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Introduction

Published in 1982 by Dick Roughsey and Percy Trezise, Turramulli the Giant Quinkin portrays an Aboriginal Dreamtime story which originated with the Yalanji people of Cape York.¹ It tells of a family's escape from Turramulli, the most feared of the Quinkins (spirit beings), who having “slept all the cool season in a dark cave under Quinkin Mountain” is awoken by the thunder of the first storms of the wet season “ravenously hungry for meat.” Two siblings, Moonbi and his sister Leealin, are out hunting with their parents Warrenby and Margara when the family chance upon Turramulli beside a lagoon. Hiding inside a log while their parents escape on foot, Moonbi and Leealin eventually emerge only to find Turramulli once again “towering above the trees.” Deciding to climb a nearby cliff, the siblings attempt to escape the Giant Quinkin only to fall as they reach the top. Tumbling through the air, Turramulli descending with them, Moonbi and Leealin are saved by two Timara, good Quinkins, living inside a crevice on the side of the cliff who reach out with their long limbs to catch them. Having fallen to his death, Turramulli is unceremoniously speared by the Yilanji at the base of the cliff as the two children are reunited with their parents.

This illustrated narrative is one of many produced by Roughsey and Trezise which present Aboriginal Dreamtime stories to a broad audience of Australian schoolchildren. Along with The Rainbow Serpent and The Giant Devil Dingo, the tale of Turramulli vividly evokes the spirit of Aboriginal mythology. After reading it many times as a child, I for one remember lightning coming to represent far more than a natural phenomena, something exclusively amenable to Western ways of knowing. At the merest clap of thunder my family living-room became a refuge from Turramulli, a veritable crevice in the wall of the giant cliff which was my home.

Although written with a childhood demographic in mind, Roughsey and Trezise's collaboration nonetheless exists in a far wider array of signification of Aboriginal people, their

¹ Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey, Turramulli the Giant Quinkin (Sydney: Collins, 1982).
mythology and their culture, throughout Australian history. What is particularly interesting about
the case of Turramulli, however, is the way in which such a representation of an Aboriginal story so
ensconced in the language of the Dreamtime could become so amenable to a non-Indigenous
person, notwithstanding the impressionability of a young imagination. The salience of this point
being that insofar as Aboriginal people and their culture have played a formative role in the
conception of non-Indigenous identity, they have largely occupied a space external to European
culture itself. 'Aboriginality', existing as a means by which Europeans have identified themselves,
has by and large come into being as a source for the representation of the 'Other'.

In Marcia Langton's definition, 'Aboriginality' is best understood in terms of “a field of
intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of
representation and interpretation” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.² According
to Langton the traffic of this intercultural discourse is largely one-way in that its “most dense
relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by
their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories
told by former colonists”³ with film, video and television as the prime media by which this
circulation of representation occurs. Drawing directly upon Langton's understanding of the
relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Chris Healy has written that

'Aboriginality' [offers] a useful orientation to colonial culture. It conceptualises the [I]ndigenous and
non-[I]ndigenous as referring to both separate and connected domains. Like two overlapping elements in
a Venn diagram and the colonial encounter itself, Aboriginality figures [I]ndigenous and non-
[I]ndigenous as coming into existence for each other at points of intersection. In this sense, Aboriginality
also presupposes 'Europeanality'.⁴

² Marcia Langton, *Well, I heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television* (Sydney: Australian Film Commission,
³ Loc.cit
While clearly drawing upon the broad conceptual underpinnings of post-colonial discourse, essentially embodying Franz Fanon's remark that “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World”\(^5\) and Edward Said's *Orientalism*, this understanding of Aboriginality provides a specific means of analysing the way in which both non-Indigenous identity and Indigenous identity have simultaneously come into being by way of a dynamic, though heavily weighted, cultural discourse throughout Australian history.\(^6\) What is more, it is a clear expression of the way in which the Australian national imaginary has tended towards an understanding of non-Indigenous identity couched in terms that exclude Aboriginal people and their culture as a source of the 'Other'.

Recent key studies of Australian nationalism in the twentieth century have focussed on the difficulty that Australia has had in cementing a national identity in the absence of Britishness as a key cultural and civic signifier, particularly since the 1960s. As James Curran and Stuart Ward remark in view of Australia's loosening ties with Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century, “with a dwindling material basis for imperial sentiment, Australians were confronted with the task of remaking their nation in the wake of empire.”\(^7\) Faced with this apparent lack of any immediate means of affirming a sense of what it meant to be Australian, the 'new nationalism' emerged as the principle trope through which a distinctive Australian identity could be defined. According to Curran and Ward, however, rather than representing an “authentically' Australian nationalism”, the 'new nationalism' is best understood in terms of “a response to the relatively sudden collapse of

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6 As Said wrote in 1978, “Orientalism is never far from...the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans against all “those” non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures.” In reiterating Said's idea with specific reference to the dynamic between Europeans and Aboriginal people, Bain Attwood has argued that by “creating such binary oppositions, the heterogeneity and difference within the former category is displaced and so the unitary self or group is manufactured. In this process there is clearly an interdependence of the two categories, that is, they only make sense in the context of each other. One should also note that this interdependence is usually hierarchical, with one category prior, visible, and superordinate, the other secondary, often invisible and subordinate. Hence, Europeans have forged a collective identity through a discourse which sets them apart from non-Europeans, especially the Aborigines.” Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 7; Bain Attwood, ‘Introduction’, in Bain Attwood and John Arnold eds., *Power, knowledge and Aborigines* (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press, 1992), p. iii.
Britishness as a credible totem of civic and sentimental allegiance in Australia. Moreover, neither did this response occur with any great coherency, nor has it been successful in fulfilling a central role in the construction of Australian national identity in the absence of Britishness.

Drawing upon the work of Anthony Smith, Russel McGregor similarly emphasises Australia's British ethnic heritage as providing the “myths, memories and symbols that unify the nation and embed it in deep historical time.” Rather than standing in opposition to the emergence of Australian nationalism British ethno-cultural institutions were in fact central to it; legally and politically speaking Britishness provided the basis of Australian society post-federation. It is thus understandable that any crisis in the way Australians conceive of their national identity should amount from the amelioration of its connection to Britain. Curran and Ward are in this sense convincing in their explanation of the emergence of 'new nationalism' within the specific context of the decreasing relevance of couching Australian national identity in terms of the nation’s British heritage since the 1960s, most notably within “the visual realm of icons and imagery”.

What this summation of the problems facing the delineation of Australian national identity tends to elide, however, is an analysis of how non-Indigenous Australians have gone about establishing a connection to the Australian landscape in terms of a national homeland. Implicit in Smith's thesis on the ethnic basis of nationalism set within a pre-modern past is the imperative of a people being able to lay claim to an historic homeland. “A nation”, Smith writes, “needs before all else a national territory or homeland” which must at once represent an historic home. As Anthony Moran carefully points out, while a British ethnic homeland operates as such in the case of Australian nationalism, “the nation as an abstract community of belonging has mythic zones of

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8 Ibid, pp. 6 – 7.
9 Ibid, p. 7
11 Ibid, pp. 502 - 503
12 Curran and Ward, The Unknown Nation, p. 5
origin within the Australian continent” such as the 'outback'. But this mythic representation must at once vie with an earlier Aboriginal historical association with the Australian landscape. With this point in mind Moran remarks that “Aboriginal Australia fits the bill of the 'national' Australian ethnic group or nation far more convincingly, in Anthony Smith's terms, than does the settler nation”.

In speaking to this apparent capacity of Aboriginality to fulfil the needs of Australian national identity, this thesis will present evidence from the first half of the twentieth century affirming white Australia's interest in appropriating certain aspects of Aboriginal culture. In the late 1930s through the 1940s, for the Jindyworobak literary movement the appeal of Aboriginal culture, and, in particular, representations of the Dreamtime, existed as the central means of elevating Australian identity beyond a simple derivation of its British cultural roots. Along with other cultural figures from the 1920s to the 1940s, the Jindyworobaks will be the primary focus of chapter one of this thesis. While not wholly convinced of the need to jettison Australia's British roots entirely, under the leadership of Rex Ingamells the Jindyworobaks actively sought to utilise the imaginative capacity of the Dreamtime in their poetry to connect with the Australian landscape to allow a genuine Australian identity to emerge. An Aboriginal word meaning “to join”, Jindyworobak became a term which proposed to amalgamate British and Aboriginal culture thus cementing a stronger and more legitimate attachment to place for non-Indigenous Australians. At the same time, the Jindyworobak's attraction to Aboriginal culture was premised on the idea that it provided a foil for the ills of modernity becoming increasingly apparent as a result of the cataclysmic first half of the twentieth century.

Particularly from the 1930s, Australian anthropological discourse was central to this intellectual dynamic which found Aboriginal culture being represented in terms of the value it held.

15 Ibid, p. 1028
for Australian culture more broadly. This shift in anthropological discourse will figure as the main point of investigation in chapter two of this thesis with specific reference to the works of T.G.H Strehlow, A.P. Elkin and Ronald and Catherine Berndt. As was the case with the Jindyworobaks, for these key anthropological figures the sudden appeal of Aboriginality lay with its potential to counteract the ills of modernity, which were more than apparent to the 1930s and the post-war period, as much as it seemed to provide deeper roots for Australian national identity. In terms of either their academic treatises or more public rhetoric, and in some cases both, each of these figures contributed to an appraisal of Aboriginal culture which emphasised its superiority relative to the orientation of modern Australian society more broadly, particularly in terms of social cohesion and spiritual connectedness to the land.

