpersonal and cross-cultural connection and its ability to change the way we relate to both each other and ourselves. This shows us a way forward in thinking about intercultural relations. In *Dreams of Speaking* and *After Darkness* we see characters take on the challenge of becoming others in order to enact personal journeys of reconciliation with the injustices of the Second World War.
8. Mixed Temporalities and Identities in Dreams of Speaking

As the protagonist Alice, in Gail Jones’s *Dreams of Speaking* (2016), enters an ‘A-bomb’ museum in Nagasaki she sees ‘an exploded wall clock, halted at 11.02 on 9 August 1945,’ and, as she leaves, ‘time shuddered and stopped’ (186). Alice’s immersion in this traumatic moment reflects Robert Stolorow’s point that traumatic experience leads to ‘the breaking up of the unifying thread of temporality,’ and Mary Dudziak and Richard Grimmett’s contention that ‘during ‘wartime’ regular, normal time is thought to be suspended. Wartime is when time is out of order.’ This disruption of time created by the bomb also speaks to the relativity of time, as put forward in Einstein’s theories which led to the eventual development of the warhead. It also recalls Benedict Anderson’s contention that modern clock time helped form national identity; it ‘created a shared ‘simultaneity’ of experience that linked individuals together in an ‘imagined community’ moving together through time.’ Thus, the broken clock also represents a rupture in what Harry Harootunian calls the ‘surface façade of the nation form’s homogenous time.’

In this chapter I follow the thread of time as a way to show ruptures in the ‘façade’ of homogenous Australian experience. By employing Harry Harootunian’s writing on modernity’s ‘mixed temporalities in the present,’ I highlight, in Alice’s story, intersections between the different times and modernities of Japan and Australia. The death of Alice’s friend, Hiroshima survivor, Mr Sakamoto towards the end of the novel links Alice’s mourning for the victims of the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombs with her personal mourning for him. In this novel, grief brings the past into the present in a way that highlights the mixing of temporalities. The transnational quality of the grief in this novel, and the ways in which it links different times, connects individuals and cultures together in shared experiences of

---

1 Gail Jones, *Dreams of Speaking* (North Sydney, N.S.W: Vintage Books Australia, 2007), 185. All subsequent citations to this novel will be in text.
6 Ibid., 493.
empathy – especially as Alice grieves along with Mr Sakamoto’s family. Whereas in *The Narrow Road* Flanagan did not represent individual characters reconciling with their enemies or undergoing cross-cultural becomings, in this novel cross-cultural empathy represents identification with the others’ experiences and thus an opportunity to become others. Grief creates a subjective level of transnational flow and cross-cultural identification. The grieving process leads to reconciliation with the wrongs of the past – in particular the Western powers’ decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. Alice feels the injustice of this event, but her friendship with Mr Sakamoto and her grief over his death create transnational ties that offer a future of intercultural engagement between Australia and Japan.

In the first part of this chapter, I outline the argument for mixed temporalities by focusing on the temporal distortions of relativity and the atomic bomb, the interrelationship between the modern and the unmodern, and spectral time. In the second part, I concentrate on cultural flows on the subjective level by exploring the tropes of water and resonance. At the end of the novel, Jones reimagines Alice’s relationship to Australia in light of her experiences with Mr Sakamoto and being in Japan. Thus, my analysis puts the spotlight on the ways in which transnational flows (especially from Asia) constantly reconstitute the nature of Australian nationhood, and thus lead to Australian identities becoming others.

**Sketching the Novel**

The Australian writer and academic Gail Jones has written several novels that ‘deal with Australians who travel or live abroad and engage with aspects of modern global culture.’ Her most recent novel, *Five Bells* (2011), explores the experiences of various Australians, including immigrants to Australia, most of whom are dealing with the grief and trauma of their various histories. Pei Xing, one of the protagonists, comes to terms with another traumatic aspect of Asian history: the Tiananmen Square massacre. Thus, *Dreams of*....

---

Speaking represents part of a larger conversation, in Jones’s work, between Australia and global culture.

In Alice’s manuscript *The Poetics of Modernity*, she ‘wished to study the unremarked beauty of modern things, of telephones, aeroplanes, computer screens and electric lights, of television, cars and underground transportation’ (18). On the Paris metro, where she meets the seventy-five-year-old Mr Sakamoto, the two begin a friendship that involves meeting often to discuss both modernity and life generally; theirs is a poignant meeting of the heart and mind that Wevers calls ‘love,’ although they never explicitly admit love for each other.

The novel has two sections; these sections divide the novel along spatial lines but also signify a transposition in Alice’s process of discovering and reconciling herself with grief. The first section takes place mostly in Paris, although it intersperses Alice’s experiences with memories, dreams, letters from Mr Sakamoto, and musings on modernity. We see a great deal of Alice’s childhood, especially the development of her close relationship with her sister Norah. As a child, Alice nagged Norah about wanting to swap their names; Alice disliked the ‘story book precedent’ (7) of her name that other children teased her for. Growing up, Alice feels different and alienated. She feels she has a ‘wrong name’ (7) and she shocks the rest of her family by killing a kangaroo that her father had hit on the road – it needed to be put out of its suffering but only Alice had the courage to do it. Her childhood memories foreshadow the later revelation of Alice being adopted. However, the flourishing relationship that develops between the sisters after their childhood antagonism – ‘it was one of those homecomings, like falling in love’ (8) – also anticipates the importance of this relationship to Alice’s ability to feel a homely connection to her family again. In Paris, Alice has an awkward liaison with her former boyfriend, Stephen, who lives in Paris. They sleep with each other, but although he wants to get together, Alice doesn’t; the past haunts Alice even in the figure of Stephen.

In the second part of the novel, Stephen moves on and has a family with another girlfriend in Australia. Thus, in the second section, the meandering discoveries of the first section’s travels in Paris (perhaps this is, after all, an *Alice in Wonderland* story) are resolved in some form or another. In this much shorter section, Alice travels briefly to Nagasaki, but having

---

not told Mr Sakamoto when exactly she would arrive, she is surprised to discover that he is in hospital after suffering a stroke. She can’t visit him but visits the A-bomb museum and returns to Perth. There she finds that her sister is ill with cancer, that she herself is adopted, and that Mr Sakamoto has passed away. Her visit to the museum in Nagasaki catalyses her need to reconcile with grief and loss – that is, the grief of both Mr Sakamoto’s death and the loss of identity brought on by the discovery of her adoption. In her return to Australia, she rediscovers her connection to that space in light of her travels. She therapeutically reconnects with both family and her deceased friend at the end of the novel when she tells Norah the story of her friendship with Mr Sakamoto.

The theme of travel reflects what many Australian literature scholars are calling a transnational turn in Australian literature,9 Dixon gives examples of several cosmopolitan Australian writers who have travelled around the globe in their writing endeavours, and he calls on scholars to consider Australian travel writing within a transnational frame as well.10 The transnational flow of people through travel and international mobility can establish what Susanne Wessendorf calls ‘transnational social fields,’ which are interlocking social networks and milieus ‘through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed across borders.’11 In a representational sense, we see this in the characters and the various ties they establish between Australia and Japan. The transnational ties created by the novel move beyond the binary thinking of Orientalism. The novel moves towards thinking about ‘Asians’ as Naoki Sakai wants to when he writes, ‘we should use the word Asian in such a way as to emphasize the fluidity of the very distinction between the West and Asia rather than its persistence.’12

---

10 Ibid., 22.
12 Naoki Sakai, “‘You Asians:’ On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary,’ in Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present (Duke University Press, 2006), 188.
Mixed Temporalities

Time and Colonial Modernity

By exploring the variegated ways in which *Dreams of Speaking* treats time, I draw attention to how homogenous time is disturbed. These temporal disturbances question the logic of national time. This in turn leads me to examine the transnational temporal flows between Australia and Japan that suggest a process of becoming others.

The novel makes a key connection between Japan and Australia through the two countries’ different, but nonetheless shared, relationship to modernity. If colonial modernity attempts ‘a unified history of humanity, imperially gathering up all special histories into the unifying realm of the collective singular,’ then the opposing historical colonialisms of Japan and the West (including Australia) signify what Harootunian calls a ‘collision of temporalities.’ The lived experiences of colonialism undid the colonialist fantasy of a singular time, and ‘destabilised the neat correlation between West/East and modern/premodern.’ While Asia was often seen in the colonial period as premodern, Japan’s colonial ascension undermined the easy dichotomy referred to above. But not only that, Japan’s post-war recuperation has seen its rise as a thoroughly modern nation as well. This modernity, by its own admission, ‘could be accomplished only by appropriating the essence of Western modernity.’ In this way, we see an example of what Harootunian calls modernity’s ‘mixed temporalities in the present.’ This is a present, following Husserl, ‘thick [with] traces of different temporalities’ – in opposition to the false, singular time of colonial modernity’s project of linking past, present and future in the name of ‘progress.’ *Dreams of Speaking*, importantly, takes place in three national locations, three cities: Nagasaki, Perth and Paris (Dixon says that Paris ‘epitomise[s] modernity’). If, as Harootunian writes, ‘uneven temporalizations differentiate[e] global geopolitical space,’ then these transnational spaces are also temporal

---

13 Harootunian, ‘Remembering the Historical Present,’ 483.
14 Ibid., 474.
16 Sakai, “You Asians:” On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary,’ 170.
17 Harootunian, ‘Remembering the Historical Present,’ 493.
18 Ibid., 476.
20 Harootunian, ‘Remembering the Historical Present,’ 493.
spaces, and this gives new meaning to Michael Peter Smith and John Eade’s point that ‘by facilitating spatial travel transnationalism has in some senses aided time travel, at least emotionally.’ In Jones’s novel, we not only travel to different times in the characters’ lives but also to the different temporal spaces of each nation and city. Dixon writes that ‘modernity … has both a temporality and a geography: it has a history that has unfolded across a large field of international space.’ Australia and Japan’s intersecting versions of modernity clearly borrow from and shape each other as part of a transnational interaction; we see this happen in the novel’s contact with transnational space and its eventual negotiation of national belonging.

The Atomic Bomb and the Relativity of Time

Jones emphasises the intersections between these different modern temporalities nowhere more clearly than in the temporal distortions wrought by the atomic bomb. In more ways than one, the atom bomb symbolises the essence of modernity, and, importantly, the theory of relativity that led to the creation of the atomic bomb has significant ramifications for the way we conceptualise time. Einstein showed that gravity changes the nature of time; the stopped clock at the A-bomb museum has a renewed meaning if we consider it against the maxim ‘Gravity of a large mass slows down nearby clocks.’ As an entry point into a further elaboration of this, I provide a brief comparison with the melting clocks of Dalí’s The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory (1954). Dalí created this work during his Atomic Period (1945–1960), when, after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, he became interested in integrating science into his work.

The analysis that follows connects the atomic bomb (which is one form of nuclear bomb) to ruptures in temporality in an entirely metaphorical manner, much as Nuclear Criticism does. While highlighting the problem that Nuclear Criticism lacks hard scientific perspectives in many of its critical trajectories, Ken Ruthven points out that the movement nonetheless reveals that the ‘literal’ and the ‘metaphoric’ are deeply imbricated in one another. He

gives the example of how physicist Leo Szilard described the nuclear reaction as a chain reaction in order to make the science more understandable: ‘To describe such a process as a ‘chain’ is to attempt to familiarise the unfamiliar by taking from ordinary language a word whose literal sense is commonly understood and then applying it metaphorically to nuclear particles.’

For Ruthven, science and literature share a history of borrowing and exchanging words and concepts with each other and this informs his interest in ‘the cultural consequences of nuclear science.’ Current work in Nuclear Criticism includes analyses of nuclear discourse’s relationship to terrorism, climate change, weapons of mass destruction, and Fukushima, just to name a few areas of interest. This chapter similarly considers some of the current cultural ramifications of the atomic bomb, especially as it relates to cultural connections between Australia and Japan.

Dali wrote: ‘The atomic explosion of August 6, 1945 [in Hiroshima] shook me seismically. Thenceforth, the atom was my favorite food for thought. Many of the landscapes painted in this period express the great fear inspired in me by the announcement of that explosion. I applied my paranoiac-critical method to exploring the world. I want to see and understand the forces hidden in the laws of things, obviously so as to master them.’