In an analysis of both the work of the Jindyworobaks and anthropologists such as Strehlow, chapter three will concentrate on the broader social frame in which this discussion of Aboriginality took place. The growing realisation that the social Darwinist dogma of Aboriginal extinction was a fiction as the half-way point of the twentieth century approached is a key moment in the representation of Aboriginality, particularly in terms of the Australian government's shift from a policy of 'protection' to one of 'assimilation'. In the case of Elkin this is a particularly important point to make given his role in challenging the idea that, in dealing with Aboriginal subjects, Australian anthropologists were dealing with a people inevitably facing extinction. In any event, the evolution of social policy towards Aboriginal people in line with the amelioration of the dying race myth is not the central focus of this thesis. Rather, the point will be made that insofar as Aboriginality was evoked in the frame of the Australian national imaginary in the lead up to the half-way point of the twentieth century, this was a form of inclusion that functioned to exclude Aboriginal people themselves which did little to ameliorate their status as the 'Other'.

The argument of this thesis is therefore essentially threefold. In view of recent discussions of Australian nationalism in the twentieth century, it will be argued that there is a paucity in
understanding of the tensions apparent to the negotiation of Australian national identity emerging from the difficulty of establishing a connection to place on the part of non-Indigenous Australians. Where Australia's struggle to assert a national identity in the wake of empire is real, so is the negotiation of non-Indigenous identity in view of the past and present occupation of the Australian continent by Indigenous people. In this frame of argument, it will demonstrated that where the inclusion of Aboriginal people and their culture within the frame of Australian national identity has actually occurred, it has more than anything been a matter of the non-Indigenous quest for a deeper connection to place in conjunction with a negative reaction to the ills of modernity. Coming to terms with this aspect of the dialectic between Aboriginality and Europeanality directly informs the third main point of this thesis. In the context of the period which found Aboriginal culture being represented as a key element of Australian national identity, it will be argued that this was a phenomenon largely premised on the ongoing exclusion of Aboriginal people. The pervasiveness of the dying race myth at a point in Australian history which found the 'Western gaze' beginning to perceive the inherent value of Aboriginal culture precluded the custodians of that culture from actually participating in any new conception of what it might mean to be Australian. Rather than challenge the representation of Aboriginal people as the 'Other' within the Australian national imaginary, the European fascination with Aboriginality which began in the 1930s did little to halt the push of the colonial juggernaut.
Chapter One

In Search of a “Place-Idea”

“What is a national culture? Is it not the expression, in thought-form or art-form, of the spirit of a Race and of a Place?”

P.R. Stephensen, The Foundations of Culture in Australia, 1936.16

The sense of urgency in the Jindyworobak movement's attempt to consolidate an Australian national culture and connectedness to place from the late 1930s was elsewhere no more apparent than in P.R. Stephensen's 1936 essay The Foundations of Culture in Australia. Indeed, according to Brian Elliott, Rex Ingamells received his “first really powerful stimulus” to form the Jindyworobaks from reading the first instalment of Stephensen's essay as it appeared in The Australian Mercury in 1935.17 By the same token, Ingamells was quick to affirm the parallels between the Jindyworobaks and the Australia First movement established by Stephensen in 1941.18 To the extent that Stephensen saw the distinctiveness of a nation's culture emerging out of its ability to reflect upon and harness “the Spirit of a Place”, particularly through literature and historical perspective, he portrayed Australian nationhood in a state of immaturity.19 Australia lacked an indigenously conceived “place-idea” and drew too narrowly upon its British roots.20 It was not that Australia should entirely disregard these roots, but rather treat it them as “fertilizer” to be used in the cultivation of an “indigenous” sense of being.21 In any event, with what seems a strong degree of resonance with the contemporary discussion of Australian nationalism, Stephensen argued that “[u]ntil we have a culture, a quiet strength of intellectual achievement, we have nothing except our soldiers to be proud of.”22

18 Rex Ingamells, 'Australianism', Meanjin Papers 1 issue 6 (1941), p. 3
19 Stephensen, The Foundation of Culture in Australia, p. 15
20 Ibid, p. 19
21 Ibid, p. 35
In all of this Stephensen was clear as to the rightful place of Aboriginal culture. If Australian culture were to emerge “indigenously”, this would begin “not with the Aborigines, who have been suppressed and exterminated” but with the nineteenth century arrival of European culture to Australian shores. Its superfluity aside, Aboriginal culture did, however, provide a clear point of reference as to how white Australia could arrive at a point of national self realisation. In a more appreciative, though no less condescending tone, Stephensen made the following observation:

The Aborigines, our admirable predecessors in sovereignty over the territory of Australian Felix, had their Bora ceremonies, their Initiation Corroborees; during which the seniors took the young men away into a sacred place, knocked out with a sacred stone a tooth from each candidate for knowledge (in order to test the youths' resistance to hardship and pain), and then told them, with awe-inspiring circumstance, the holy secrets of the tribe. We white Australians should consider the advisability of doing something of the same kind...Just as the sacred traditions and ceremonies of an Aboriginal tribe provide that tribe with a collective soul and a continuity, so written history and literature provide a civilised nation with a national soul and coherence.

This marginal importance aside, Stephensen could only add that it was doubtful that Australia's interest in anything pertaining to a pre-colonial time and place could be anything but academic.

Two salient points emerge out of Stephensen's landmark essay in terms of its influence upon Ingamells and the establishment of the Jindyworobaks. Firstly, Stephensen is clear on Australian literature's deficit in terms of its capacity to evoke an attachment to place from which an “indigenous” national culture and sense of identity could emerge. For Stephensen, in true Hegelian fashion, the Australian people's attainment of Geist – of coming to realise their own particularity by way of their universality – was there to be seized through the common ground of the Australian environment. With literature as the prime vehicle by which this dialectical moment could be realised, white Australians had to date fallen short of the mark. Notwithstanding Henry Lawson's

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23 Ibid, p. 12
24 Ibid, pp. 98 – 99 [italics in original]
25 Ibid, p. 100
potential to have produced “great Australian novels”, his talent could only ever go unrealised in the form of short stories and sketches under the editorship of J.F. Archibald at the *Bulletin*.\(^{26}\) In this sense Australia's literary ineptitude was a commercial matter as much as it was a matter of talent. As Stephensen put it so succinctly, “[i]n no other country in the civilised world is literary genius so badly treated, so humiliated and crushed and despised and ignored, as in Australia.”\(^{27}\)

Secondly, Aboriginal culture is ironically enough precluded from contributing to the emergence of an “indigenous” Australian national culture in the terms set by Stephensen outside of an historical precedent that human beings are indeed able to establish a meaningful connection to the Australian landscape. Conversely, as this chapter will now go on to demonstrate, Aboriginal culture and specifically the anthropological concept of Alcheringa, or the Dreamtime, nonetheless came to embody the central trope through which the Jindyworobaks developed their literary expression, albeit in a fashion that excluded actual Aboriginal people. As J.J. Healy has written of the group's leader, “Ingamells walked into the hothouse of nationalistic assumption that Stephensen had improvised and fell into the same tendency to use the Aborigine.”\(^{28}\) In any event, with the emergence of this group of nationalist poets the stage seemed set for Australian culture to at long last fill the void at its heart; an Australian “Spirit of the Place” had a chance of being realised by the continent's white inhabitants.

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Not long after Ingamells established what was essentially a Jindyworobak manifesto in the publication of the pamphlet *Conditional Culture* in 1938, Stephensen could still be found lamenting the fact that white Australia had not yet cured its spiritual malaise. In what amounts to an overall expression of petulance, Stephensen contributed an article to the journal *Meanjin Papers* in 1941 outlining the goal of delineating “Queensland culture”. While ostensibly directed towards this state-

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\(^{26}\) Ibid, p. 67  
\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 86  
based goal, Stephensen used the article as an opportunity to articulate much the same argument for the reorientation of Australian nationalism as he had in 1936. A distinctive Australian nationhood was a matter of assuming a sense of being that eschewed any “trans-national, delocalised” global sentiment in addition to the individual particularities of other nations, especially those nations with the same ethnic roots:

Australia is of no importance unless Australians make it important, by developing here a distinctively-Australian way of life, based on distinctively Australian customs, laws, art, architecture, speech, music, legend, lore, tradition, flora, fauna, fashions, manners – in a word, by developing here a distinctively-Australian culture. The more different we are from other people's, the more shall we become respected, and self-respecting. To excel in imitativeness, could never be a constructive ideal for an individual, or a community. Unless we Australians can become creative enough to construct a new and distinctive way of life here, it would be better for all of us to migrate back to Europe or to North America, the sources of our inspiration, leaving Australia to be occupied by some other people, who will love it for its own sake.29

This complaint likewise arose from a deficient cultural engagement of the Australian environment on the part of white Australians, an “environmental maladjustment” most amenable to a poetic cure. “If I am right in this diagnosis of the Australian community as suffering from environmental maladjustment,” wrote Stephensen, “then the onus on Australian poets is to correct that dis-ease by leading the Australian community towards a correct environmental maladjustment.”30 The fact that Queensland, let alone Australia, had yet to so orient itself culturally was enough to leave Stephensen in complete disbelief.31

Whether Stephensen's incredulity in this particular case is informed by the early years of the Jindyworobak movement is not apparent. Nor can it be said that Ingamells had not already attempted to concoct the poetic cure for the “environmental maladjustment” inflicting Australian

29 P.R. Stephensen, 'Queensland Culture', *Meanjin Papers* vol. 1, no. 6 (Summer: 1941), p. 7. [bold in original]
30 Loc.cit.
31 Ibid, p. 8
culture. By explaining the Aboriginal meaning of Jindyworobak in *Conditional culture*, “to annex, to join”, Ingamells proposed “to coin it for a particular use”. This use spoke directly to the crisis in Australian national being so clearly delineated by Stephensen:

The Jindyworobaks...are the individuals who are endeavouring to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it, that is, to bring it into proper contact with its material. They are the few who seriously realise that an Australian culture depends on the fulfilment and sublimation of certain definite conditions, namely:

1. A clear recognition of environmental values.
2. The debunking of much nonsense
3. An understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primaeval, colonial and modern.