Many critics take the melting clocks to reflect the curvature of time in Einstein’s relativity. Joan Kropf points out that postwar representations of the melted clocks are ‘possibly connected to the melted and stopped clocks found among the debris of Hiroshima’; earlier depictions of the clocks occurred prior to 1945 [such as in *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), which Dali obviously reimagined in *The Disintegration*], although they did continue in the Atomic Period. The painting also depicts matter made up of atoms that do not touch one another: floating objects are aligned but do not come into contact. Writing on Dalí’s *Anti-Protonic Assumption* (1956), Dawn Ades writes, ‘Dalí here is drawing on the

---

25 Ibid., 6.
26 Daniel Cordle, ‘Cultures of Terror: Nuclear Criticism During and since the Cold War,’ *Literature Compass* 3, no. 6 (2006).
27 Richard Klein, ‘Climate Change through the Lens of Nuclear Criticism,’ *diacritics* 41, no. 3 (2013).
combination of the theories of quantum mechanics with relativity, which showed that corresponding to any particle was an anti-particle of the same mass, and that when they met and annihilated each other they let off an enormous amount of kinetic energy.’ While in *Anti-Protonic Assumption* Dalí depicts contact between atoms, in *The Disintegration* he shows the lack of such contact. Jones also explores the proximity of atoms that do not touch (unless, for example, in an atomic explosion) in *Dreams of Speaking*; Mr Sakamoto describes atoms as having certain resonances and these correlate, in the novel, with resonances between people.

**The Bomb and Relative Time in the Novel**

Like Dalí, Jones connects the atomic bomb with the relativity of time. The novel uses non-linear time; Jones frequently takes us back to childhood memories of Alice’s. For example, we revisit memories of her stilted relationship with her mother, we see Alice and Norah discover, on the beach, the skeletal remains of a whale, we see the siblings’ antagonism as children develop into a loving relationship as adults. Moreover, Alice has dreams that bend time, including ones of Mr Sakamoto after his death and ones that mix Stephen’s childhood memories with her own.

Jones does not represent the event of the bombing itself. As Lydia Wevers writes, ‘Nagasaki cannot be accommodated, not in [Mr Sakamoto’s] own narrative, nor in Alice’s.’ Instead, it exists only as gleaned through the objects in the museum, through fragments of others’ testimonials. Thus, the bombing – the focus of the later section of the novel, but also something outside of the time of the novel – functions as a kind of temporal paradox or singularity: it epitomises the disruption to time wrought by war and trauma. For Alice, the museum’s displays of ‘a steel helmet with the wearer’s skull fused to the inside, hand bones embedded in melted glass, a schoolgirl’s charred lunchbox, tatters of clothes, any number of mournful, forfeited things’ (185) attempt, obliquely, to depict a reality that defies

---

33 Wevers, ‘Fold in the Map : Figuring Modernity in Gail Jones’s *Dreams of Speaking* and Elizabeth Knox’s *Dreamhunter,*’ 195.
34 I make this point with the knowledge that an atomic bomb is not a singularity in the scientific sense. However, I do highlight the link between Einstein’s General Relativity (including theories of the curvature of space time, singularities) and the production of the bomb itself.
description. The reality of the bomb lies beyond the temporal parameters of *Dreams of Speaking*, and yet the event (or its lack?), as well as Alice’s visit to the museum, structures the novel’s focus on coming to terms with grief.

Thus, the bomb ruptures the space-time of *Dreams of Speaking*; it is the singularity that the novel’s temporal distortions – its many postmodern leaps and recursions in time – come, paradoxically, to cohere around. Alice cannot meet with Mr Sakamoto, but the museum draws her. She descends the spiralling staircase into the museum, as if sucked in by the *gravity* of the event, and she is led underground to the heart of the exhibition: a Foucault’s pendulum demonstrating the rotation of the Earth. Leaving an answering machine message at Mr Sakamoto’s home, after his death, she says, ‘We are blasted by your leaving. Blown open. Apart’ (214). After touching terrible loss, the reconnection between those blown apart personally, nationally, takes place through the weaving of story. The spiralling continues as the novel ends where it started: ‘Tell me of Mr Sakamoto,’ Norah said. And in the quietest of voices, Alice began.’ Revisiting the past and fusing it with the present ultimately leads the novel to the difficult work of grief and reconciliation.

*Spectral Time*

Jones also fuses the past with the present in the way she explicitly thematises the simultaneous existence of the modern and the unmodern. Mr Sakamoto says, ‘The difficulty with celebrating modernity is that we live with so many persistently unmodern things. Dreams, love, babies, illness. Memory. Death. And all the natural things. Leaves, birds, ocean, animals’ (21). Observing the ‘wearisome, dull’ atmosphere on the modern aeroplane, Alice sees people in the thoroughly unmodern, animalistic and even eerie light of ‘crepuscular gloom’ (18). The passengers’ entranced personas lead Alice to think that ‘there had to be in the world of mechanical efficiency some mystery of transaction, the summoning of remote meanings, an extra dimension – supernatural, sure’ (18). The persistence of the unmodern or supernatural within the modern exposes the fiction of homogenous modern time. Bliss Cua Lim observes that the enlightenment, and modernity, led to a devaluing of wonder and the supernatural: ‘The social and cultural history of the supernatural in our age is not the heroic tale of a truer, rational, skeptical schema’s triumph
over premodern superstition; rather, it is a story of temporal elitism and temporal exclusion, of how supernaturalism came to be fenced out from highbrow, urbane, and educated thinking. Alice attempts to disrupt this elitism and sees modernity as mixed with these so-called unmodern temporalities or beliefs.

To further this coexistence of the modern and unmodern, Mr Sakamoto’s biographical notes on inventors explore not simply those inventors’ modern contraptions but also the unmodern realities of the inventors’ personal lives; Chester F Carlson’s invention of Xerox relates to his desire to duplicate things, something equated to the torment of his increasing baldness. The notes on Alexander Graham Bell’s life are suffused with the important influence of the loves of his life: his grandfather, parents, brothers, wife. But Mr Sakamoto also feels affinity with Bell’s many losses: his two brothers died young, as did two of his sons. Mr Sakamoto, who lost most of his family in the Nagasaki explosion, writes that Bell was a man who despite being incredibly knowledgeable and famous ‘was a man still privately wedded to hush, to dark, to sign, to grief’ (102). We can read the temporal distortions brought on by grief and trauma in Mr Sakamoto’s analysis of ‘Yesterday’ by the Beatles: ‘It combines the simplest of rhymes … with the simplest anguish – a man abandoned by his lover – and constructs it all as a spectre of lost time…. The idea, think of it, that yesterday might come suddenly. Time itself, split open by abandonment’ (33).

For Lim, Henri Bergson’s idea of the ‘survival of the past’ presents a critique and a destabilisation of what Walter Benjamin calls ‘homogenous empty time.’ Lim writes, ‘We believe that the present is all that exists and that the past has elapsed and is gone. Resisting such presentism, Bergson insists that the past is: it has not elapsed; it is not over and done with. Rather, it coexists alongside the present as the latter’s absolute condition for existing [Lim’s emphasis].’ Lim sees spectral time – the past that comes ‘suddenly,’ to use Mr Sakamoto’s words – through a close engagement with Bergson’s work. Spectral time creates heterogeneous time, or what Lim calls ‘immiscible time.’ Lim writes: ‘The adjective immiscible, from the Latin miscibilis (‘that can be mixed’) means ‘incapable of mixing or attaining homogeneity.’ The immiscible pertains to the commingling of oil and water, for

---

36 Ibid., 15.
instance, which can never yield a true solution [Lim’s emphases]. Immiscible temporality therefore involves times existing together not in a homogenous mixture but through a coexistence of distinct parts. Times thus coexist with other times; time is ‘mixed,’ to use Harootunian’s expression, but not as a single homogenous mixture, it is mixed with various separate, immiscible, times. The survival of the past in the memory of the bomb epitomises this spectral time. It catalyses and structures Alice’s grieving process at the end of the novel; the spectre of this event returns in different national spaces too.

Transnational Time

Through the relationship between Alice and Mr. Sakamoto’s shared experiences of modernity, Japan’s history, in this Australian novel, is also Australia’s history, and the grief shared across borders represents a form of cross-cultural identification and communication that speaks to the ever-changing thresholds of the local and the global. After visiting Nagasaki, Alice promptly returns to Perth. Mr Sakamoto continues to deteriorate and Alice expects his daughter, Haruko, to call at any time to notify her of his passing. Stephen’s mother, whom Alice visits on her return to Perth, has cancer. This serves as a thematic recurrence of cancer as Mr Sakamoto’s wife died from leukaemia when their eldest daughter was twelve: the leukaemia was ‘probably the consequence of radiation exposure’ (72). Stephen’s mother’s sickness parallels that of Mr Sakamoto’s; Alice ‘thought perversely, she could visit Mr Sakamoto by visiting Margaret. Not as a substitution, but as a kind of veneration, a tribute to the expectation of loss’ (196). When Alice returns to Perth, she realises that Norah had, without telling Alice, experienced a recurrence of cancer also, despite being treated for it previously. In this example of doubling, experiences in Australia are layered on top of those in Japan. Although these Australian examples do not result from radiation, nor does Sakamoto himself suffer from cancer, they do create shared empathy and grief that spans across time and space.

Additionally, Mr Sakamoto’s wife’s leukaemia, and its connection to the radiation of the atomic bomb, could suggest the common belief that cancer is a modern disease. The effect of this allegedly modern affliction can be seen across the globe. But, in a typical

37 Ibid., 32.
juxtaposition for this novel, cancer also represents something thoroughly unmodern; cancer has reportedly been discovered as far back as the period of Ancient Egypt. As noted, Mr Sakamoto finds affinity in Bell’s experiences of loss, and Alice feels affinity with Mr Sakamoto’s family in Nagasaki in the face of their loss of him. In order to illustrate the cross-cultural sharing of loss, I consider two metaphorical tropes in the novel that speak to the connections between people (especially as they relate to grief) across time and nation: water and resonance. The intersubjective possibilities of these themes highlight the process of becoming others in the novel.

Water and Resonance

Jones highlights the particular experience of living in the coastal city of Perth, with its mixture of both land and water: ‘Alice loved the river and its special effects. All that was solid melting into air. The material assertion – built on mining money and pastoral seizure and colonialist pride – dispersed into bone-tinted visions and a paradoxical sense of deathless impermanency’ (4). She describes Perth as being ‘a refuge for white people who wished not to remember’ (4), and makes a clear distinction between the colonial domination of land and the non-territorial freedom of ocean. Water offers a space free of the colonial heritage imposed upon Australian land. Suvendrini Perera explains how this land/sea distinction works: ‘The oceanic, as other to the increasingly demarcated, owned, cultivated, and scored terrestrial realm, signifies as that which exceeds human capture: uninscribed, unowned, unproductive, unfixable, infinite, profoundly unhistoric…. Against the order and regulation of the land, the ocean evokes terror and sublimity, freedom and anarchy, chaos and limitless possibility.’ Yet water may not necessarily represent the unhistoric in *Dreams of Speaking*; it also contains various silent histories: ‘At night when [Alice] could not sleep, she was comforted by knowing that the water flowed nearby, dark with an oily blackness, silent, deep, dragging with river-tenderness a world of lost things, the silt of history and the plastic detritus of the present, night yearnings, dreams, drowned and buoyant possibilities, misty shapes that would resolve only in some future lens [my

---

38 A. Rosalie David and Michael R. Zimmerman, ‘Cancer: An Old Disease, a New Disease or Something in Between?’, *Nat Rev Cancer* 10, no. 10 (2010).
emphasis’ (5). Thus, water carries with it loss, grief, and the promise of future resolution. It reflects, in a sense, the psyche, the subconscious. Indeed, immediately following the previously quoted extract comes, ‘What was it Mr Sakamoto had said that day? Everyone needs inside them an ocean or a river’ [Jones’s emphasis] (5).

Water and the Psyche

Water is not only the site for liberation, it also creates the conditions for overlaps of emotion, memory, and grief between people. In one scene, after a conversation with Stephen, Alice dreams of ‘her mother standing on a whale’ (52). Stephen had shown Alice earlier a photograph of his father, who had worked at a whaling station, standing atop a whale. The whale itself, a recurring motif, inverts the usual association of whaling with Japan, an inversion also made by Jones’s mother, Noreen Jones, in her book North to Matsumae, about the first known contact between Australians (whalers) and Japanese in 1831.40 Furthermore, the figure of the whale, a creature that navigates the ocean, occasionally surfaces in the novel perhaps to mark the ongoing journey through the ocean of the psyche, paralleling the physical journey between continents, across oceans. I quote the passage that follows at length:

In the morning Alice considered her seizure of Stephen’s tale – unconscious as it was – and could make little sense of it all. In what happens between people, she reflected, there are these transmigrations, these episodes of smudged experience, in which the containers of memory and story become weak and permeable. Images leak like smoke. Emotions. Chance utterances. Rudimentary threads of being float outwards, and reattach. Fibres of some counterlife, that which we make through others, join like the ganglia of an unlocatable, interstitial intelligence. We confederate. We are many. We carry others’ stories. As she stood beneath the shower with her eyes closed, the dream was still unravelling. There was the ocean or a river. There was a shuddery wind. There was a sound like the roar of a fire, then her smiling mother disappeared (52).

40 Noreen Jones, North to Matsumae: Australian Whalers to Japan, vol. 1 (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2008).
This passage – which connects the water of the shower to the stuff of dreams – considers individuals as made up of memories, stories, and experiences of others that ‘transmigrate’ between people and places. Subjectivity is an intangible, permeable body of these memories and experiences that leak into other people, cultures, and even perhaps nations. The passage highlights the overlaps in subjective experience that suggest processes of becoming others. As Mr Sakamoto says at one point, warning against limited or bounded notions of the self, ‘You are large enough to contain contradictions’ (83). Thus water, and especially the ocean, is a site of exchange that potentially disrupts the demarcations we associate with land: as Perera writes, ‘Cultural theorists and historians increasingly explore the ocean as a space of cultural crossings, both painful and productive, and a crucible for the fashioning of new subjectivities, geopolitical categories, and epistemological terrains.’

In *Dreams of Speaking*, we see these crossings, these new subjectivities, form in the experiential, emotional contact between Australians and Japanese.

**Resonance**

The development of the ocean metaphor, and its ability to connect cultures and nations, continues in the intersection between it and the metaphor of resonance. Mr Sakamoto, on the technology of X-rays, writes:

> Think of this: we are mostly water; we are two-thirds ocean. Because of our high water content the body can be exposed to a strong magnetic field and the molecules of our hydrogen atoms respond. When submitted to radio waves, the energy content of the nuclei changes and a resonance wave is emitted when the nuclei return to their previous state. Do you understand? Is this not the simplest of principles? Small differences in the oscillation of nuclei can be detected, so a three-dimensional image of the interior body can be built. The image shows the structure of the tissue, and reveals any pathology. Water, waves, magnetism, image: it is a kind of poetry. A physical *haiku*. Entering an MRI is like entering a radio coil: the radio waves cause the nuclei of the body to quiver and respond.

---

We are all thus collectors of waves, we are all creatures of hidden oceans (167).

As we will see, resonances within and between people come to signify shared responses to grief, and the connection between resonance and the metaphor of the ocean exemplifies the fluidity of subjective identification on personal and national levels. In addition, the reference to haiku makes an important point about the force of literature and story.

Mr Sakamoto writes that the body quivers in response to stimuli and responds with resonance waves; in many ways, this description of the proximity of atoms resembles the representation of atoms at the quantum level as depicted by Dalí in The Disintegration. Alice and Mr Sakamoto both see resonance in the everyday; at the airport in Perth, Alice takes in the happy sounds of the various conversations happening simultaneously: ‘There was a kind of pleasure in the air, a tremble of call and responsiveness. Conversations of all kinds were developing, overlapping and warm tones everywhere met with other warm tones’ (189). She recalls Mr Sakamoto telling her of a phenomenon that Bell described as ‘sympathetic vibration’: ‘Playing the family piano, he discovered that by pressing the pedal that lifted the felt dampers from the piano wires, then singing into the piano, he could sound the wire that matched the pitch of his voice, the others remaining silent. He also discovered that one piano would echo a chord struck on another one nearby’ (190). Sympathetic vibrations come to describe the resonance and response between one human being and another. But rather than modernity encumbering this seemingly unmodern communication, the novel shows modernity’s ability to facilitate and channel these resonances. The telephone, Bell’s invention, epitomises this. Mr Sakamoto becomes extremely close to his Uncle Tadeo; they share, over the phone, their histories, fears, and ghosts. For Mr Sakamoto this includes the losses of Nagasaki, for Uncle Tadeo the shame of the war. The telephone works, according to Mr Sakamoto, by creating an electromagnetic field along which sound travels: ‘when the sound of a voice vibrates, the changes in the magnetic field induce a similarly varying current’ (89). The resonances of sound create physical vibrations but also personal resonances between people. Technology then, and the kind of modernity it helps engender, allows for personal and emotional resonances between people; as Jones writes, the resonances of the voices of Mr Sakamoto and Tadeo on the telephone were such that ‘their voices floated into each other, in a disincarnate embrace’ (75).
Grief as Resonance

These resonances connect different times and places as well. In Alice’s answering machine message to Mr Sakamoto after his death, we see the telephone’s resonances helping Alice grieve and connect with him. Mr Sakamoto’s voice appears as a ghost in the machine’s greeting – it is as if Alice is talking to the past – and Alice says, ‘In the museum I thought I saw a glimpse of your childhood…. I don’t know what you saw, but I felt some sympathetic vibration, like the pianos you told me about, a vibration that I took to be the sound we had established between us’ (213). The rupture in time produced by the bomb offers resonances between Alice and Mr Sakamoto, between different times, and between Japan and Australia. Alice shares these feelings of grief with Mr Sakamoto’s family too: ‘Uncle Tadeo touched my hair and seems to understand. Haruko was there, and Akiko [his daughters], already mourning. I sense how they miss you and join them in sorrow’ (214).

Like Dalí, Bergson connects the science of atoms and vibrations with his concepts of time: ‘Bergson maintains that there are no static, irreducibly solid, impermeable things (the corpuscular view of matter) but rather a universe composed of movement, interpenetration, and flux: a vibrational universe.’42 Lim sees Bergson’s understanding of space and matter as reflective of his disruptive views on time. In her critique, ‘homogeneous space dissolves into a spectral palimpsest of permanence and change, a kaleidoscopic space haunted by immiscible times.’43 Likewise, the personal resonances of grief that Alice feels in herself, and with Mr Sakamoto’s family in Nagasaki, speak to the vibrational realities of a time haunted by the past, where spectres disrupt the present and reveal a mixed experience of temporality and modernity. The connection between the bomb and Mr Sakamoto’s death – a death that meant that all around him were ‘blown apart’ – presents a spectral experience of time in grief, a mixing of the painful uncontrollable past with the ‘present.’ In a sadly ironic way, these non-linear experiences of time reflect the relative notions of time and the universe that led to the development of the atomic bomb.

42 Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, 155.
43 Ibid.
Jones connects the familial resonances of grief that Alice felt in Japan with the grieving that Alice does at home with her own family. The return to Australia represents an important phase in Alice’s personal journey as well. Pheng Cheah calls the nation ‘a specter that haunts [the] global ... and awaits reincarnation, the undecidable neuralgic point that refuses to be exorcised.’

Cheah highlights the transnational’s co-dependent relationship with the national: the two shape and constitute one another. This novel’s return to nation leads to a reimagining of nation but with a transnational perspective: Alice’s disruptive experience of contact with Mr Sakamoto undoes existing national identifications – they must be rebuilt through new transnational foundations. As Mr Sakamoto says, grief, ‘is a mysterious subtraction of the self; one then builds the self again with whatever resources are available’ (75). Indeed, Alice’s connections to home must be rebuilt upon discovering, after a blood test, her adoption. She has a confused, antagonistic conversation with her parents, but then, as she sits at home, she looks around her:

‘Here were habits and stories, the referential system of personal signs, the shadows of time past. Certain objects replenished memory or pushed it into beige dusty corners. Ornaments of particular ugliness held sweet associations. The immediacy of these things, these family things, these ordinary things knotted into the crisscross of four disparate souls, seized Alice with a force she was not prepared for. A web of connective tissue somehow linked what she saw [my emphases]’ (212).

Alice rebuilds her relationship with home: she sees this suddenly unhomely space as homely again. This rebuilding of her relationship with nation, with loss, with the past, reverberates with that same reconciliation with loss happening in Japan. The above extract also contains some uncanny/unhomely (or perhaps these are simply canny/homely) resonances with the following quotation from Wai Chee Dimock’s Through Other Continents on transnational American literature:

‘[American Literature] is better seen as a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures. These are input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of

---

44 Cheah, Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation, 395.
attachment – *connective tissues* binding America to the rest of the world [my emphases].

The ‘connective tissues’ linking family and nations, and that might be expressed through literature, do their reconciliatory work at the end of the novel when Alice shares the story of Mr Sakamoto with Norah. Their sibling relationship has grown deep with time, as Jones writes, ‘So much lay between siblings, so much obstinate history. So much overlapped in inexpressible ways’ (16). If the bodily, and we might say emotional, reverberations resemble a haiku, as Mr Sakamoto claims in his explanation of the X-ray, then literature itself offers a nexus of such resonance. The connective tissues of Alice’s personal history, which is inscribed in literature, reflect both the connective tissues that Dimock sees literature creating and the resonances that Mr Sakamoto sees haiku creating too. In that moment, when Alice ‘in the quietest voices ... began,’ she not only transmits to her sister – her closest connection to home, to Australia – her emotional experiences of Japan but also cements her own connection to home, to nation. She knits and mixes Australian and Japanese histories, she connects them temporally and spatially; the personal memories, interactions, and subjectivities of individuals resonate with, and leak into, one another through the process of story. We can see how Alice’s national identifications have changed: she has been reshaped by intercultural relations with Japan and she becomes other in the way that she now subjectively identifies across difference. Her ability to come to terms with her grief requires a re-building of her identity which, this time, finds culturally mixed reference points in order to fashion itself.

*Conclusion*

Alice’s visit to the A-bomb museum allows her to start coming to terms with the death of Mr Sakamoto. By connecting to that significant part of his life, she can feel deep emotional resonance between herself and him. Like Sandy in *Japanese Story*, Alice’s process of mourning Mr Sakamoto’s death opens a larger wound – this time, remorse over the dropping of the atomic bombs. By mourning for Mr Sakamoto, Alice also begins to reconcile

---

with the past, with the injustices of the Second World War. She does this by sharing in grief with Mr Sakamoto’s family, and through being refigured by the life-changing intercultural relationship she has with him. The transnational feelings and ties that allow her to restore her sense of self after grief and the discovery of her adoption, highlight her process of becoming other, becoming mixed.
9. Overcoming Silence: Mixed Race and Wartime Reconciliation in After Darkness

Christine Piper’s 2014 Vogel Award winning novel *After Darkness* centres on the largely unspoken history of Australian internment of resident Japanese during WWII. It also exposes the deep silence surrounding the war atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during this time, especially those of Unit 731 – Japan’s chemical and biological warfare experimentations division. Piper highlights Japan’s suppression of this history through the protagonist Dr Tomokazu Ibaraki’s own suppression of his experiences of Unit 731. His inability to speak of that time exemplifies what W.G. Sebald calls the ‘conspiracy of silence’ encircling the events of the Second World War. Piper’s novel explores how characters around Ibaraki slowly prompt him to share his experiences, thus allowing him to reconcile with his past. This in turn draws attention to the need for further reconciliation between Japan and its wartime past as well as the nations and peoples it unjustly treated.

One of the key groups of characters that prod Ibaraki into delving into his past are the *hafu* mixed race Japanese Australians also interned during the war. The *hafu*, most of whom are Australian born, are ostracised by the Japanese groups within the camp mostly due to cultural differences. They feel betrayed by an Australia they had always identified with and alienated by the Japanese who subject them to racist exclusion and mistreatment. When one of the *hafu*, Stan Suzuki, seeks the doctor’s help and claims that camp section leader, and acquaintance of Ibaraki’s, Yamada has physically assaulted him, Ibaraki doesn’t believe him. Stan sinks into a depression and attempts to take his own life. Ibaraki feels responsible for Stan’s attempted suicide and slowly tries to bridge the distance that has developed between himself and Stan, and overcome the silence that permeates Stan’s recuperation in the camp infirmary:

> Stan’s disposition remained the same. He stared at the window all day, displaying little inclination to move or speak or even eat. I made feeble attempts at conversation. ‘How are you feeling?’ I asked. Sometimes he nodded, but mostly he said nothing at all. I offered to get him some books, but he said he didn’t feel like

---

reading. I asked him if his family knew of his condition, but he shrugged. If I managed
to engage him for a moment, as soon as I finished talking, he always turned back to
the window, seeking out the light.²

Ibaraki eventually stumbles across more evidence that Yamada did in fact mistreat Stan and
thus his relationship with the *hafu* changes to one of increasing trust, causing him to
question his own loyalty to the Japanese community. This questioning of loyalty to Japanese
authority and identity catalyses, by the end of the novel, a rebellion against the imposed
silence regarding Unit 731 – the director of the Unit, General Shiro Ishii, pressured his unit
members to ‘take the secret [of the unit] to the grave.’³

The sense of divided loyalty reflects Steven Vertovec’s thoughts on transnational migrants’
multiple senses of attachment or belonging: ‘even if migrants and their descendants
maintain a strong sense of belonging to other co-ethnics both in the host country and
transnationally, this needn’t mean that they are not becoming integrated in their places of
settlement.’ Vertovec goes on to say that ‘belonging, loyalty and a sense of attachment are
not parts of a zero-sum game based on a single place.’⁴ Thus Ibaraki’s growing identification
with the *hafu* characters – his process of becoming other – stretches and reshapes his sense
of national loyalty into a more transnational one. My interest lies in elucidating how the
exchange between Ibaraki and the *hafu* leads to a process of identifying with national and
cultural others, both on the part of Ibaraki and the readers who undergo their own
encounter with the *hafu* as well as the Japanese and Australian characters.