The most important of these is the first. Pseudo Europeanism clogs the minds of most Australians, preventing a free appreciation of nature. Their speech and thought idioms are European; they have little direct thought-contact with nature. Although emotionally and spiritually they should be, and, I believe, are more attuned to the distinction bush, hill and coastal places they visit then to the European parts and gardens around the cities, their thought-idioms belongs to the latter not the former. Give them a suitable thought-idiom for the former and they will be grateful. Their more important emotional and spiritual potentialities will be given the the conditions of growth. The inhibited individuality of the race will be released. Australian culture will exist.\(^{32}\)

Where Ingamells and Stephensen found themselves very much on the same page regarding this existential crisis facing Australian culture, the respective roles they offered Aboriginal culture in ameliorating this mutual concern diverged. A functional example of the way in which people could glean meaning from the Australian environment from Stephensen's point of view, in Ingamell's case Aboriginal culture provided both the content and structure from which an Australian national identity could emerge. However, where Ingamells extolled the virtue of Aboriginal culture in this regard, he did so in terms very much couched in the then widely held belief that Aboriginal

people were inescapably facing extinction. As the historian W.K. Hancock remarked in 1930, while Aboriginal people had “fitted themselves well to the soil” there social framework was “pathetically helpless when assailed by the acquisitive society of Europe. The advance of British civilisation made inevitable the 'natural progress of the [A]boriginal race towards extinction'”. Insofar as Aboriginal Australians remained extant from Ingamells' particular point of view, they were “a degenerate, puppet people, mere parodies of what the race once was.” In a more reflective, though no less deprecating tone, a pamphlet expounding the nationalist agenda of the Jindyworobaks found club member Kenneth Gifford remarking that

[...]he aborigine was not always the ...wreck of humanity that the white man has made him. His was a race that proudly lived and proudly fought to retain its independence against the unheeding land-grabbing dominance of the white conquerers. His resistance was futile, fraught with the bewilderment at the new material culture thrust before him; but it was a resistance worthy of his proud traditions.

As will be later demonstrated in the case of T.G.H Strehlow, for the Jindyworobaks the value of Aboriginal culture in terms of its facilitation of an “indigenous” Australian culture was caught within a representation of a timeless people, untouched by modernity, who held the key to “the Spirit of the Place”.

Drawing upon what was initially represented by Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen in their 1890s study of the Aranda people of Central Australia, nowhere was this “Spirit of Place” more manifest than within Alcheringha, or the Dreamtime. Indeed, it was essentially through this ethnographic lens that Ingamells saw the value of Aboriginal culture as a means of engendering a true sense of Australian identity. “This synthesising of sporadic observation and ideational research”, wrote Ingamells in Conditional Culture, “is, unfortunately, now that the best of the

33 W.K. Hancock, Australia (Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co., 1945[1930], p. 29.
34 Ingamells, 'Australianism', p. 3.
36 In their ethnographic study of the 'Arunta' tribe of central Australia, Spencer and Gillen coined Alcheringha to describe the “far distant past which the earliest traditions of the tribe deal.” Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, The Native Tribes of Central Australia (London: Macmillan and Co., 1938[1899]), p. 73.
culture is dead, the only way of attempting appreciation of it.”\textsuperscript{37} And, most importantly, it was the reconstitution of this spirit of Aboriginal culture synthesised in anthropological discourse through “our own experiences, in cultural expression” that would allow “the honest development of Australian culture.”\textsuperscript{38}

In this sense Ingamells offered what appeared to be a genuine moment of historical reflexivity in view of Australia's colonial past. However, his adherence to the belief that 'full-blood' Aboriginal people and their tribal traditions were vanishing from the face of the Earth prevented him from going any way in paying restitution to the people whose culture he hoped from which Australian nationhood would flower; this notwithstanding any concern he held for the future of 'half-cast' Aboriginal people living in the Australian community. Historical accountability in view of Australia's colonial legacy was thus a matter of realising the value of the culture it had once disparaged, not its people, in what was in essence a continuation of imperialism:

> When I see wommeras, spears, bullroarers, boomerangs, dilly-bags, message sticks, tjuringas and wax figures in the aboriginal sections of our museums, and when I read scientific treatises and pioneer reminiscences dealing with aboriginal occultation, funeral rites, initiation ceremonies and so on; I am strongly conscious, often unhappily so, of much of our colonial tradition. As a people it is our duty to be familiar with these things. In them must spread the roots of our culture. Our culture must make artistic realisations of these things and the spirit permeating and engendered by them acceptable to the world.\textsuperscript{39}

So how did this dialectic between European cultural and the presumed 'remnants' of Central Australian Aboriginal culture become manifest in Jindyworobak poetry? And other than an urge to assert a more 'authentic' sense of what it meant to be Australian, what motivated this act of appropriation? In a penetrating analysis of the motivation behind the establishment of the Jindyworobaks which appeared in Meanjin in 1978, Humphrey McQueen offers insight to both of

\textsuperscript{37} Ingamells, \textit{Conditional Culture}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{38} Loc.cit
\textsuperscript{39} Loc.cit
these questions. According to McQueen, Ingamells owed his initial belief in the spiritual value of Aboriginal culture from his encounter with Strehlow on a trip to central Australia in the early 1930s through which he became aware of “the legends of the Aranda and the meaning of Alchera, the dreamtime.” It was along with this experience, his exposure to Stephensen's writings, in addition to his reading of James Devaney's *The Vanished Tribe* (from which he in fact lifted the term *Jindyworobak*), that led Ingamells to establish the Jindyworobak movement.

In McQueen's analysis, it was this combination of linguistic appropriation and ethnographic revelation that was at the heart of both what propelled Ingamells' nationalist project and what ultimately brought it to ground. Where the Jindyworobaks may have been premised on the use of Aboriginal words, in so rarely using them in his poetry Ingamells relegated them outside of the actual aim he envisaged for the movement. As Russel McGregor has argued, “[t]he Jindyworobak aim was to incorporate Aboriginality into Australian nationalism, not the Aboriginal people into the Australian nation.” Most tellingly, this superficial appropriation of Aboriginality spoke directly to the forces which truly shaped the Jindyworobak agenda. While language occupied a central space in the Jindyworobak's literary concern, according to McQueen, it “was the product of, and never the motive force behind, Ingamells' search for environmental values. This search was determined by the social forces threatening Australia from within and without, forces which gave a special urgency to his quest for environmental values.” It was namely “the triple abyss of wars, economic collapse and fascism versus Bolshevism” facing European civilisation, along with the growing need to articulate a distinct national culture in 1930s Australia, that colluded with Ingamells' understanding of an Aboriginal culture loaded with environmental sentiment, left with no custodianship but that of anthropology, which went to conceptualise the romanticism of Jindyworobak poetry.

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40 Humphrey McQueen, "Rex Ingamells and the Quest for Environmental values, *Meanjin* 37 no.1 (April 1978), p. 31.
41 Ibid, pp. 31 – 32.
43 Ibid, p. 34.
44 Ibid, p. 34 – 38.
This view of the Jindyworobak movement in terms of a vehicle for the critique of modernity is also conveyed by J.J. Healy when he argues that Ingamells' motivation in forming the group “was related to a rejection of a European culture which was falling apart during [the 1930s] and which seemed to Ingamells to be still dominating important sections of Australian cultural life.” In much the same language, McGregor has placed the Jindyworobaks in the frame of a global “intellectual shift” after the First World War characterised by an overall “disenchantment with the civilisation that had inflicted the horrors of mechanised warfare” along with a desire to escape the “materialism, alienation and anomie” that had come to embody the experience of modernity. In this intellectual milieu, “primitivity came to be evaluated positively for its spirituality, sociality and environmental sensitivity.”

In Ingamells' particular case, the cultural decadence of the West was most apparent in view of the overall complacency which characterised Australian society's indifference towards delineating an identity away from its European cultural roots; an identity which was both authentic in terms of how it came into being as a consciousness of the Australian environment while at once reactionary to the corruption and greed of capitalist society. Both J.J. Healy and McQueen cite Ingamells' poem 'The Gangrened People' as embodying this sentiment with its invective towards a hollow society 'swollen with prefabricated virtue', a sentiment equally expressed in the poem 'Unknown Land':

We who are called Australians have no country;
no country holds us native heart and soul:
our boast that Federation made a nation;
our boast that Anzac proved it with our blood
are tragic fictions. Our standards are fictitious:

45 Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, p. 172
46 McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p. 20
47 Loc.cit
48 Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, p. 173; McQueen, 'Rex Ingamells and the Quest for Environmental values', p. 37
we dwell in the limbo of a harsh deception,
a criminal betrayal, guaranteeing
the selfish satisfaction of the cunning,
exploiting is for money, money, money,
spreading the itch to purchase every day,
filling our hearts with fatal loyalties
to notions not our own, not suited to us. 49

In much the same tone, in an article published in *Meanjin Papers* in 1942 titled 'Australian Outlook' Ingamells consigns Australia's fate in the frame of European culture's fall, with more than a slight awareness of the designs of war propaganda. While Australia had come to most emphatically embody what was most wrong with modernity, the war itself offered a moment of redress and underlined “the necessity for an Australian outlook” developed by way of better coming to know our “most ancient block of ground”:

At present it is as though the very heart of a strange peace and beauty were reached but not seen, not known, unrealised because the creatures who have, by dint of overweening egotism, encroached upon it still cling to the cumbersome trappings and impediments of evacuated and crumbling citadels of craziness and apathy: the propaganda and lying advertisement that filled the whitened halls of Commerce and Humbug are blazed forth in the very fastness of Hope and Wonder. We, the Australian people, are the hollowest of shams, the most pitiful pretentiousness that the tragic spark of life has contrived; the most ashen gutter the brief candle of spiritual existence has given to the dreams of civilisation. 50