The in-between position of the mixed race characters in this novel trouble national loyalty
and identification in Ibaraki, and potentially the readership. The attention given to this
position brings the focus on mixed race in this thesis full circle. Mixed race subjectivities
embody and catalyse intercultural becomings, which in *After Darkness* lead to reconciliation
and ongoing engagement. In addition, Piper appears to negotiate her own mixed heritages
by juggling the different perspectives of Japanese and Australian characters. Unlike in *The
Narrow Road* or *Dreams of Speaking*, where either Australian or Japanese wrong doing are
explored, Piper explores accountability on both sides: in this way, she attempts to account

² *After Darkness* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2014), 149.
for both perspectives and considers how they might be affected by each other. Rather than a narrative of Australian enrichment through intercultural engagement (a narrative that features in most of the texts in this thesis) we see mutual enrichment. This mutual enrichment exists in *The Goddess*, however *After Darkness* goes further in its framing of intercultural exchange as Piper compares both contexts’ attitudes towards the shared cultural issue of wartime reconciliation. This comparative approach takes seriously the significance of Japanese war crimes to the Asian region, as well as Australian issues surrounding internment. Thus, the novel represents an engagement and negotiation between these two perspectives that leads to both sides being confronted and changed by their encounter with difference.

In this chapter I start by exploring the historical legacy of Japanese war atrocities during WWII and their significance to issues of regional Asian reconciliation. I look specifically at the case of Unit 731, and compare literature on reconciliation pertaining to Asian, Japanese, Australian, and other contexts. Ibaraki’s relationships, many of which are circumscribed by silence and secrets, highlight his personal struggle with exploring his past and reconciling with it. These relationships also allow him the opportunity to free himself of his silence and attempt meaningful connections with his past and other people. I also explore the experiences of internment for Japanese Australians and focus on the unique position of the *hafu* in Piper’s novel.

*War and Reconciliation*

*After Darkness* reads as the memoir of its protagonist Dr Ibaraki. It is spliced between the period of internment that Ibaraki experienced, his pre-internment days in Broome, his time in Japan working as a doctor and eventually scientist in Unit 731, and – at the end of the novel – his later life in Japan after the war. In Japan, Ibaraki marries Kayoko Sasaki but they split after Kayoko experiences a miscarriage. Ibaraki isn’t there to help her physically or emotionally due to his over-investment in the difficult and disturbing work in Unit 731 where he experiences things he cannot share with Kayoko. Ibaraki is dismissed after he fails to perform in a public lecture, and in 1938 he takes up a position as a doctor in Broome in order to escape his difficult circumstances in Japan. There he works with Sister Bernice, who
attempts unsuccessfully to find out about his past, until his internment at Loveday camp in South Australia in 1942. He experiences feelings of divided loyalty between the Japanese and the hafu, as mentioned earlier. Later in the same year Ibaraki returns to Japan as part of a prisoner exchange program. At the end of the novel, he reads in the paper about the discovery of human remains in Tokyo where the Unit 731 division once existed. Encouraged by an old letter from Sister Bernice that asks him to open up about his past, he starts to pen a letter to the newspaper recounting his experiences of the unit. He finally reveals to the world that closed and painful aspect of his past, allowing for a process of healing and reconciliation.

In this section I give an overview of the significance of wartime reconciliation in the Asian region, specifically as it is related to Japanese war crimes. In addition, I examine the history of Unit 731, and consider frameworks for reconciliation as a general concept. I then explore how After Darkness provides a reconciliatory ethic through its protagonist Ibaraki and his relationships with various characters.

Ibaraki’s inability to speak of his experiences during his time at Unit 731 mirrors the Japanese government’s silence on the existence of the unit itself, and any responsibility Japan may have regarding the atrocities committed.5 Jun-Hyeok Kwak and Melissa Nobles write that ‘the different and contesting interpretations of historical wrongdoing in East Asia’ have contributed to the difficulty in creating ‘a regional identity or shape an East Asian community.’6 This echoes the opinions of many scholars working on the Asian region. There are still several long-standing issues to do with Japanese wartime and colonial responsibility regarding the Nanking Massacre, Unit 731, treatment of POWs, and comfort women.7

In his essay entitled ‘Japan’s Long Postwar: The Trick of Memory and the Ruse of History,’ Harry Harootunian argues that ‘the Japanese have appealed to memory, as such, and the retrieval of ‘experience’ but less, perhaps, to grasp the meaning of the events that led to

---

genocide in Asia, destruction, and defeat than to refigure the relationship between victimizer and victim. By this he means that some current day Japanese mainstream discourse characterises Japan as the victim of a form of US cultural domination in the post-war period; this is a US culture that is pitted against a pre-modern Japanese ‘essence’. Writers such as Norihiro Katō frame the US occupation and post-war period as one that heralded an unprecedented Americanisation of Japanese culture which obliterated Japan’s past - Japan’s ‘Japaneseness’. But Harootunian argues that this is an oft repeated stance that has been melancholically replaying itself since the Meiji period: it represents a fetishisation of the binary between an authentic national self and the inauthentic other. This creates a form of remembering that is in fact amnesic: it ‘remembers’ authentic Japanese identity, robbed of Japan since the modernity of the post-war period, whilst entirely forgetting the reality of pre-war Japanese modernity in the form of colonialism. In this amnesia Japanese fixate on their victimisation, at the hands of Americanisation, in order to forget Japan’s colonial past and thus evade responsibility for war crimes and colonial atrocities.

Having said this, Harootunian and others note that the allied powers also played their part in allowing Japan to escape proper responsibility for wartime wrongdoing. The US, for example, did not hold the emperor to account or try him for war crimes: ‘by preserving the emperor and the dynasty, the United States literally undermined the very reforms it had implemented to eliminate pre-war fascism and to put into place the foundations of a genuine social democratic structure.’ Many have noted how Douglas MacArthur granted immunity to those involved in Unit 731 in exchange for the medical information gained, and possibly for former unit scientists’ co-operation with US scientists. In addition, John Pritchard points out how Britain, Canada, China, France, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union and Australia all failed to raise the issues of Unit 731 and other war crimes during the Tokyo

---

9 Ibid., 101.
It is worth noting that Australia’s expectations for post-war Japan and its wartime responsibility differed somewhat to the official line eventually put forward by the US. Christine de Matos highlights, in her excellent work on Australia’s role during the occupation in Japan, how Australia wanted to hold the emperor to account, and expected reparations for Japanese conduct during the war. Some of these measures were undoubtedly vengeful in nature – for example, demands that Australia claim part of Japan’s whaling fleet as compensation in order to revitalise Australia’s own whaling industry. Still, some of the projected policies by the Australian government for post-war Japan included the construction of a powerful union movement - something that US anti-communist ideology would not allow for.

Unit 731, officially entitled the Epidemic Prevention and Water Purification Department, conducted cruel experiments on live victims in order to advance scientific knowledge about medical conditions afflicting Japanese soldiers and to develop Japan’s capacity for chemical and biological warfare. The unit started in 1932 in Manchuria and later expanded to Guangzhou, Beijing, and Singapore. It was headed by General Shiro Ishii who escaped tribunal at the end of the war. The experiments that took place in the unit involved:

- Intentionally infecting healthy men and women with the disease agents causing plague, anthrax, cholera, and typhoid by injection, by breathing in contaminated air, or by eating food and drinks laced with specific germs.
- Conducting vivisections and autopsies on these human subjects in order to study the natural progression of these infectious diseases created in them.
- Exposing research subjects to extreme cold for long periods of time to test physiological and psychological responses to frostbite, including use of anti-frostbite techniques.
- Experimenting with other responses to extreme conditions, such as deprivation of oxygen and high-voltage electric shocks.

---

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 51.
15 Kleiman, Nie, and Selden, 'Introduction: Medical Atrocities, History and Ethics,' 1.
• Exposing subjects to infectious agents released in explosions in order to evaluate the effects of biological weapons.
• Conducting experiments whose deadly consequences were predetermined, such as bleeding subjects to death, replacing human blood with horse blood, and injecting horse urine into the kidneys of human subjects.¹⁷

Scientists were also involved in the bombing and contamination of entire city and village populations.¹⁸ Testimonies by people involved in the unit include horrific stories of scientists performing live vivisections on pregnant ‘comfort women’, rape of test subjects, and torture of children.¹⁹ Three thousand people are believed to have been directly killed by the unit experimentations, and some 250 000 to 300 000 are believed to have perished as a result of the intentional release of fatal diseases into village populations.²⁰

As mentioned earlier, nobody involved in Unit 731 was held to account during the Tokyo Tribunals. Many war criminals maintained positions of power in the postwar period.²¹ There were trials, with convictions, in Russia and China. However all those convicted in Russia were repatriated by 1956,²² and those convicted in China were given light sentences as the new PRC government wanted to be seen as treating its prisoners humanely.²³ While the Japanese government has not publicly acknowledged the existence of Unit 731, on July 19, 2005 the Japanese High Court stated that the Japanese Imperial Army had violated the Geneva protocol of 1925 which prohibited the use in war of poisonous gases and bacteriological methods of warfare. The court however dismissed the demands for direct compensation and an apology from the Japanese government.²⁴ Thus the struggle for acknowledgement and reconciliation in regards to Unit 731 continues today.

Piper’s novel contributes to awareness around the issue, and it also offers ways forward through Ibaraki’s process of his personal reconciliation with the past. While Ibaraki kept his

¹⁷ Kleiman, Nie, and Selden, 'Introduction: Medical Atrocities, History and Ethics,' 4-5.
¹⁸ Ibid., 1.
¹⁹ Gold, Unit 731 Testimony, 162.
²⁰ Piper, ‘Unearthing the Past,’ 33.
²¹ Ibid,., 41.
²³ Suzy Wang, ‘Medicine Related War Crimes Trials and Post-War Politics and Ethics,’ ibid., 43.
²⁴ Ibid., 48.
experiences a secret from all in his life, leading to serious limitations and problems in his personal relationships, he eventually decides to write about his experiences, paving the way for more meaningful relationships with others. This accords with writing about reconciliation – in Asian and other contexts – that highlights the need for acknowledgment of past wrongdoing and the establishment of renewed relationships between opposing parties. By including cultural issues that concern the Asian region in her ostensibly Australian novel, Piper involves Australia in Asian cultural politics and offers mixed cultural perspectives to her readers. The linking together of these different geographical concerns highlights Piper’s own mixed cultural position and her desire to explore possibilities in comparative approaches to cultural issues such as wartime reconciliation. Before delving into some of the reconciliation literature and its relevance to the novel, I explore the characterisation of Ibaraki and his process of overcoming the silence about his involvement in Japanese war crimes.

Ibaraki, the son of a well-respected surgeon, wanted to be a doctor from a young age but becomes disillusioned by the reality of the medical profession, by ‘how incapable we all were. Medicine was not the noble, enlightened profession I’d envisaged. Patients still died; there was no secret cure’ (33). He eventually takes up a research position in the Army Medical College which we later discover is a Tokyo division of Unit 731 where specimens and bodies are brought back from Japanese colonial outposts in China. Ibaraki does not take part in the murder and experimentation on live victims that happened in China, he analyses the body parts of the deceased in Tokyo. At around the same time he joins the unit, Ibaraki marries Kayoko Sasaki; they move into a new house together and Kayoko becomes pregnant. Ibaraki is sworn to secrecy regarding what he sees at his job; he cannot even share what he experiences with his family. While Ibaraki starts in the unit by completing menial tasks such as mass-producing particular pathogens, he works his way up the ranks, due mainly to his advanced surgical skills. He then begins to witness increasingly disturbing things: body parts like severed heads in glass jars are sent to Tokyo from Manchuria, he even sees in one such jar the preserved body of a 2 year old child, ‘His skin was blackened and covered in blisters’ (195). He attends lectures and comes across documents that tell of horrific experimentation on live victims; for example, infecting patients with fatal viruses, subjecting patients to extreme cold temperature to find ways of treating frostbite, exposing
patients to toxic gas. One document that he reads on his superior’s table entitled ‘Hydrogen cyanide toxicity by inhalation’ reads:

‘Subject A: Female 26 years. Subject B: Infant 22 months. Experiment began with 1000mg of HCN released into 5 cubic-metre enclosure. At 50 seconds, ‘B’ showed signs of disturbed breathing, despite attempts by ‘A’ to cover respiratory tract. Convulsions in ‘B’ began at 1 minute 40 seconds. ‘A’ collapsed at 4 minutes. Lay on top of ‘B’ to little effect. Convulsions began thereafter. ‘A’ displayed signs of flushing on face and neck and foaming at the mouth. At 21 minutes, respiratory signs ceased. Experiment terminated at 30 minutes. Both subjects pronounced dead. (278)

Ibaraki says, ‘I closed the file, my hands trembling’ (278).

The horrors Ibaraki witnesses, and is in a sense a party to, take their toll on him and his relationship with his wife. After a particularly difficult night at work Ibaraki returns home late and he finds that the bath has been drained. Kayoko finds him washing in the cold, and their interaction shows the distance growing between them.

‘The bath. You emptied it. I need to wash myself,’ I clenched my teeth to try to contain my feelings.
‘I’m sorry. You were so late – I thought you’d stayed at work overnight like you did the other week.’

I shook my head. I prayed she’d leave me alone. As I sat on the stool, holding a bar of soap, silence stretched between us.
‘Tomo, are you okay?’
I imagined her expression: lips pressed into a thin line and her big, troubled eyes.
‘Yes. Please, just leave me alone.’
I heard her step back and felt the cool air again as she closed the door. (178-9)

The secrets and silence that dominate their relationship become painfully obvious when Kayoko misrecognises Ibaraki’s need to clean himself after work. ‘I know why you wash yourself after work’ (196), she says, ‘How could she know?’ Ibaraki thinks ‘Was it the smell of the formalin? Were my clothes soiled with their blood?’ Ibaraki believes his wife has discovered the secrets of his work.
My wife, my love. She knew, and she didn’t hate me. She could still look at me with love. The realisation unhinged me. I felt dizzy with relief...

‘Kayoko...’ I reached out to take her arm, to draw her warmth to me. I wanted to hold her, to hear her tell me it was alright. I wanted her to help shoulder the burden of my pain. (196)

But Kayoko thinks Ibaraki washes to remove the smell of the geishas she believes he fraternises with along with his colleagues.

The words I had been about to speak caught in my throat. The relief I had felt seconds earlier vanished. Emptiness gnawed at my stomach. To have been on the verge of sharing the pain, and then to have the comfort snatched away! All hope was knocked out of me. (196)

Kayoko asks Ibaraki not to stay out too often as it worries her: with the child coming she wants him to be more present in the home, and in her life. But the distance between them reaches its breaking point when Kayoko suffers a miscarriage and Ibaraki is at work, not at home to help. Kayoko feels betrayed, isolated, and disconnected from Ibaraki. Despite his protestations, she moves back to her parents’ place and communication between the two becomes scarce.

After Kayoko leaves, Ibaraki dejectedly continues work. He experiences a particularly difficult moment when unexpectedly ordered, during a public lecture, to perform incisions on the body of a deceased child specimen. Ibaraki freezes and is unable to perform; another doctor has to take over from him. Kayoko’s miscarriage appears to have had deep effects on him. This failure on Ibaraki’s part leads to Ibaraki’s dismissal from the unit as it caused considerable embarrassment for his superiors and raised questions about his trustworthiness.

Although Kayoko does attempt, on more than on occasion, to get Ibaraki to talk about what seems to be bothering him, he feels bound by the authorities at Unit 731 and he fears rejection from his wife. This inability to communicate with his wife and to acknowledge the horrors of the unit resembles the Japanese government’s inability to acknowledge the existence of the unit and create adequate communication about the past with other nations. It also reflects the adherence to authority that may be hindering the process –
certainly loyalty to authority stopped many involved in Unit 731 from talking about their experiences. Not only that, it speaks to a larger national amnesia about the past that has not been adequately confronted or resolved.

Unsure about his employability in Japan after his dismissal, and keen to leave his personal problems behind, Ibaraki takes up a position as a single doctor at a small practice in Broome, Australia. Here, he works with Sister Bernice; they become rather close through work and she, like Kayoko, recognises the silent pain that Ibaraki is unwilling to share.

As the working relationship and friendship between Ibaraki and Sister Bernice grows, Ibaraki offers to lend her some of his books. She borrows Robinson Crusoe, but when returning it she mentions a thin wooden tab she found under the cover and asks Ibaraki what it is. He is horrified and becomes angry, snapping the book shut and barking at Sister Bernice: ‘it shouldn’t have been there. It was a mistake you never should have found it’ (159). Sister Bernice is understandably distraught as Ibaraki is normally mild mannered and polite.

She flinched. ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you…Are you alright?’

‘I just …I don’t like you intruding into my life. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m very busy right now.’

She blinked several times. I thought I saw her lower lip tremble, but I couldn’t be sure. She nodded slowly, then, without another comment, left the room. (159)

We later find out that this tab hung on the neck of the child Ibaraki was unable to perform the public surgery on. His visceral and emotively charged reaction testifies to the traumatic nature of the experiences he suppresses. His anger also mirrors the level of the denial in some sectors of Japanese society surrounding Japanese war atrocities.

When the probability of war becomes apparent, Ibaraki decides to stay in Broome rather than flee to Japan. Sister Bernice cannot understand why he wouldn’t try to escape: ‘they’ll come for you – they’ll put you away’ (216). She shows up at his door one rainy evening and confronts him about his decision, demanding an explanation.

I could see she was determined not to leave without an answer. The thought occurred to me that I could tell her. If not about the laboratory, at least about what

25 Gold, Unit 731 Testimony, 11.
happened between Kayoko and me. If there was anyone who could listen without judgement, it would be Bernice. But how to put my pain into words?

‘I did not want to go back to Japan. Not yet,’ I said finally. ‘My family – so much occurred before I left...It’s hard for you to understand –’

‘Why? Because I’m young? Because I’m a nun?’ The sharpness of her voice startled me. She glared at me. I blinked. My heart sank as I realised the opportunity was gone. I could not tell her about my past – how I hadn’t been there for Kayoko when she’d needed me the most. I certainly couldn’t tell Bernice when she was so aggrieved – if I ever could at all. (219)

Sister Bernice goes on to tell of her frustration of not being able to understand Ibaraki:

All these years we’ve worked together and I still don’t know who you are. I’ve tried to understand you – the Lord knows how much I’ve tried. But as soon as you show a part of yourself, almost at once you hide away. I see you almost every day, and yet I don’t know the slightest thing about you. Perhaps I shouldn’t care, but I do.’ (219-220)

Sister Bernice feels conflicted by a sense of jealousy about Ibaraki’s former life in Japan. She starts to develop feelings for him, and evidently wants to get closer to him: ‘I really did think of giving it up, throwing it all away because of you. It was a silly idea, of course. You’d never –’ She winced and closed her eyes, as if she felt sudden pain. ‘I mean, I knew it would come to nothing. I never wanted it to come to anything, but I couldn’t help thinking...’ (220). In this critical moment, Ibaraki does not know how to react. He tenses, feeling the silence between them, and ultimately cannot open up. He sabotages the moment of connection: ‘Sister, it is very late. Too late to be talking about such things. Let’s discuss it in the morning, when the weather is calm and our minds are clear’ (220). Sister Bernice leaves abruptly and the two never see each other again.

Piper writes that during the beginning stages of the development of the Ibaraki character she sensed that his was ‘a voice that concealed.’ The doctor’s reticence about sharing his past with the reader or with characters in the novel ‘created an unnatural emptiness – a

silence that haunted the text." Ibaraki’s silence structures the text in many ways; the moment of overcoming that silence, at the end of novel, represents a clear climax and resolution to the problem of Ibaraki’s inability ‘to confront his traumatic memories due to the pain he knew they would unleash.’

Not until many years after the war, in 1989, can Ibaraki find the strength to confront these memories. He sees in the newspaper that an excavation has revealed the remains of thirty five people that some historians believe may have been connected to Unit 731. No evidence proving the link has been found. He finds encouragement to write to the newspaper about his time in the unit through a letter from Sister Bernice dating back to 1942. In it she writes,

> Whenever I felt we were growing closer, you seemed to step away. I recall your irritation when I found the tag inside the book. We all have our secrets, and I did not wish to know yours, but I longed to be able to relieve you of your burden. I wish you had shared a little more of yourself.

> I would have liked to have said such things and more to you in person. Not doing so is my greatest regret. ‘When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.’ (Psalms 32:3)

> I pray for your wellbeing, Tomokazu, and for all that has been left unsaid. (293-4)

Ibaraki finally allows Sister Bernice’s words to have their effect on him, and recognises the weakness of his silence. His personal process of coming to terms with his past also reflects an ethical attitude towards the ways in which nations regard history, as the final line of the novel – part of Ibaraki’s letter to the newspaper – reveals: ‘I am writing to you in the hope that you will publish my letter, because there is something the Japanese people should know’ (295).

Ask Kwak and Nobles write: ‘it is clear that some form of historical reconciliation is necessary to generate and sustain cross-national mutual trust and prevent nationalist sentiments from re-emerging.’ Thus, After Darkness plays its part in the process of

---

27 Ibid., 323.
28 Ibid.
29 Kwak and Nobles, Inherited Responsibility and Historical Reconciliation in East Asia, 3.
historical reconciliation in the Asian region by taking the reader through an individual’s journey of personal reconciliation with the past.

Reconciliation itself can represent a many tiered process that involves political and policy initiatives that go beyond the bounds of individual healing. Ernesto Verdeja argues that ‘reconciliation for historical injustices includes several elements: critical reflection on the past; symbolic and material recognition; and securing the means of political participation.’

Farid Abdel-Nour argues that citizens bear the responsibility of wartime injustices as ultimately the popular mood of the nation will spur governments to recognise official reconciliation. This argument is premised on the idea that a citizen, by definition, takes an active role in the political activities and circumstances of their nation. In Australia, national reconciliation, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, took place as part of a formal government led process instituted by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke. A government organised body, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR), was given ten years (1991 – 2000) to achieve national reconciliation. This process has largely been deemed a failure. Andrew Gunstone argues as much in his book *Unfinished Business: The Australian Reconciliation Process*, pointing out how CAR itself acknowledged that reconciliation would not be achieved by its 2000 target. Aboriginal leader Geoff Clark argues that ‘nothing much’ changed after the reconciliation process. The Australian reconciliation process has also been criticised for attempting to subsume Indigenous issues into a dominant national framework, as well as for attempting to alleviate white guilt rather than confront ongoing forms of discrimination and dispossession.

However, my project does not focus on the policy aspects of reconciliation: Piper’s novel highlights the important role of personal reflection to the reconciliation process. Reconciliation is not simply a civic responsibility, it also involves personal change and intercultural exchange. Considering reconciliation within an inter-Asia frame, one that includes

---

31 Abdel-Nour Farid, 'Owning the Misdeeds of Japan’s Wartime Regime,' ibid. (Milton Park, Abingdon, New York), 24.
Australia within Asia, requires comparisons between different national attitudes towards reconciliation. Minoru Hokari, in ‘Globalising Aboriginal Reconciliation: Indigenous Australians and Asian (Japanese) Migrants,’ borrows from literature on Japanese wartime responsibility in order to consider the place of Japanese Australians in the Australian reconciliation process. Similarly, I borrow from some literature in Australian reconciliation to consider ways of conceptualising reconciliation in this novel.

Aboriginal educator Lilian Holt for example calls Australia, using John Pilger’s words, ‘the secret country,’ saying ‘secrets keep us sick. We need to open up and share.’ She goes on to say: ‘Aboriginal people are the shadow side of white Australia, which is afraid to look because of guilt, shame, blame, anger, defence. Yet in looking, in interrogation lies liberation, as my closest white friends have attested. And with liberation can come reconciliation.’ Ibaraki’s liberation from his silent past could represent a step towards reconciliation, as Holt’s words on secrets testify to. Michelle Grattan writes that reconciliation ‘vitally involves material progress, but also intrinsically matters of the spirit. It is about attitudes, white and black, as well as tangibles.’ Similarly, as respected Aboriginal leader Patrick Dodson highlights, reconciliation has many levels and one of these is the personal level: ‘this is the level of human encounter.’ I focus on this aspect of reconciliation in the next section. In this section I have highlighted the need for acknowledgement of past wrongs in the process of historical reconciliation in the Asian region. But as we see, Ibaraki’s process involves not only dealing with the past, but also creating connections with people during his lifetime: ‘human encounter.’ His encounters with Sister Bernice, for example, and, as we will see in the section to come, the interned hafu challenge his feelings of loyalty to Japan and authority, thus paving the way for his ability to confront his past. Holt provides a compelling call for non-Indigenous Australians to ‘mix’ with Aboriginal people: ‘hang out with them, walk with them in the streets and accompany them into shops, pubs, and public places...you will learn something not only about yourself but about your own mob, who will

---

36 Ibid., 150.
most often see you as a ‘race traitor.’ Holt argues that this kind of interaction will lead to a recognition of one’s implicitly racialised identity, and perhaps also to a more significant level of empathetic understanding of discrimination against Aboriginal people: ‘unless we go beyond the mask and dig deep, it will remain a superficial encounter.’