The idea that Aboriginality offered Australian culture salvation from its 'sham' existence, “a corrective belief for the indifference of white Australia” in J.J. Healy's words, was by no means well met within existing Australian literary circles. According to Geoffrey Serle, “the movement was greeted with immense derision, almost entirely because of its Aboriginal emphasis.” 51 As McQueen

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50 Rex Ingamells, 'Australian Outlook', *Meanjin Papers* 1 no. 8 (March 1942), pp. 11 – 12.
similarly remarks:

Claims that Aboriginals were intelligent still met with public disbelief and editorial wonder...Ingamells' ideas were scorned partly because of the racial prejudices held by literary Australians: the very notion that British civilisation had to learn form the dying race was proof that Ingamells could not be taken seriously.52

Outside of the social reticence which met Ingamell's attempt to elevate Aboriginal culture to a position equal, if not up and above, Australia's European heritage, this thesis is not directly concerned with the success achieved by the Jindyworobak movement in terms of its nationalist aim. The central point of concern is rather more the fact that Aboriginality could at such a moment in Australian history be evaluated for its potential to contribute to the formation of a national culture, however narrowly it is represented in terms of a romanticised vision of Central Australian Aboriginal culture. In this sense, it is important to observe literary and artistic attempts to appropriate Aboriginal culture that preceded those of Ingamells and the Jindyworobaks. As Serle writes, placing Aboriginality in the context of “the problems of depicting Australian landscape and society” was not only taken up by the Jindyworobaks but central to the earlier work of writers such as Bernard O'Dowd, Eleanor Dark, and Katherine Prichard.53 Frank Bongiorno has more directly pointed to O'Dowd as an “ancestor” of the Jindyworobaks insofar as he sought to utilise Aboriginal culture in “the construction of a national culture”.54 Similarly, Kosmos Tsokhas has demonstrated how Aboriginality was central to Mary Gilmore's attempt to delineate an Australian national identity through poetry.55 In much the same fashion as the Jindyworobaks, according to Tsokhas, the incorporation of Aboriginal culture within Gilmore's work was premised on the belief that it was quickly disappearing along with Aboriginal people.56

52 McQueen, 'Rex Ingamells and the Quest for Environmental Values', p. 31
53 Serle, From the Deserts the Prophets Come, p. 133.
Where the task of helping to “build a new national culture and literature, to give Australia a cultural expression, to reveal Australia to [Australians]” may have seemed particularly apparent to the 1930s, the Jindyworobaks were thus part of a deeper historical moment in the negotiation of Australian identity, a literary process which directly involved Aboriginality. With reference to Vance Palmer, Xavier Herbert, Judith Wright and Patrick White, in addition to the Jindyworobaks and Prichard, John Docker has more broadly suggested that a major theme of historicist thought in Australia has been to work out how, in this new continent, the desired unity between the evolving culture and the natural environment can be developed...In Australia the answer frequently has been to look to Aboriginal society as an example of Gemeinschaft, a community which has successfully adopted to Australian nature, an organic adaptation revealed in its life of myth and legend.57

Nor has this been exclusively a literary preoccupation. As Stephensen remarked in *Culture in Australia* “the birth of a distinctively Australian culture has been heralded more precisely by our own great landscape painters then by our writers.”58 Whether or not she falls into the same category as Arthur Streeton or Conrad Martens, one of the more overt attempts to generate a distinctly Australian art was undertaken by Margaret Preston through her promotion of Aboriginal motifs in the 1920s. As Preston wrote in *Art in Australia* in 1925:

I have gone to the art of a people who had never seen or known anything different from themselves, and were accustomed to the same symbols to express themselves. These are the Australian aboriginals, and it is only from them the art of such people in any land can spring. Later come the individual or individuals who with conscious knowledge (education) use the symbols that are their heritage, and thus a great national art is founded.59

Preston was also at pains to dispel any notion that this exploration of Aboriginal art should be a demeaning exercise or a simple expression of sympathy; rather Australians would be better off

58 Stephensen, *Culture in Australia*, p. 73.
59 Margaret Preston, 'The Indigenous Art of Australia', *Art in Australia* no. 11 (1925). [no pg. numbers]
suspending any such reservations in incorporating the “simplest” and yet “most elaborate” Aboriginal motifs in a domestic setting so as to cultivate the familiarity from which an authentic Australian art could emerge.60 Where Preston in this sense exists as a predecessor to the Jindyworobaks insofar as she also offered Aboriginality as the progenitor of a distinct Australian national identity, in a purely artistic frame her innovativeness draws from the fact that she added a new level to the appreciation of Aboriginal art. As McGregor writes, “[Preston] shifted focus from the anthropological significance and traditional meanings of Aboriginal artworks to their aesthetic qualities” thus transubstantiating their existence from “artefacts” to “art”.61

As this chapter has shown with respect to Australian artists such as Preston, and, in particular the Jindyworobaks, between the two world wars there was a markedly more sympathetic attitude towards Aboriginal culture on the part of white Australia. However, rather than being an attempt to include Aboriginal people within the frame of the Australian nation, this was a phenomenon emerging out of a white Australian desire to cement a more secure national identity. What is more, the sudden appeal of an apparently disembodied Aboriginal culture drew directly from Australian society’s disillusionment with modernity in the inter-war years, a phenomenon inflicting the West more broadly. Not only could Aboriginality be appreciated on the basis of its representation as the truest possible expression of Australian indigeneity, but also on the count that it was seen as a desirable alternative to a European culture falling apart at the seams.

As will be the focus of chapter two, to the extent that anthropology was implicit in how Aboriginal people and their culture could be understood in the frame of this discursive departure, certain anthropologists themselves engaged in rhetoric which offered Aboriginality as both a platform for Australian nationhood and a critique of modernity. While such rhetoric was in this sense continuous with the nationalist platform proposed by the Jindyworobaks, as the 1940s gave to

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60 Loc.cit
61 McGregor, Indifferent Inclusion, p. 27. Incidentally, McGregor also notes that Preston would later go on to design covers for some of the Jindyworobak anthologies.
the 1950s it also draw its critique from the Second World War and its aftermath. At all events, the exclusion of Aboriginal people within this discourse was equally assured owing to the ongoing, albeit increasingly contested, belief that Aboriginal people were swiftly becoming less capable as bearers of their own culture as they inevitably approached extinction.
Chapter 2

A 'Spenglerish Monument'

Change of food, environment, outlook, the burying of the old traditions and customs, inhibitions and the breakdown of the laws all conspired to bring degeneration, first to the individual and then to the race. Can we wonder that they faded so swiftly?


In the same year that Rex Ingamells began to underline the latent syncretic potential of Aboriginal culture in terms of a source of inspiration for a distinctive Australian national identity, not even this limited posterity was offered Aboriginal people by Daisy Bates in her book *The Passing of the Aborigines*. While Ingamells and the Jindyworobaks largely understood the degenerative nature of Aboriginal society in terms of its incapacity to maintain spiritual and cultural integrity in the face of the encroachment of modernity, thus allowing Aboriginality to continue in the degenerate form of the 'half-caste', Bates denied Aboriginal people even this liminal state of corporeality. “There is no hope”, argued Bates, “of protecting the Stone Age from the twentieth century.”63 Civilisation “was a cloak that [Aboriginal people] donned easily [but] they could not wear it and live.”64

In view of the forty-odd years Bates had spent among various groups of Aboriginal people ranging throughout Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, it seemed that she could reflect upon but two genuine points of consolation regarding her work to ease the decline of her Indigenous charges. She could “rejoice” in the fact “that no “half-castes” were begotten in any of [her] camps”65. Moreover, to the extent that she had so successfully prevented the scourge of miscegenation, thus sparing Aboriginal people from the worst aspects of modernity inherent to “low

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63 Ibid, p. 68
64 Ibid, p. 67.
whites”, Bates could also take heart from the prospect of “the appointment of a King's High Commissioner” who would ease Aboriginal people in their “inevitable passing”.

It is in a sense ironic that such an incongruence between Aboriginal people and modernity could be detected on one count, as in Bate's observations, while on another count Aboriginal people's culture could be represented as both a palliative for the worst aspects of the modern world and a basis for Australian nationalism, as in the case of the Jindyworobaks. In making this point it is worth reiterating that Ingamells saw no future for Aboriginal people within the Australian nation, outside of the appropriation of certain aspects of their culture. He and other Jindyworobaks were also clear as to the wretched and hopeless situation of 'half-caste' Aboriginal people, their exposure to modernity engendering the worst aspects of both sides of the frontier. By the same token, it is important to point out that while Bates was in no doubt as to the eventual extinction of Aboriginal people, she was not entirely dismissive of Aboriginal culture itself. As Andrew Markus has written,

Bates was not explicitly repelled by Aboriginal customs...but her choice of material, her emphasise, distortions and inaccuracies – the products of her imagination – were calculated to revolt her Australian readers nonetheless, to leave no room for doubt that here was a people rightly destined for extinction in the near future.

“Products of her imagination” as they may have been, it is important to consider the anthropological dogma pertaining to the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century which encompassed Bates' experience with Aboriginal people. Ostensibly a journalist, in her study of Aboriginal people Bates was nevertheless beholden to opinions which presided within the discipline of anthropology. Particularly owing to the work of Spencer and Gillen on the Central Australian Aboriginal tribes, as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth representations of

67 Andrew Markus, Governing Savages (Sydney: Allen and Unwin,1990), p. 43.
68 While Bates was familiar with contemporary Australian anthropology and indeed hoped for recognition within the discipline, her contribution to the discourse on Aboriginal people's was invariably received with disdain. That her work could not be taken seriously in a academic sense was made increasingly apparent by her 'obsession' with the practice of infanticide and cannibalism among Aboriginal people, evidence for which was largely anecdotal. See Bob Reece, Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2007), pp. 8, 87.
Aboriginal people were set around tropes of the 'stone-age' and the 'savage', with a strong emphasis on physiological characteristics and frequent reference to the apparent incongruence between Aboriginal culture and that brought to Australia by Europeans. Reflecting ruefully upon this sentiment in his 1968 Boyer lectures, W.E.H. Stanner could only lament the fact that “[t]his atrocious muddle appeared to give scientific warrant for the judgement of Australian practical experience that nothing could be done for the Aborigines but to immure them in protective isolation within inviolable reserves.” In line with this prerogative to 'smooth the dying pillow', as Markus explains, “scientists working within the social Darwinist framework saw little reason to challenge assumptions of Aboriginal inferiority and inability to survive contact with European civilisation.” In returning to the point made in chapter one that the Jindyworobaks also formed their understanding of Aboriginal people and their culture by way of anthropological discourse, it is perhaps unsurprising that they also saw little hope of ensuring their survival.