This understanding of encounter resonates with my thesis that inter-cultural encounter and exchange leads to more expansive understandings of national and racial identity. How does Ibaraki’s interaction with the hafu and their culturally and racially mixed positions and experiences aid the reconciliation process happening in the novel? How does the novel challenge its readers to undergo similar encounters and leaps in identity? The novel’s remembering of the injustice of internment also asks Australia to acknowledge discrimination against resident Japanese – there has been no apology for Australian internment as of yet. The novel creates a multifaceted inter-Asia reconciliatory process between Australia and Japan. In addition, I interrogate how mixed race identities represent the kinds of mixed perspectives, which have multiple nodes of identification, that I argue lead to important transnational and inter-cultural notions of selfhood.

**Internment and Hafu**

During WWII the Australian government interned Germans, Italians and Japanese living in Australia – totalling 16,757 people – in various camps across the country. A total of 4,301 Japanese civilians were interned at the camps Hay (NSW), Tatura (VIC) and Loveday (SA). 1,141 were arrested in Australia and 3,160 were arrested in nearby allied nations (such as the Dutch east Indies, New Caledonia, New Hebrides [Vanuatu], the Solomon Islands) and transferred to Australia. These Japanese also included Formosans and Koreans arrested as Japanese. Of those arrested in Australia, approximately 100 were Australian born Japanese. The internment of Japanese was racially motivated as can be seen in the fact

---

38 Lilian Holt, ‘Reflections on Race and Reconciliation,’ ibid., 150.
39 Ibid., 151.
that only 31.7 per cent of Italian males and 32.04 per cent of German males were interned as compared to the 97.83 percentage of Japanese males interned.\textsuperscript{44} Authorities believed that resident Japanese might work as spies for the Imperial Army, or attempt to commit sabotage attacks.

Piper’s research found that many of those who experienced internment had largely positive memories. Maurice Shiosaki for examples says, ‘We were treated very well, as far as I can remember... All the time we were there, we were very happy.’\textsuperscript{45} However many that owned businesses or property lost both due to internment:\textsuperscript{46} the Australian constitution did not protect non-citizens from deprivation of liberty or property without due process of law.\textsuperscript{47} In the US context Japanese Americans received a total of USD 37 million in compensation for property, businesses, material possessions and wages lost, despite estimates four decades later calculating the total loss for Japanese Americans at between 1.2 to 3.1 billion USD. Japanese Australians have not received any compensation.\textsuperscript{48} As Brian Masaru Hayashi points out, in the US context many Japanese Americans had to cut cultural ties to Japan after internment due to post-war anti-Japanese sentiment.\textsuperscript{49} The same was true in Australia, where many suffered racial discrimination after the war.\textsuperscript{50} Most however were repatriated to Japan after internment, even if they didn’t wish to return.\textsuperscript{51} This is not the case for Italian and German residents, most of whom were allowed to stay.\textsuperscript{52} One of the major injustices however, as Hayashi argues, lies in the fact that even if some Japanese harboured nationalistic views, ‘people cannot and should not be locked up on the basis of political sentiment but rather on the basis of acts committed.’\textsuperscript{53} Certainly people should not be locked up based on racial phenotype or ancestry either. Piper’s novel draws attention to this lesser known historical injustice against Japanese Australians. The injustice of this unlawful detention can repeat itself, as is evident in the recent detention of asylum seekers

\textsuperscript{44} Piper, 'After Darkness : Japanese Civilian Internment in Australia During World War 2,' 232.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 252.
\textsuperscript{46} See examples in 'Perspectives on Japanese Internment in Australia,' ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{47} Nagata, \textit{Unwanted Aliens: Japanese Internment in Australia}, 274.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 278.
\textsuperscript{50} Nagata, \textit{Unwanted Aliens: Japanese Internment in Australia}, 278.
\textsuperscript{51} Piper, 'After Darkness : Japanese Civilian Internment in Australia During World War 2,' 232.
\textsuperscript{52} Nagata, \textit{Unwanted Aliens: Japanese Internment in Australia}, 212.
\textsuperscript{53} Hayashi, \textit{Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment}, 11.
in the Australian context. Recently, a prominent supporter of Donald Trump suggested that the internment of Japanese civilians in World War II offered a precedent for an immigrant registry in the US.\textsuperscript{54}

Piper also discovered that internee experience depended upon individual internees’ senses of belonging to particular groups within the camps. Those marginalised within the camp did not share the positive memories of internment:

The Japanese civilian internment experience was thus shaped by feelings of belonging. Those whose beliefs and sympathies mirrored the dominant ideology reported the most positive experiences of internment. Conversely, pro-Australian internees probably suffered the most, as they felt rejected by their country and their fellow internees. They neither belonged outside nor inside camp.\textsuperscript{55}

In her memoir \textit{Beyond Borders}, for example, Mary Nakashiba expresses her feelings of rejection when arrested and taken to an internment camp at fifteen years old:

I felt there was nothing to live for. I didn’t know where we were going, what was going to happen to us and I didn’t care. I knew, then, that I had no country, no people save my immediate family and no future. I was an enemy, an alien in the country of my birth. We had always regarded ourselves as Australians and we kids couldn’t even speak Japanese – so what was there left?\textsuperscript{56}

Nakashiba describes being marginalised and mistreated by the Japanese within Tatura camp where she was interned. She recalls, for example, how when objecting to her clothes being thrown out of the laundry tub, her mother was physically assaulted by a Japanese male.

The experiences of mixed race Japanese Australians such as Nakashiba interests Piper particularly: ‘As a half-Japanese Australian, I was naturally drawn to the experience of the mixed-race and Australian-born Japanese internees. Caught between two cultures, they were welcomed by neither.’\textsuperscript{57} Piper based the group of mixed race characters in \textit{After


\textsuperscript{55} Piper, ‘After Darkness : Japanese Civilian Internment in Australia During World War 2,’ 248.

\textsuperscript{56} Mary Nakashiba, \textit{Beyond Borders: A Memoir} (Book Pal, 2010), 107.

\textsuperscript{57} Piper, ‘After Darkness : Japanese Civilian Internment in Australia During World War 2,’ 244-5.
Darkness on a real life group of mixed race friends at Loveday nicknamed ‘the Gang’: it comprised seven Australian-born—Jimmy Chi (who had shifted from Loveday), James Hamabata, Jack Tolsee, Patrick Ahmat, Eddie Ahmat, Sam Nakashiba [brother of Mary Nakashiba] and Joseph Suzuki (who was born in Japan but raised in Australia since he was six months old)—and one Indonesian-born, Ted Takamura.58 Piper’s two central hafu characters Johnny Chang and Stan Suzuki were based on Jimmy Chi and Joseph Suzuki.

By highlighting the ways in which mixed race people can exhibit, in some instances, multiple nodes of identification I show how they can represent disruptive and dynamic forms of identity that have transnational realities. Ibaraki’s interaction with the hafu – and his involvement in their ambivalent, in-between position in the camp – disrupts, and forces him to rethink or reimagine, his own forms of identification. This leads him to a process of reconciliation with his past, and leads the novel to the beginning of a reconciliation between Japan and its Asian neighbours. Australian readers may also consider reconciliation with its racist interment past, and the Japanese Australians that were subject to it. Not only that but readers of the novel themselves delve into encounters with hafu, as well as Japanese and Australian, perspectives and can form new identifications through empathy with other experiences. This leads to expanded or reimagined forms of national or, more appropriately, transnational identification based on empathetic relationships with others. These identities have the potential to create more inclusive, changing, and dynamic communities within the Australian context.

The first time Ibaraki encounters ‘The Gang’, Johnny Chang is caught up in a confrontation in the mess hall. A Japanese camp member has allegedly accused him of taking portions of meat that are too large. This ignites Johnny’s feelings of ostracisation and discrimination within the camp: ‘What right have you got to tell us what to do, anyway? Acting like you own the place, with your so-called mayor who doesn’t even follow his own bloody rules’ (18). The mayor is a Japanese male appointed to organise camp structure and procedures. ‘He gets all sort of special treatment,’ Johnny continues, ‘two or three helpings of food, first in line to use the showers, no cleaning duties. Don’t think I haven’t noticed’ (18). Johnny experiences problems with the Japanese authority structure within the camp; he says, ‘the

58 Ibid., 245.
camp’s run like a dictatorship, not a democracy’ (41). We view the confrontation through Ibaraki’s eyes who is not properly acquainted with Johnny and is led through the camp by Yamada, another authority figure within the camp. Yamada says, ‘He thinks he’s better than everyone else...He has no respect for authority – no respect for our ways. None of them do’ (18). The negative attitudes towards the hafu are racially motivated: during the confrontation one internee shouts, ‘You haafu fools don’t deserve the Japanese blood in you!’ to which Johnny replies ‘You bloody racist!’ (19). Different nationalist sentiments also reveal clear divides between some of the Japanese and the hafu: Johnny shouts at his antagonist, ‘You fucking Emperor-worshipping pig’ (19). Many of the hafu exhibit more loyalty to Australian values; Stan for instance was enlisted in the AIF before they discovered his ancestry. When a Salvation Army representative visits the camp to screen a film, the Japanese and camp authorities are keen to put on a positive front for the outside world. Johnny however publically introduces himself to the representative and attempts to air his grievances about being interned despite being ‘Australian born and bred...I am an Australian citizen, just like you. Only my mother’s Japanese. But I was arrested...’ (71). The authorities silence him in order to save face. Although Johnny attempts to appeal his internment, the tribunal decides that it cannot hear his and others’ similar cases as they ‘were Australian-born not aliens. They said we have to go to a different tribunal – one just for British subjects who are interned. Except there is no tribunal like that’ (232). This was an official stance on Australian born appeals and no alternative tribunal was ever arranged.59

The divided sense of loyalty that the hafu feel begins to affect Ibaraki when Stan comes into the camp hospital with injuries that he claims were due to physical violence perpetrated against him. Stan accuses Yamada of attacking him but Ibaraki doesn’t believe him: ‘Yamada Denkichi is a very good friend. He would never do something like that. He was the one who introduced me to everyone when I first arrived here. You must be mistaken’ (77). Ibaraki thinks that Johnny, out of a desire to undermine the Japanese authorities, has convinced Stan that Yamada was to blame for the attack. He warns Stan to be wary of Johnny. Ibaraki’s inherent prejudices towards the hafu are linked to his sense of national or cultural loyalty to Japan. Piper leads the reader into his prejudices:

59 Ibid., 250.
The half-castes and Australian-born had formed a clique, sleeping in tents a little
away from the others, eating at a separate table and doing different chores. Even
when they worked outside the camp grounds, they didn’t have to wear the maroon
uniforms that everyone else wore. They spent their time chatting to the guards and
officers, which didn’t help their reputation in camp. If they were outcasts, they were
outcasts of their own making. (93)

However, Ibaraki’s changing attitudes towards the hafu also represents an opportunity for
the reader to empathise with the unique position that the mixed race internees find
themselves in. The experience of being attacked, and possibly the fact that Ibaraki did not
believe him, send Stan into a depressive spiral that leads to him attempt suicide. Johnny
openly accuses Ibaraki of being partly responsible for Stan’s attempted suicide: ‘Stan was
different after he went to the infirmary. Said the doc thought he was lying about what
happened in the mess hall. After that he didn’t want to talk to anyone. And then tonight he
goes missing and turns up on the floor of the shower block with his wrists cut up’ (99). The
accusation shocks Ibaraki, and he begins to feel responsible: ‘Stan had opened up to me,
and I hadn’t listened. I was horrified to think my insensitivity could have led to his death’
(145).

Ibaraki begins to question his previous loyalty to Yamada: ‘Lying in bed at night, I turned
over the possibilities in my mind. Could Yamada have been the one who hurt Stan?’ (100).
He decides to view Yamada’s reaction when he raises the incident and the accusation of an
attack at a camp meeting. Yamada’s agitated response makes Ibaraki suspicious.

When Stan returns to the infirmary, from hospital, he lies in bed in a near catatonic state for
many days. The wall of silence mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, between Ibaraki
and Stan, reminds the doctor of his inadequate care of Stan earlier in the novel. However,
Ibaraki slowly attempts to make amends and get closer to Stan: ‘[Stan] began to smile when
he saw me, and responded to my questions about his health. Eventually, we started to talk
about family. He told me his elder sister, Emmy, was interned at Tatura camp in Victoria.
Their father had died years ago. Their mother was the only one left at their home in Sydney’
(164). Stan tells Ibaraki about a love interest of his that he cannot contact due to shame
about his internment. But when Stan asks Ibaraki about his wife, the doctor stiffens and
does not share these details of his past.
A decisive change occurs when Ibaraki decides, the next morning, that he should share his past with Stan rather than let the divide between them return:

Stan, yesterday, when you asked me about my wife...It is hard for me to talk about it, but my wife and I...we are separated. I have not heard from her in years. We had a misunderstanding in Japan. She wanted me to help her, to share her pain, but I had my own problems. I wasn’t there for her. I wish I had said more to her before I left. That is my greatest regret. So I urge you to write to this girl you like and share your feelings with her.’ (166-7).