This is not to say that belief in the extinction of Aboriginal people went unchallenged. From the 1930s certain anthropologists, most notably A.P. Elkin, began to object to the certainty attached to Aboriginal inferiority and sought to place an obligation upon white Australians to assist Aboriginal people in their transition from their 'traditional' way of life to modernity. Rather than address the matter of how to best ease Aboriginal people in their passing, Elkin saw the main problem regarding their situation in far more ambitious terms. As he reflected in 1938, “will the Aborigines, with our help, take their place in our modern way of life? It is so different from their traditional and tribal life, that they find the change very hard to make. But we have no grounds for saying that they cannot, and will not do so.”

69 In terms that align directly with the fatalistic resignation later expressed by Bates, Baldwin and Spencer remarked in 1899 that the “natural result” of the swift circulation of items acquired from European was that “no sooner do the natives come into contact with white men, than pthisis and other diseases soon make their appearance, and, after a comparatively short time, all that can be done is to gather the few remnants of the tribe into some mission station where the path to final extinction may be made as pleasant as possible.” Spencer and Gillen, The Native Tribes of Central Australia, pp. 17 – 18, 37 – 46
71 Markus, Governing Savages, p. 144
72 A.P. Elkin, The Australian Aborigines, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1938), p. 14

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In a sentiment that bore some similarity with the eventual adoption of ‘assimilation' policy on the part of the Australian government, at roughly the same point in time which saw the emergence of the Jindyworobaks, anthropology had thus taken a turn which allowed that Aboriginal people would, and, indeed, should be included within Australian society. Be this as it may, Aboriginal culture in its actuality was given no hope of enduring the twilight it had entered with the coming of modernity. As Jeremy Beckett has remarked,

while Australia was told that Aborigines were not going to die out, it was also given to understand that Aboriginality was doomed. Timeless and unchanging, Aboriginal culture was incapable of co-existence with the modern world...What could be retrieved [from it] at such a late stage was to be preserved for 'science' and incorporated in the national heritage’.

As the rest of this chapter will explain, the representation of Aboriginal culture by certain anthropologists from the 1930s was not only premised on the idea of preservation, but also, in much the same manner as how it was understood by the Jindyworobaks, promoted as a key to unravelling the true nature of Australian national identity while at once being offered as a means of easing disenchantment with the modern world.

Following in line with Elkin, their academic mentor, in 1952 Ronald and Catherine Berndt highlighted the imperative of securing Aboriginal people a place within Australian society given the

73 According to Tim Rowse, Elkin was aware of his “proprietal responsibility” for the term 'assimilation'. However, as 'assimilation' policies took shape under the guidance of Paul Hasluck as Federal Minister for the Interior from 1951, Elkin grew disappointed with the level of force this entailed. As Rowse writes, “as an early advocate of 'assimilation', Elkin had advised against thinking of Aborigines as an ensemble of individuals, each to be liberated from their crumbling Aboriginality by the state.” Rather he saw the communal structure of Aboriginality as being key to the psychological stability of Aboriginal people as they were integrated with Australian society. Moreover, Elkin saw the cohesion of Aboriginal society as being something that European society should strive towards given its increasingly egoistic individualism. Hasluck on the other hand was more concerned that 'assimilation' envelope Aboriginal people as individuals, and, as such, with complete disregard to their Aboriginality. Tim Rowse Rethinking social justice: from ‘peoples’ to ‘populations’ (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012), pp. 39, 41 – 42.

breakdown of their culture. They cannot continue to live in their own way”, they argued, “and indeed few of them are able to do so now. Life is changing for them just as it is, in a different sense, for us: and the white man is the new power in the land. It seems certain that they must, in the coming generations, become more fully absorbed into the mainstream of Australian life.” What is more, the Berndts outlined the value of what remained of Aboriginal culture to white Australia when they stipulated that Aboriginal people “have something to offer us, too – something of their vitality and colour, the spiritual heritage of the Aboriginal Way. Enriched by this link with their traditional background, we can become more truly Australian, more deeply a part of this land which we, like the Aborigines, know and love.”

Where this allusion to a reciprocity between Aboriginal culture and white Australian culture reads as vague as it does well-meaning, the Berndts would later provide a more nuanced explanation as to what this intercultural transaction would entail. In publishing *The World of the First Australians* in 1964, it appears that the anthropological partnership may have more fully digested the consequences of earlier attempts at integrating Australia's Aboriginal and European cultural heritage. In a disclaimer with a disparaging glance in the direction of the Jindyworobaks, the pair explained that they were not suggesting that the Aboriginal heritage is our heritage as Western Europeans. Our cultural growth stems from a different direction, and development of an Australian ethos will not depend on the actual content of that Aboriginal past or present, except in a very specified way. The sentimental movement of the 1940s to recapture a romanticised Aboriginal perspective through, stories, poetry and art, in the search for a peculiarly Australian flavour, was as an unsuccessful endeavour to resuscitate something which was never entirely Aboriginal.

77 Loc.cit
Where such language speaks directly to the problem of sincerely expressing the nature of Aboriginality from a non-Indigenous perspective, something they perhaps thought themselves capable of given their anthropological knowledge of “traditional” Aboriginal society, the Berndts also made the following claim:

Nevertheless, the wealth of Aboriginal traditional culture can contribute to the general development of what is sometimes called, vaguely, the Australian way of life. Firstly, we Australians should know what we are supplanting. This is important in terms of creating not only a national conscience, but also a national consciousness.79

Implicit in this rhetoric are two major claims in terms of the non-Indigenous engagement of Aboriginal culture, one is ethical and the other is epistemological. According to the Berndts it is as if Australia's sense of self will be forever unsettled if it remains in blind ignorance of the nation's Aboriginal past, and, for that matter, present. In this case the Berndts suggest the need for Australians to reflect more honestly and clearly regarding their past, and, in particular, the place of Aboriginal people within it, a sentiment that would later be imbued in Stanner's historical nomenclature of “the great Australian silence”. More significant in terms of the scope of this thesis, however, is the way in which the Berndts allude to their own authority as purveyors of a culture supposedly less and less relevant to Aboriginal people themselves.

Where the Berndts thus attributed their own role as anthropologists in very didactic and possessive terms, they came nowhere near the level of ownership over Aboriginal culture sought, and, to some extent achieved, by T.G.H. Strehlow. Strehlow's expertise as a linguist saw him develop an in-depth understanding of Aboriginal people in central Australian, particularly the Aranda, previously studied by Spencer and Gillen in addition to his father Carl Strehlow, the pastor of the Lutheran mission at Hermansberg from 1894 to 1922. Being born and raised at Hermannsburg placed Strehlow in a unique position in terms of the role Aboriginality played in his

life, the most obvious manifestation of which being his fluency in Aranda from a young age. As this perspicacity grew over time, Strehlow's relationship to Aboriginal culture, particularly in terms of his views as to how it was represented and by whom, became more and more complex. Most importantly, Strehlow's vast knowledge of Aranda lore and language became a central element in how he perceived his own identity, which lent directly to his evolving critique of modernity. What is more, this intimacy with Aboriginal culture, particularly Aranda, went to inform much of the rhetoric he espoused as to the place of Aboriginality in the frame of Australian national identity following the Second World War.

As with Ingamells, Strehlow's concern for the ill state of the modern world drew directly from the violence of the first half of the twentieth century. In a public address in 1956 titled *The Sustaining Ideals of Aboriginal Society*, Strehlow sought to demonstrate the way in which anthropological insights to the traditions of “primitive peoples” could be utilised as a means of reflecting upon, and potentially change, the destructive nature of the modern world. In a clear expression of the existential anxiety emerging out of violence in Europe and the Pacific, Strehlow remarked as to how his generation [had] witnessed the horrors of slave camps, concentration camps, and extermination camps; the ruthless deportations of citizens organised by the rulers of totalitarian states; and the employment of new weapons of mass destruction, used not against fighting men or installations of war, but against women, children and the residential areas of modern cities...The very threat of this new warfare threatens to destroy the concepts, ideals, and faiths upon which our civilisation has always rested, and without which it could not survive.80

In view of how this unease had come to collude with the general pursuit of “material progress” and presence of “ruthless rivalry” in the West, Strehlow asked that Australia look to align its “national traditions” with “the spirit of co-operation and kinship that once expressed itself in the institutions

of our Australian natives”. As he wistfully pointed out, these aspects of Aboriginality “might perhaps be helpful in the solution of some of our own problems and those of the modern civilised world.”

Crucial to understanding this evocation of Aboriginality as a cure for the poor state of modern world is Strehlow's use of the past tense when he points to “the spirit of co-operation that once expressed itself in the institutions of our Australian natives”. This speaks directly to Strehlow's belief that Aboriginal society was in a state of decay. Where this consigns Strehlow among others, including the Berndts and the Jindyworobaks, who envisaged Aboriginal society as being irrevocably on the wane, it is important that this point not go unqualified. As Strehlow claimed in *Aranda Traditions* in 1947,

[i]t is almost certain that native myths had ceased to be invented many centuries ago. The chants, legends, and the ceremonies which we record today mark the consumation of the creative efforts of a distant, long-past age. The present day natives are on the whole merely the painstaking, uninspired preservers of a great and interesting inheritance. They live almost entirely on the traditions of their forefathers. They are, in many ways, not so much a primitive as a decadent race.

It was, therefore, not that Aranda myths and legends only became manifest within an irrevocable past, but rather that the exhaustive efforts of previous generations of Aranda men in constituting a culture, of understanding every nuance of their environment and attaching meaning to it, had made it impossible for more recent generations to contribute anything new. This apparent ossification notwithstanding, it was Strehlow's consternation with the generation following the men from whom he collected so much static ethnographical material that he construed his own role as the rightful heir to Aranda tradition. Given his reverence for Aranda culture in line with this ongoing ethnographic accrual of knowledge and objects, Strehlow could only feel frustration in view of its

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81 Ibid, p. 20
82 Loc.cit
traditional custodian's apparent inability to convey lore to a younger generation beholden to the materialism of modernity.

This sentiment is most strongly expressed by Strehlow in his 1971 magnum opus, *Songs of Central Australia*, which incorporated his 'Final Summary' as a coda to Aranda poetry and its place within modernity:

[Aranda] songs had depended for their survival on the zeal of young men to learn them. Now they died with the embittered old men who could find no further heirs for their treasures. The old songs perished, it should be noted, largely because their *subject matter* had lost its appeal: no objections had been raised against them on formal artistic grounds.84

Although this point in the chronology of Strehlow's thought strictly falls beyond the historical purview of this thesis, it is nonetheless an important point of reference in clarifying what he thought to be the main cultural deficiencies of modernity and how they could be rectified by Aboriginality, not to mention his thoughts regarding contemporary Aboriginal people. Moreover, according to Barry Hill, it was upon returning from his trip to Europe at the beginning of the 1950s that Strehlow began to write *Songs of Central Australia's* 'Final Summary'; his “indictment of the modern world and his restitution of the primitive in poetry.”85 As Hill writes, “[a]fter his two years in metropolitan Europe Strehlow had come to think of the primitive as the authentic mode” of artistic expression.86 So outside of the calamitous first half of the twentieth century, what was it about the culmination of modernity in the 1950s which found Strehlow so easily deferring to Aboriginal culture over the sophistication of the metropole? And what did this unique take on critical theory propose such that Australian culture and sense of national identity could develop beyond the cultural stagnation of modern Europe?

84 T.G.H. Strehlow, *Songs of Central Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971), p. 703 [Italics in original]
While similar to his concerns around modernity as they drew from the Second World War in particular, the central critique of modernity Strehlow offered in the case of his 'Final Summary' pertained to what he saw as the more long-running social disunity resulting from the individualistic and impenetrable orientation of Western culture, particularly poetry, since the nineteenth century. “One thing seems certain”, argued Strehlow, “[i]f modern poetry wants to regain its place of proud honour in our modern age, our poets will have to adapt to a less supercilious and insulting attitude towards the profanum vulgas and speak a language that sensitive men and women of ordinary education can more readily understand.”

Inadvertently or not, Strehlow was thus drawing a parallel between the experience of Western individuals and that of the Aranda owing to the push of modernity, particularly in terms of the amelioration of religious and spiritual truths in line with the growing attraction of material wealth. In what is perhaps a justification of his coming into possession of traditional verses and sacred objects (tjurunja) on the basis of his superior knowledge of Aranda culture and close association with tribal elders, Strehlow argued that “[t]he present young Aranda generation has no use for the tjurunja treasures of their forefathers, because it no longer believes unhesitatingly in the existence of the totemic ancestors and in the magic power of their charms.” For Strehlow this sense of disenchantment with religious power among the Aranda was analogous to waning religious faith in the West to the extent that it is possible to read the Bible purely for its passages of grand poetry, without believing in its divine inspiration; but the fact remains that very few people do so. Most of those who reject the bible as an inspired book have little regard for its literary value: its poetry is linked far too closely to its religious teachings.

Given this affinity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, Strehlow proceeded to create an equation which balanced the needs of a national culture bereft of spiritual guidance and means of conveying meaning to 'the herd' by way of revoking the valuable religious meanings of a

87 Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, p. 718.
88 Ibid, p. 678
89 Loc.cit
culture seemingly lacking its own means of securing posterity. As Hill succinctly puts it, through Strehlow's appropriation of Aranda poetics “[t]he Australian, the native culture, the ancient peoples of song and dance and animistic belief, are used to construct a nationalism at the expense of other forms of cultural sophistication” thus allowing non-Indigenous Australians access to “a vitalising truth and force that modernity could not offer.” 90 In McGregor's words, “Strehlow did not suggest that white Australia should copy Aboriginal social institutions or mimic their rituals; rather he asked them to cultivate an appreciation of Aboriginal culture and social systems, from which they might formulate new antidotes to the ills of modernity.” 91 While this last analysis in particular may obscure the extent to which Strehlow in fact blatantly appropriated many of the sources of this cultural inspiration for his own possession in “accordance with the Aranda rules of tjrunja inheritance”, 92 it nonetheless captures the tone of the rhetoric with which Strehlow ended his 'Final Summary'. “If we are to develop a literature which will appeal strongly to an Australian audience”, proposed Strehlow,

then our future writers and poets will have to garb their verse and prose with the trappings which will harmonize with the Australian background against which we are living our own daily lives. It is therefore to be hoped that a perusal of the ancient material that constitutes the aboriginal sacred songs of central Australia will not prove entirely unrewarding to our future poets: the imagery found here does harmonize with the outward shape and the inward spirit of our continent...It is my belief that when the strong web of future Australian verse comes to be woven, probably some of the strands will be found to be poetic threads spun on the Stone Age hair-spindles of Central Australia. 93

The anachronism of this statement in view of his familiarity with the Jindyworobaks aside, not to mention the fact that by the 1970s many Australian writers had come to represent Aboriginality within their poetry, it is arguably the clearest expression of Strehlow's ambivalence

90 Hill, Broken Song, pp. 503 – 504.
91 McGregor, Indifferent Inclusion, p. 135.
92 Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, p. xlvi.
towards both Aboriginal and European culture. It is as if in perceiving a vacant space at the heart of Australian culture and modernity more broadly, Strehlow offered Aranda poetry, in a dialectical moment similar to that evoked by the Jindyworobaks, as a vehicle for achieving a more complete spiritual awareness of the Australian landscape which would in turn engender a more coherent national identity. In essence it was only by way of this syncretism that Strehlow could at once envisage Australian culture to reach its full potential whilst allowing Aboriginal culture to exist at all. Nor could anyone claim to occupy this intercultural space and function as mediator more than Strehlow himself.

To use Hill's phrase, as things stood for Strehlow by 1971 Aboriginality took on the proportions of a “Spengler-ish monument” which he used as a means of keeping the modern world at bay. The imagery is apt. As Oswald Spengler argued by way of justification for his claim in 1926 that the West was in a state of decline, at the moment any given culture takes on the “inorganic” form of a society no longer able to execute any new understandings of itself and the world around it, it has reached a necessary conclusion. Whether or not this holds true for the West, such an understanding of Aboriginal culture was central to Strehlow's belief that it was in a state of complete decadence. That being said, it remained for him a monument of reverence in the frame of a modern world which had lost its ability to negotiate universal meanings, both in terms of truth and accessibility. As this chapter has made clear, the problem with this close connection between Aboriginal culture and non-Aboriginal understandings of it is one of ownership. Focussing on Strehlow's accumulating possession of sacred objects and verses on both academic grounds and on the basis of his self-identification as a legitimate heir to Aranda culture, chapter three will discuss the political consequences of the non-Aboriginal appropriation of Aboriginal culture for Aboriginal people.

94 Hill, Broken Song. p. 506
95 Loc.cit.
96 Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, Volume 1: Form and Actuality (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980 [1926]), p. 31
Chapter 3

The 'Juggernaut' of Modernity

To live in the world produced by high modernity has the feeling of riding a juggernaut. It is not just that more or less continuous and profound processes of change occur; rather change does not consistently conform either to human expectations or to human control. The anticipation that the social and natural environments would increasingly be subject to rational ordering has not proved to be valid. The reflexivity of modernity is bound up in an immediate way with this phenomenon.


It is by now evident that the elevation of Aboriginal culture within anthropological and literary discourse that began in the late 1930s had little to do with Aboriginal people themselves, outside the capacity of certain individuals to bestow raw cultural knowledge upon the eager hearts and minds of Australian anthropologists, and, subsequently, Australian writers. This was a discussion held exclusively among non-Aboriginal Australians in their pursuit of a more distinctive national identity and hope of reconciling the metaphysical, social and moral uncertainties of modernity. The stable roots of Aboriginal culture reaching deep into the Australian soil were offered as a means of cementing a national identity, a more genuine and timeless connection to the landscape. The utility of Aboriginal culture for non-Indigenous Australians equally lay with its capacity to counter the ills of modernity; in a sense to function as the chocks to halt the wheels of the 'juggernaut' of modernity.

The difficulty of the modern subject to found a solid sense of self given the social and cultural fluidity of modernity, so clearly encapsulated by Anthony Giddens, along with an insecurity around the depth and distinctiveness of Australian culture and identity, are thus the key discursive fields within which individuals such as Ingamells and Strehlow promoted the cultural capital inherent to Aboriginality. It is through this particular historical lens that the problem of delineating a

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distinctive Australian national identity appears to resonate far deeper than the crisis caused by the decreasing relevance and availability of British culture from the 1960s, without doubting the verity of the circumstances relating to this moment in the nation's past. Britain's moves to disassociate itself from its colonial ties as the second half of the twentieth century unfolded were always bound to cause a moment of civic and cultural reflection for countries such as Australia. 98 However, as this thesis has shown, Australia's colonial genesis has found the negotiation of Australian national identity taking place less with respect to the absence of Britishness and more to the presence of Aboriginality.