Ibaraki in fact helps Stan to write the letter, and the two pen a heartfelt and clear expression of Stan’s feelings for the woman he loves, Isabelle. Not only does this moment draw Stan and Ibaraki closer together, showing the growth of Ibaraki’s empathetic connection to the *hafu*, but it also serves to show the importance of honest communication about the past and suppressed feelings or emotions. Ibaraki cannot open up about his secrets or emotions with women – his wife or Sister Bernice – but only with men. It may be that his silence signifies masculine reserve or stoicism in the face of difficult emotions. Homosocial relationships between men may sustain a certain emotional distance that enables him to partly open up – he talks about his wife, but certainly not about the deeper source of anxiety which is his involvement in Unit 731. By helping and opening up to Stan, Ibaraki atones for the secrecy in his behaviour with his wife and Sister Bernice. This process of opening lines of communication culminates in his ability to face the root cause of his silence: it activates Ibaraki’s changing feelings of loyalty to his Japanese community and his ability to pen that other divulging letter to the Japanese newspaper.

Ibaraki’s feelings of connection and loyalty to Stan come to a head when Ibaraki believes he overhears Yamada planning to poison Stan. It’s unclear whether Yamada actually harbours this intention or not. Ibaraki’s suspicions come on the day of a dust storm, where the authorities order everyone to stay indoors, and mobility between sections in the camp is restricted. Ibaraki wishes to get to Stan in the infirmary in order to protect him, but a guard denies him entry. He runs from tent to tent looking for Johnny who he thinks could help, but Johnny, depressed and agitated by the denial of his parole hearing, cannot be found. In the commotion of the dust storm Johnny attempts to escape the camp. The siren goes off, Ibaraki hears gun shots and runs towards them only to find Stan dead: a young trigger happy
guard that has recently arrived at the camp has shot Stan, thinking he was an escapee. It appears however that Stan was simply walking around the grounds outside the infirmary. Johnny is later captured and incarcerated.

The tragedy of Stan’s death brings home to Ibaraki the idea that he has failed to help people at many stages of his life. In his estimation, he failed to help not only Stan but he failed to ease Sister Bernice’s pain, as well as Kayoko’s. He has also failed all those subject to the atrocities in Unit 731: ‘I could have helped him. I could have done something more. Not just for him. For all of them. Why didn’t I?’ (264). He sees his life as a series of failures to act, failures to be honest, and failures to take responsibility. While he does not have the strength or courage to make amends until much later in life, his experiences with Stan create a lasting impression on him and push him into bringing the injustice of Unit 731 into the limelight. While he continually denied that part of his life in his time in Broome, ‘Stan’s death brought it back into sharp relief’ (291).

Reconciliation involves not only social change but also personal changes: ‘In reconciliation…the forces for change are primarily internal and voluntary; while in other approaches they are external and to a certain extent coerced.’ As Assefa writes, it also ‘works to alter adversaries’ relationships from that of resentment and hostility to friendship and harmony.’ While the hafu do not represent the offended party in the issue of Unit 731, they do represent a national, racial and cultural other that Ibaraki learns to develop connections of friendship with. He unlearns the kind of racist logic that enabled the massacre and exploitation of Chinese, Korean, and many other people, and the mistreatment of mixed race Japanese Australians in the camp. He gains an empathetic relationship with the hafu which disentangles him from some of his loyalty to Japan, and starts a process of reconciling with the other. He breaks the deafening silence surrounding Unit 731 and the novel offers a reconciliatory future between Japan and its neighbours, including Australia. Piper also has Australia consider its role in the injustices of WWII: as Noreen Jones writes, ‘The atrocities of war should never be forgotten, but there is also a need to recognise that injustices are not only carried out by the enemy, and the detention

---

61 Ibid., 38.
of innocent women, men and children should not be used as a solution to international or
domestic problems during war or peace.\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{hafu} create sympathy in Australian readers,
thus inviting Australian acknowledgement of the wrongs of internment, and they also lead
the Japanese character to let go of rigid national and racial loyalties and identify with the
experiences of others. Piper creates an important inter-Asian cross-cultural reconciliatory
process, but also a cross-cultural form of personal and transnational connection between
Australia, Japan, and the diasporic, mixed race peoples who inhabit the in-between cultural
spaces of those national and racial identities.

The ambiguous and disruptive potential of the mixed position, its multiple nodes of
identification, its internal and external clashes and conflicts, inspired in Ibaraki a resistance
to the mould of closed national identity. It stimulates a differently imagined empathetic
relationship with the other – an identification with the other, or a becoming other – that
changes and perhaps expands the boundaries of national identities to discover transnational
possibilities. In experiencing Ibaraki’s changes and transitions, the reader too can potentially
undergo a similar empathetic identification with mixed race, Japanese, and Australian
experience that overcomes silence and aversion and finds the courage to reach out for
meaningful moments of encounter: encounters or mixings where those involved become
irrevocably mixed themselves.

\textsuperscript{62} Noreen Jones, \textit{Number 2 Home: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in Australia} (North Fremantle: Fremantle Arts
Centre Press, 2002), 196.
Conclusion
This thesis attempts to address an impasse in Australian studies of race and multiculturalism. As Ghassan Hage’s work has shown us, state-sponsored multiculturalism constitutes a masked form of assimilationism that perpetuates racist exclusion and does not offer an adequate model for understanding and living with difference. Academic studies that focus on transnational connections between Australia and other national contexts have grown in reaction to purely national studies that are considered by some to be parochial and out of date. This transnational focus which, as Robert Dixon says, goes ‘beyond the nation’ undermines the strictures of nationalism and highlights the transnational character of nation building: as Vilashini Cooppan says the transnational exists in ‘the very moment and process of national formation.’ However, while the transnational focus displaces the dangers of national discourse, it can take the gaze outside of the nation in a way that effaces the ongoing problems of internal relations with difference. Transnationalism does not necessarily offer an alternative to multiculturalism’s attempts at relating to cultural and racial others. Asserting that Australia has always been transnational does not change the fact that racism and nationalism continue to affect the ways that people of colour inhabit the Australian cultural space. While transnational studies highlight the importance of cultural flows between nations, they don’t always give us the tools to communicate and connect with cultural others or to ‘[understand] how to get along in a world of cultural and social diversity,’ as Baden Offord says.

Hage also draws attention to the need for an alternative model to multiculturalism and he puts forward an argument in favour of considering ‘intercultural relations,’ which he says emerge ‘at the limits of multicultural governmentality.’ I’ve taken up Hage’s call to explore intercultural relations and have attempted to show how a transnational attitude towards Australian cultural life can lead us to an intercultural model for encouraging relationships and connections between culturally different individuals and groups.

My analysis has important implications for social and structural levels of intercultural engagement, but it also draws attention to the important personal dynamics of the intercultural which serve as the foundation for the social. By drawing on my own experience of intercultural identity as a mixed race Japanese Australian, I have shown how individuals negotiate cultural difference on a personal level. I used the framework of Freudian melancholia to argue that subjectivity is premised on the denial and suppression of lost
aspects of the self. I connected this to Gloria Anzaldua’s writing on the ‘ambivalence from the clash of voices’ in the mixed race subject and highlighted the varying and sometimes competing cultural identities at play within a cultural subject. This analysis illuminates Julia Kristeva’s argument that ‘the foreigner is within.’

I contend that intercultural engagement brings us into contact with those suppressed cultural aspects of ourselves and offers us the opportunity to realise them more fully in our own forms of identification. We come to see that, as Hage says, ‘we can be radically other than what we are.’ I call this process, following Kuan-Hsing Chen, becoming others. By holding multiple nodes of identification we disrupt the exclusivist logic of national and racial identities. By interculturally engaging with Asia, Australia can radically reshape and transform the very nature of its cultural and racial identity. Rather than simply giving space for the presence of cultural difference – and in the process excluding it from and dominating it with mainstream culture – the co-ordinates of Australian identity itself can be changed and refigured by difference.

I have supported my argument through textual analysis of nine contemporary Australian texts. Each of my three sections of three texts has elaborated on particular intercultural dynamics that lead to the process of becoming others, and they indicate how to improve upon intercultural dynamics by exploring increasingly sophisticated forms of intercultural engagement.

Section I

*Japanese Story* opened this section’s focus on how the road movie and interracial romance and desire can facilitate intercultural engagement between Australians and Japanese. These are ‘first contact’ narratives where unfamiliar Japanese others come into contact with Australians. In my chapter on this film I explored the significance of Sandy’s process of mourning her lover Hiromitsu and connected it with my Introduction’s exploration of Freudian melancholia. The melancholic attachments to loss that Sandy feels resonate with the Australian nation’s unresolved guilt over its past and continuing mistreatment of Aboriginal people. I argued that Sandy’s attempt to come to terms with Hiromitsu’s death doubles as a national attempt at reconciliation with the colonial past. This film gives space
to externalise this apparently lost other that haunts the Australian nation, and in the process it reveals the possibility of transforming the nation’s mainstream identification with whiteness (and in the process its exclusion of and disidentification with Aboriginal people and cultures). This expansive thrust towards externalising the suppressed other within is hampered by a concomitant contractive impulse that defends national identification from the threat of change. I showed the disingenuous motivations of the film’s reconciliatory manoeuvres by highlighting how Hiromitsu’s death, itself, signifies the exclusion of difference: while the transgressive space of the road allowed for the sexual union of Sandy and Hiromitsu, he is not allowed to continue on living in Australia – his presence is too disruptive for the mainstream cultural space. Thus my textual analysis of this film examines the potential for becoming others represented in this text, but also how nationalising forces temper and limit that potential.

*Bondi Tsunami* represents an engagement with Japan more cognizant of cultural flows that transgress the boundaries of nationhood. My analysis of this film drew attention to how Lucas uses key symbols of Japanese soft power (manga, karaoke, kawaii), thus highlighting the cultural influence of Japan on Australia. She hybridises her representation of Japanese surfers in Australia to create a film that is ‘half Australian/ half Japanese feeling.’ The scopophilic gaze on Japanese masculinity clearly reveals a desire to identify with Japan and become vulnerable to difference, however, like *Japanese Story*, the Japanese characters symbolically die into the landscape at the film’s end. This suggests an assimilative logic that consumes and contains difference rather than a desire to be changed by it. As is common in the road movie narrative, the transgressive potential of the road (which contains the potential for becoming others) becomes re-integrated into the mainstream.

In *The Goddess of 1967* we also see an interracial romance between a Japanese man (Yoshiyasu) and a white Australian woman (Deirdre), however this romance possesses longevity. Like in *Japanese Story*, Australian interaction with Japanese characters triggers anxieties about Australia’s colonial past. In this film however, the heroine’s journey leads her to disidentify with her colonial heritage (as symbolised in her father) and continue her life on the road with her Japanese lover. By turning from her father to Yoshiyasu, Deirdre becomes other and symbolically transforms the conventional narrative of Australian identification. The transgressive potential of this becoming other that happens on the road
flows into the future as the two continue on their road trip at the end of the film: no re-integration into the mainstream takes place. This film solidifies this section’s argument in favour of ongoing engagement with difference in processes of becoming others, rather than a shying away from that possibility which we see in *Japanese Story* and *Bondi Tsunami*. In this chapter I have also shown the importance of drawing from transnational sources of textual criticism in order to displace the national framings often used in cinematic analyses.

**Section II**

*The Factory* highlights this section’s focus on intercultural theatre as a ‘stage’ for becoming others. These texts showcase a more complex and involved engagement with Japanese culture than the texts in the first section. They take up the challenge of ongoing engagement and show us the next stage in the process. Hilda is an Australian academic who speaks Japanese and studies Japanese culture. Her involvement within the cultural commune Koba creates feelings identification with Japan and a sense of belonging. Her process of learning noh theatre leads to an embodied experience of becoming Japanese. Unlike in the previous section where cross-cultural identification happens on a mostly symbolic level, in this section we have individuals that undergo transformations of identity by welcoming difference into their body and sense of self. Ghostly possession, in all three texts, exemplifies this process of becoming other: white subjectivities possess Japanese bodies and vice versa, thus bringing internal processes of cross-cultural identification into the corporeal realm. I argued that Paddy O’Reilly and Hilda’s narrator subjectivities possessed Japanese bodies in the novel, but that these subjectivities are exorcised in the end. Like *Japanese Story* and *Bondi Tsunami*, *The Factory* retreats from ongoing engagement as Hilda cuts ties to Japan and returns to Australia. However, the novel sets up the potential for embodied experiences of becoming others which is taken further in *Oppenheimer Noh*.