While an apt metaphor for modernity, 'juggernaut' equally brings to mind the specific nature of colonialism; the sense of cultural disorientation and inability on the part of the colonised to assert their own agency existing alongside the coloniser's progress towards a discursive framework of subjugation. The importance of considering anthropologists such as Strehlow and literary movements such as the Jindyworobaks within this colonial framework becomes most apparent in view of the extent to which their appropriation of Aboriginal culture functioned to undermine the political agency of Aboriginal people, their ability to determine their own identity by way of the irrefutable ownership of their own past and heritage. While the argument can be made that the contemporary understanding of Aboriginality is historically contrived, essentially a product of the discursive framework under scrutiny, this should not preclude Aboriginal people from constituting a sense of identity of their own volition with or without recourse to the constructed categories of understanding brought to life by colonialism. What is more, this should be able to take place without the interference of non-Indigenous Australians as they account for the shortcomings of their

98 As this line of argument is carried by Curran and Ward, it is also important to recognise how they feature the Australian governments attempt to address the decreasing relevance of Britishness in the frame of Australian cultural identity with recourse to Aboriginality, a moment of political discretion most clearly demonstrated by the 1967 referendum, the success of which gave “the Commonwealth the power to legislate specifically for Aboriginal people”, along with discussion as to how Aboriginal culture could be used to represent Australia at the 1967 International Exhibition held in Montreal. Importantly, Curran and Ward point to the fact that this did not clearly entail the presence of actual Aboriginal people. Curran and Ward, The Unknown Nation, pp. 78, 103. See also James Curran, 'Australia Should Be There': Expo '67 and the Search for a New National Image, Australian Historical Studies vol. 39 (2008), pp. 87 – 88.
own identity. With reference to the various attempts to evoke a distinctive sense of Australian culture and identity by way of Aboriginal culture covered throughout this thesis, this chapter will expand upon the specific motivations and desires behind this intercultural dialectic. Insofar as Aboriginal culture has been transfigured as a means of securing a more distinctive Australian identity, it will be emphasised that Aboriginal people themselves have largely been included within this intercultural space only by way of their exclusion. Most importantly, as such nationalistic discourse involved the direct appropriation of Aboriginality by non-Indigenous people, it will be shown to have hampered the ability of Aboriginal people to achieve political self-determination.

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As David Smith argues in the context of Indian history, Giddens' metaphor of modernity as 'juggernaut' can be equally used to describe the specific nature of colonialism. In drawing upon Arjun Appadurai's understanding of the colonial imagination\(^9\), Smith points to the way in which the juggernaut of British colonialism rode “roughshod over the Oriental reality”, demeaning the existence of colonial subjects by equating them with objects whose essential physical and temporal differences relegated them to either the zoo or the museum.\(^{10}\) In his study of the settler practice of collecting “_primitive” objects, Tom Griffiths makes the similar point that for a large part of Australian history Aboriginal people have been of interest to the European imagination only insofar as they embodied fascinating “objects of display and research”.\(^{11}\) In James Clifford's words, through the process of collecting objects and knowledge pertaining to 'the primitive', Europeans “are offered treasures saved from a destructive history, relics of a vanishing past.”\(^{12}\)

Far from being arbitrary, it is in essence this characteristic antiquarian lurch of the juggernaut of colonialism which provides the key to understanding the appreciation of Aboriginal

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101Ibid, p. 94.
culture in terms of the nationalistic rhetoric presented in this thesis. In parallel to Langton's understanding of Aboriginality, Clifford points out that where the colonial encounter assuredly affects the alienation of the colonised from their culture through a process which sees 'the primitive' defined, categorised and invariably relegated to the past, at the same time it facilitates the negotiation of the Western self. In particular, this engagement of 'the primitive' functions as the means by which Western identity satisfies its need to establish the physical, emotional and spiritual ownership of the colonial landscape. As Griffiths remarks in Australia's specific case, Europeans “were feeling their way towards the realisation that becoming Australian would, in some senses, mean becoming 'Aboriginal'”.

To the extent that Ingamells and Strehlow in particular fall under the banner of this colonial tendency, their handling of the primitive in order to fulfil the needs of the Western self is all the more interesting on the count that it represents the transection of the respective paths of the juggernaut of colonialism and the juggernaut of modernity. Not only did Aboriginal culture offer them a means of affirming a deeper connection to the Australian landscape, but it was also the grist for the mill in delineating a way out of the chaotic sense of being, anomie and destructiveness of modernity. The colonised are the indisputable victims in the case of the juggernaut of colonialism, whereas in the case of the juggernaut of modernity it is in fact the coloniser's unease with the trajectory of the modern world which in turn makes them vulnerable. In view of this discursive confluence an irony can be found at the heart of the European appreciation of Aboriginal culture. To offer Aboriginality as the means by which the ills of modernity might be treated, one paradoxically fulfils a principle prerogative of colonialism; it engages in the process of enveloping the colonised within the Western self. In this sense, by endeavouring to fulfil a desire to reorient Australia within the modern world the likes of Ingamells and Strehlow made a robust effort on the behalf of

103Ibid, p. 212.
105Ibid, pp. 5 – 6.
imperialism: the negation of the colonised and the appropriation of what they perceived to be the remnants of a dying culture for their own nationalistic and ontological ends.

It is perhaps all too glib to condemn any such attempt to incorporate Aboriginal culture by non-Indigenous Australians solely in view of the particular examples that have been provided. To do so one runs the risk of outrightly dismissing the possibility of Aboriginal culture contributing to the understanding of Australian national identity and to preclude altogether the non-Indigenous representation of Indigenous people. As Bain Attwood writes, “the problem of our representation [of Aboriginal people] lies not in the particular nature of how and what we speak. This is what determines whether the effects of European representations are reprehensible or not.”

Be this as it may, it is difficult to see how any level of intercultural representation, “reprehensible” or not, can escape the dialectic between Aboriginality and Europeanality which given the power dynamic inherent to colonialism will always result in the manipulation of Aboriginal people. This point is increasingly important to consider given that Aboriginality exists as the rightful platform for Indigenous Australians to assert their own political identity. The salience of this need for intercultural sensitivity becomes particularly apparent in Strehlow's case owing to his reluctance to properly come to terms with the growing assertion of Aboriginal political agency, which from the 1960s placed the ownership of Aboriginal culture, land and heritage as central concerns.

In a very real sense, Strehlow embodied the ontological angst that went with riding the juggernaut of modernity. As most clearly demonstrated in the case of *Songs of Central Australia*, the beauty of Aranda poetics for Strehlow was its explication of universal truths around which Aranda culture could cohere. And it was on this count that Strehlow felt Aboriginality could fulfil the modern world's lack with regard to the articulation of clear and solid meanings broadly amenable at all levels of society. Where European culture had more or less relieved itself of the possibility of metaphysical truths in the course of the decreasing epistemological purchase of

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106 Attwood, 'Introduction', p. xiii.
Christianity, resulting in the acute individualisation of poetic expression, no such 'enlightenment' had clipped the poetical wings of Australia's central desert tribes. Also important to remember is the fact that Aranda culture was central to Strehlow's life from childhood, a Lutheran missionary's son in every respect but at once having largely no contact with children other than those of his father's charges. Aranda culture in this sense functioned both as his foil for modernity while being one of the longest running points of cultural familiarity he could conjure.

Strehlow could thus claim a unique affinity with Aranda culture and concomitant despondency with the West – a liminal figure with a tentative foot in each side of the colonial encounter. And it was this confluence which colluded in his imagination to enforce the belief that his possession of Aboriginal sacred objects and songs was more valid than could be claimed by the 'driftwood' of Aboriginal society who he thought had chosen not to continue the traditional ways of their forefathers. Hill explains this sense of dependency and rightful attachment well when he writes,

[b]y 1958 Strehlow had at least 427 tjurunja, and he was holding onto them for dear life. For the sake of the old men who had given them to him in sacred trust, because they were giving him their lives; and for the sake of his own life, which had become more entwined with theirs over the years. Strehlow frequently told himself, in times when he was most miserable...that they were his because they had been theirs.\(^{107}\)

Notwithstanding the extent to which Strehlow's attachment to Aranda culture may have been justified by his personal experiences growing up at Hermannsburg and close relationship with old tribal men, the obstinacy with which he maintained this identification with Aboriginality in the face of an emergent Aboriginal political identity, which, in any event, confounded his belief that Aboriginal culture could not be maintained by Aboriginal people, cannot go without redress. The idea that “the mind of real Aboriginal Australia had ceased to exist”\(^{108}\) following Strehlow's death in

1978, a claim actually made by his wife Kathleen, is an epitaph all too hubristic, not to mention anachronistic, given the fact that Aboriginal calls for rights on the basis of their Aboriginality, particularly land rights, had by that stage well and truly become political realities.\(^{109}\) It is on this point of cultural insensitivity that Strehlow’s advocation of an Australian identity couched in terms evocative of Aboriginal Australia must be taken to account. Where Strehlow did in fact allow the possibility that Aboriginal people would continue to exist in the make-up of the Australian nation, and indeed at times promoted this, he failed to entertain the prospect that they could continue as the rightful custodians of their own culture in light of the disruptions caused by modernity.\(^{110}\) Nor is his appropriation of Aboriginal culture any easier to reconcile than that attempted earlier by Ingamells and the Jindyworobaks. They equally proposed to incorporate Aboriginality directly within the frame of Australian nationalism on the basis that it was in fact lost to Aboriginal people. It seems all

\(^{109}\)Although instigated by the Yolngu and Gurindji in the Northern Territory during the 1960s, and not the Aranda, the Aboriginal land rights movement had consequences for all Aboriginal people insofar as it became the vehicle for the expression of a pan-Aboriginal identity and emphasised the association between Aboriginality and land. Although Aboriginal political protest can be traced back to the 1930s, most notably the 1938 Day of Mourning organised by Jack Patten and William Ferguson, and the broader activism of William Cooper, at this point in time urgency was given more to achieving civic equality between Aboriginal people and the rest of Australia and drew less on the specific rights owed on the basis of Aboriginality. As Richard Broome has shown, one could arguably go back as far as 1863 to establish the point of genesis for Aboriginal political protest in view of the Kulin people’s successful bid to have 931 hectares of reserve land gazetted at Coranderrk following the “demise of the Aboriginal Protectorate” in Victoria in 1849. Although the Kulin did not own the land, it provided them with a home where they sought to ‘live like white men almost’. J.T. Patten and W. Ferguson, Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights! A Statement of the Case for the Aborigines Progressive Association, 1938, in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 82; Russel McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880 - 1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), p 252 – 253; Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003), p. 316. Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005), pp. 119 – 125.