In *Oppenheimer Noh* we see white noh actors perform traditional Japanese behaviours in body, voice, and sensibility. Non-Japanese bodies also play Japanese characters, thus exemplifying cultural mixture and the embodiment of difference. While the drama of the play could signify the internal dynamics of the author’s relationship to Japan – the author’s experience is symbolised in the pilgrim character – this internal drama plays out in corporal
form. The play culminates in Robert Oppenheimer’s ghost possessing, and therefore becoming, the Japanese buddhist deity Fudô Myô-ô. I showed that this climactic event in the play exemplifies embodied experiences of becoming others and becoming culturally mixed. In this way, I draw attention to the unique transformative potential of intercultural engagements such as intercultural theatre.

In Yasukichi Murakami Kanamori examines the history of Japanese residence in Australia and in the process highlights the thoroughly intercultural nature of Australian cultural life. By putting the spotlight on diasporic experiences she makes the stage a diasporic space that enables cross-cultural identification and becoming others. The host country changes the diaspora and the diaspora changes the host country. When Kanamori asks the audience to imagine Yasukichi Murakami’s ghost within themselves – thus allowing him to, in a sense, possess their bodies – she constructs a moment where the Australian audience becomes other. I argued that her play illuminates the potential for transformation inherent in cross-cultural interactions, and, in this way, offers an alternative to multicultural demarcations of difference in Australian cultural space. The play therefore highlights the importance of bringing sophisticated forms of ongoing engagement with Japan to the space of Australia.

Section III

This section explored how wartime reconciliation works towards resolving issues of the past in order to envision a future of co-operation. Resentment towards the Japanese, due to horrific war crimes committed in WWII, hampers intercultural relations between Japan and its Asian neighbours (including Australia). By revisiting and confronting wrong doing in the war, these texts attempt to address lingering tensions that limit intercultural possibilities between Australia and Japan. In The Narrow Road Flanagan shows how Australian POWs suffered under their Japanese captors in the Burma Railway camps. He doesn’t depict individual characters reconciling with their former enemies, but he does highlight similarities in the Japanese and Australian experiences of the war and he complicates arguments around which side might be considered good or bad in historical memory. By drawing links between Australians and Japanese in this way Flanagan asks his readers to empathise and identify with Japanese experiences and thus start a process of reconciliation.
I argued that the protagonist Dorrigo’s process of becoming woman takes place alongside the Japanese rejection (rather than embrace) of national and racial others, thus suggesting that becoming serves as an alternative to rejection in relations with others.

In *Dreams of Speaking* Alice undergoes a process of reconciling with the horrors of the Nagasaki and Hiroshima atomic bombs. Rather than Japanese culpability in the war, this novel explores the Western powers’ wrong doing. The death of her friend, and Hiroshima survivor, Mr Sakamoto leads Alice to feel grief that crosses national and cultural boundaries – connecting her to the past and to Japan. By focussing on temporality in this novel, I complicated common analyses of transnationalism that focus on the geographical or spatial dimensions of nationhood. I also showed how individual experiences of mixed time highlight the mixed cultural aspects of national and cultural identity.

In *After Darkness*, Piper explores accountability for wrong doing on both sides: she highlights the injustices of Japan’s Unit 731 and Australia’s internment of resident Japanese. Piper sheds light on the role of the *hafu*, or mixed race Japanese Australians, who were interned, and sees them as important catalysts for change. The protagonist Dr Ibaraki empathises with the difficult in-between position that the *hafu* find themselves in, and his relationship with them leads to him letting go of his loyalty to Japan and opening up about the horrors of his involvement in Unit 731. I explored how the mixed race experience provides an example for the cross-cultural identifications necessary for reconciliation and becoming others. In this novel Australian readers identify across difference by empathising with the predicament faced by Japanese Australians and *hafu*, and a Japanese character identifies with *hafu* Japanese Australian experience in a way that compels him to reconsider his own involvement in the mistreatment of national and racial others. Piper’s comparative approach to addressing the war offers more complexity than the other texts in this section in thinking about intercultural relations. Rather than only Australia being enriched by contact with Japan, both sides are changed by each other and learn to relate to difference in new, unforeseen ways. While individual, national processes of reconciliation are important, in this chapter I showed how comparative approaches to such cultural issues allow both sides to think outside of their national paradigms and identify across national and cultural borders – thus enabling a robustly intercultural process of becoming.
Innovations and Future Directions

My thesis makes a much needed contribution to the area of Critical Mixed Race Studies in Australia. Scholarship on Australian mixed race experiences is still in its germinal phases: work in the area is needed as Australian experiences differ in various ways to US ones that have been well documented in the field. One of the primary differences is Australia’s proximity to Asia and the various transnational cultural flows and ethics that arise from that. By linking mixed race to transnational cultural politics I have shown how mixed race identities do not exist in a monocultural vacuum nor are they static, and I’ve also shown how mixed race experiences can help us navigate the mixed cultural, intercultural realities that Australian people and society face. My research does not attempt to solidify some mixed race identity position, but, rather, it highlights how mixed cultural experiences shape and are shaped by the challenges of intercultural societies.

My work also contributes mixed race research to Asian Australian Studies. Again, more work in the area is needed as the mixed race Asian Australian experience becomes increasingly common. I have attempted to adapt, to the Australian context, Vincent Cheng’s call to consider Asian American identity a mixed race category. Doing so enables us to move out of restrictive forms of ‘strategic essentialism’ – to use Spivak’s term – that do not cater to all racial identities. In addition, my work attempts comparative work between Australia and Asia in order to move out of limiting national approaches to research: transnational work of this kind is already being done in Asian Australian Studies and I hope that my thesis contributes to this trend.

Finally, this thesis asks important questions about racial identity, multiculturalism, and transnationalism that contribute to the fields of Australian studies, Australian Cultural Studies, and Cultural Studies more generally. We need new ways of thinking about racial identities and cross-cultural identification. As bell hooks says, it’s difficult to come by the right language for talking about the transformations inherent in cross-cultural exchange. This thesis ventures to find such a language and to push the boundaries of scholarship on intercultural engagement. I have attempted to find new answers to the problems of multiculturalism by exploring the potential of interculturalism, and I have started to ask how comparative and transnational forms of research can contribute new ideas to Cultural Studies.
My work on my final text, *After Darkness*, opens my research up to new possibilities for comparative study. My thesis, as it stands, represents a broadly national study of Australian attitudes towards Japan. I’ve used Australian texts and Australian experiences in order to talk about intercultural engagement. However, my work also asks what is possible in comparative studies of shared cultural issues. What can be gained from comparing colonialism, multiculturalism, mixed race in Australian and particular Asian contexts? How would comparing scholarly approaches from different contexts allow us to expand our current understandings of academic work? How will disrupting national frames of inquiry affect the kinds of claims we can make about cultural products and practices?

This new area of inquiry offers the opportunity for me to be challenged by different cultural perspectives on academic issues. Comparing differing attitudes to shared cultural questions might disentangle me from national frames of inquiry and allow me to rebuild my approach with the help of other cultural frames. This PhD thesis speaks to the experience of growing up mixed race in Australia; how can I take this perspective into more challenging intercultural territory? What will I learn about my own mixed race identifications in the process? What more will I learn about what is possible in intercultural engagement?

As is common with diasporic peoples, aspects of my Japanese identity are resolutely stuck in the past. I have an unusual habit of singing post-war era Japanese pop songs or *enka* at karaoke. I enjoy these songs because their melodies (which use the pentatonic scale) inspire me nostalgic feelings for my childhood: this music was common in the end of year national singing competition, *Kōhaku Uta Gassen*, which my mother used to watch as a child. The sorrowful, longing tone of the pentatonic scale (which is also used in the blues) speaks to my melancholic attachment to an upbringing much more immersed in Japanese culture than my current day life. My Great Aunt appreciates my renditions deeply. However, hers is the only generation to whom these songs have any real relevance. These songs are not even of my mother’s generation. Incidentally, my ‘Western’ repertoire consists of pops songs but also operatic arias. I remember when singing these with my Great Aunt and my uncle, my uncle told me in hushed tones, ‘don’t sing these around young people.’ Indeed, once when I did sing some of these songs around people closer to my age, one young woman, who was feeling ill at the time, abruptly left to have a lie down in the car. I suppose the Australian equivalent of this might be me singing an old bush ballad at karaoke – ‘A
strapping young stockman lay dying…’ Amongst my Australian friends these Japanese songs are a hit: nobody understands the cultural connotations – they are appreciated for their difference.

My experience of karaoke speaks to the conditions of cultural and racial mixedness that I have attempted to do justice to in this thesis. For diasporic peoples, the performance of cultural identity evokes complicated forms of attachment to temporally displaced heritage. Karaoke allows me to perform Japaneseness, in some sense, and to become Japanese. But my performances also mean I become curiously Australian and diasporic – especially in the Japanese context. The strange temporal and spatial mixing evoked by my repertoire creates unusual, tentative links between Japan and Australia. Karaoke is also a space in which I can form new connections to Japan, and Asia more broadly.

I may never stop appreciating the particular nostalgic or melancholic appeal of these songs, however, I’d also like to expand my repertoire to Japanese or other Asian songs that are more relevant to the times. My karaoke ambitions are reflected in my desire to expand my academic interests into current day Asian Cultural Studies so that my horizons of knowledge might be broadened and tested. Who knows what thresholds and opportunities these two loves of mine offer for future experiences of becoming mixed?
Bibliography


Asia-Link. The University of Melbourne, [http://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/about_us/who_we_are](http://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/about_us/who_we_are).


Bingham, Frank. 'Australia’s Trade since Federation.' edited by Australian Government. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, June 2016.


Cordle, Daniel. 'Cultures of Terror: Nuclear Criticism During and since the Cold War.' *Literature Compass* 3, no. 6 (2006): 1186-99.


Davis, Darrell William, and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh. 'Vcd as Programmatic Technology: Japanese Television Drama in Hong Kong.' In *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational*


DIAC, Community Relations Section. 'Community Information Summary: China-Born.' edited by Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011.

———. 'Community Information Summary: Japan-Born.' edited by Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011.

———. 'Community Information Summary: Korea-Born.' edited by Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011.


———. 'Invitation to the Voyage: Reading Gail Jones' Five Bells '. JASAL 12, no. 3 (2012): 1-17.


Evers, Clifton. 'The Point': Surfing, Geography and a Sensual Life of Men and Masculinity on the Gold Coast, Australia.' *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no. 8 (2009): 893-908.

'Fact Sheet – Abolition of the ‘White Australia' Policy.' edited by Australian Government. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

Falconer, Delia. '"We Don't Need to Know the Way Home": The Disappearance of the Road in the Mad Max Trilogy.' In *The Road Movie Book*, edited by Steven and Ina Rae Hark Cohan, 249-70. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.


Kendall, Timothy. 'Within China’s Orbit?: China through the Eyes of the Australian Parliament.' Australian Parliamentary Library, 2008.
Khoo, Olivia. 'The Sacrificial Asian in Australian Film.' RealTime, no. 59 (2004): 15.
Klein, Richard. 'Climate Change through the Lens of Nuclear Criticism.' diacritics 41, no. 3 (2013): 82-87.
Leung, Wing Fai. 'Perceptions of the East – Yellow Peril: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear.' The Irish Times, August 16, 2014.
Lucas-Smith, Rachael. 'Bondi Tsunami - Making New Waves.'
Marett, Allan. 'The Bodhisattva of Compassion.' In Oppenheimer Noh Project: The University of Sydney, 2015.
—.—.—. 'Foxes and Karma.' In Oppenheimer Noh Project: The University of Sydney, 2015.
—.—.—. 'Fudô Myô-Ô' In Oppenheimer Noh Project: The University of Sydney, 2015.
Marotta, Vince. 'Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Cross-Cultural Subject.' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, no. 3 (2009): 267-84.


Offord, Baden. 'Androgynous Ethical Intervention and Living History.' *Coolabah* 3 (2009): 87-98.

———. 'Gender, Sexuality and Cosmopolitanism in Multicultural Australia: A Case Study.' *GEMC* 8, no. 3 (2013): 6-21.


OUTinPerth. "‘Bondi Tsunami Rock N’ Roll Guide to Filmmaking’ Book Launch.'


Roberts, Shari. 'Western Meets Eastwood: Genre and Gender on the Road.' In The Road Movie Book, edited by Steven and Ina Rae Hark Cohan, 45-69. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002.


Sun, Ge. 'Globalization and Cultural Difference: Thoughts on the Situation of Trans-Cultural Knowledge.' Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 2, no. 2 (2001): 261-75.


Szeto, Mirana M. 'Sinophone Libidinal Economy in the Age of Neoliberalization and Mainlandization: Masculinities in Hong Kong Sar New Wave Cinema.' In Sinophone Cinemas, edited by Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo, 120-46. Basingstoke: Basingstoke, 2014.


Zakin, Emily. 'The 'Alchemy of Identification': Narcissism, Melancholia, Femininity.' In