\(^{110}\)As a self-appointed spokesperson for Aboriginal people in the 1960s Strehlow would to an extent contradict this sentiment in his advocation for more Indigenous cultural agency in the determination of the Australian government’s policy of assimilation. As Tim Rowse has rightly pointed out, implicit in this critique of the Australian government’s assimilation policy is the assumption “that Aboriginal culture is alive and capable of survival.” Where this presents a tension in terms of the functionality of Aboriginality in Strehlow’s imagination, as Rowse has demonstrated elsewhere, he also had difficulty in coming to terms with the state’s incorporation of Aboriginal sites, objects and cultural knowledge in terms of national heritage under the guidance of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS – later The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies - AIATSIS) on the basis that it disregarded the consequences of exposing such knowledge to the public. This once again speaks to Strehlow’s belief that the knowledge he gained from Indigenous elders bestowed upon him the obligation of protecting its integrity given that the present generation of Aboriginal people had not paid sufficient fidelity to the traditions of their forefathers. As Rowe writes, Strehlow’s “counsel to government in the 1960s was still in sympathy with the old men to whom he had been novice in the 1930s.” Strehlow was thus opposed to the approach of H.C. Coombs who by way of his involvement with the Council of Aboriginal Affairs gave force to the idea that Aboriginal culture could adapt itself in such a way that placed the greatest agency with the current generation of Aboriginal people. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Assimilation Problems: The Aboriginal Viewpoint* (Adelaide: Aborigines Advncement league Inc. of South Australia, 1964); Tim Rowse ‘Strehlow’s Strap: Functionalism and Historicism in a Colonial Ethnography’, in Bain Attwood and John Arnold eds., *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines* (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press, 1992), p. 100; Rowse, *Rethinking social justice*, pp. 45 – 61.
too cruel a fate for Aboriginal people that their inclusion within the negotiation of Australian nationhood should come only by way of such an exclusion.

It is in this sense that the role played by Aboriginal people in the context of Australian nationalist discourse resembles Giorgio Agamben's discussion of Homo Sacer, “an obscure figure of archaic Roman Law, in which human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed).”\(^\text{111}\) Drawing on Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics and Hannah Arendt's excursions into understanding human rights in light of historical developments since the First World War, Agamben sees Homo Sacer as an increasingly present figure within the modern world in line with his claim that “the entry of zoë into the sphere of the polis – the politicisation of bare life as such – constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought.”\(^\text{112}\)

According to Agamben, the central historical circumstance attributing to this characteristic orientation of modernity is the fact that the proclamation of human rights coincided with the inception of the nation-state. The issue with this being that at the moment an individual finds themselves outside the security of the sovereign nation-state, the fallacy of their inalienable rights is exposed. As Agamben writes, “[i]n the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state.”\(^\text{113}\) Taken as such the homelessness and rightlessness of the refugee is the most genuine representation of what it means to exist in the world as Homo Sacer; as being included under the auspices of a sovereign power only by way of an exclusion. That the plight of so-called 'boat people' whose arrival on Australian shores has engendered such a political imperative in the recent era of Australian

\(^\text{112}\)Ibid, p. 4.
government speaks to the clear and present reality of this situation in Australia. To live in immigration detention, to exist inside the legislative capacity of a state only to be physically excluded by it, is the ontological definition of Homo Sacer.

It is not difficult to see how this power of exception has also been utilised by the Australian state over Aboriginal people in the course of the twentieth century. The era of 'protection' policies is a clear demonstration of sovereign power operating over Aboriginal people entirely on the presumption of their exclusion from Australian society. Nor is it unreasonable to extend this analogy to the intercultural dialectic at the heart of this thesis. In view of the same tendency of settler Australians to accumulate Aboriginal artefacts observed by Griffiths, and in a way that aligns directly with individuals such as Strehlow, Denis Byrne has remarked how such objects “constituted a form of cultural capital which enhanced the social position of the collectors.”

Rather than an object of conspicuous consumption and display, as in the case of Pierre Bourdieu's example of a family's reputation increasing in line with its imprudent purchase of an extra ox, according to Byrne the cultural capital residing within Aboriginality was its capacity to secure Australia's sense of itself in terms of a 'deep-nation'. As such, it was not the “frequently urban and ghettoised Aboriginality shared by living Aborigines” that was used to elucidate Australia's national identity by white Australians such as Ingamells and Strehlow, “but the 'traditional', static, materialised Aboriginality with its complement of archaeological remains.” To the extent that Aboriginality has thus functioned to alleviate white Australia's deficit in terms of a timeless cultural connection to the Australian landscape, Aboriginal people could only ever be excluded given they no longer

117 Ibid, p. 97. This point resonates clearly with McGregor's argument that the only genuine purchase Aboriginality has been able to secure in the frame of Australian national discourse since the 1950s is in the realm of the aesthetic, particularly the artistic heritage of central Australian tribes including the Aranda. More with reference to the emergence of the environmental movement in Australia from the 1960s, Nicholas Smith has similarly pointed to the way in which “environmental history has extended beyond the colonise era to include primordial Indigenous nature as the source of an authochthonous sense of belonging.” McGregor, Indifferent Inclusion, p. 134; Nicholas Smith, 'Blood and Soil: Nature, Native and Nation in the Australian Imaginary', Journal of Australian Studies 35 Issue. 1 (2011), p. 13.
existed as the source of this romantic ideal but had rather come to embody the worst aspects of modernity in the imagination of the majority of non-Indigenous Australians.

Complementing the negative consequences of this exclusive inclusion of Aboriginal people in the frame of Australian nationalist discourse is the way in which it has further eroded their right to control the representation of Aboriginality. As Michael Dodson argues, the need to evaluate how such discourse has shaped Indigenous identity and assert the right of Indigenous people to ownership of their past is central to the promotion of their political agency and rights to self-determination. In establishing the “sovereign right” of Indigenous communities to define their identity and membership without “external interference”, Dodson sets Indigenous Australians the task of simultaneously comprehending and subverting non-Indigenously conceived representations of Aboriginality and the motives behind them, while at once creating a “world of meaning” through which they can form their own identity.\(^{118}\) Dodson makes it clear that whether “Indigenous people have been used to affirm the superiority of the colonisers, and to provide confirmation of the value of progress” or whether they “are used to create a counterpoint against which the dominant society can critique itself, becoming living embodiments of the romantic ideal, which offers a desolate society the hope of redemption and of recapturing what it feels it has lost in its march forward”, the point remains the same: they “have been objects to be manipulated and used to further the aspirations of other people.”\(^{119}\)

In the case that Aboriginality is thus rightly denied non-Indigenous Australians by their Indigenous counterparts as a source of cultural inspiration, what recourse remains in the search for a

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\(^{118}\)To cross-reference this political agenda with an argument put forward by Patrick Wolfe, Dodson's initial task of subversion may ironically entail disrupting the concept of the Dreamtime altogether. Where the spiritual and mythological depth of the Dreamtime may appeal to non-Indigenous Australians on the grounds of nationalism, according to Wolfe it has also justified the representation of pre-contact Australia in terms of a land without owners – a landscape whose inhabitants lived in a state of unreality. In adopting the Dreamtime for their own discursive ends, Wolfe argues, Aboriginal people run the risk of perpetuating the 'powerlessness' of their place within anthropological and settler discourse. Michael Dodson, 'The end in the beginning: re(de)finding Aboriginality', in M. Crossman eds., *Blacklines* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), pp. 30, 33; Patrick Wolfe, 'On Being Woken Up: The Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler Culture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 2 (April, 1991), pp. 197 – 224.

\(^{119}\)Ibid, p. 36.
more distinctive Australian national identity accompanied by a deeper sense of attachment to place? Ian Maclean has described the main impediment facing non-Indigenous Australia's desire to feel at home on Australian soil in terms of its “antipodality”, its identity being founded “in migration rather than indigeneity”. “Like Ocean”, McLean writes, “the Antipodean never becomes, never is, but is condemned to a perpetual becoming, a constitutional restlessness and mobility, an 'in-betweeness'”.

In similar terms, Andrew Lattas has portrayed Australian national identity in “a state of lack”; a void characterised by a particular deficit in spiritual meaning which Aboriginality is purported to reconcile. However, while this 'scar of culture' emblazons all non-Indigenous Australians, they alone do not wear it. According to McLean, a basis for 'indigeniety' is deprived all Europeans insofar as they “bristle with historical differences”, and, as such, is the “defining historical experience of Europeanality – or what Europeans call 'modernity'”. And where Aboriginal culture may provide the means of effacing this nebulous origin in Australia's case, notwithstanding the post-colonial ethical dilemma this entails, this task is terminally hampered by the fact of its longstanding representation as the 'Other' within the national imaginary; a preserved object, not a potential agent of cultural renewal.

Where this encapsulation of modernity leaves the prospect of consolidating a distinctive Australian national identity somewhere along the path of the oceanic voyage that led to the European colonisation of Australia, it at once directs the negotiation of reconciling the non-Indigenous sense of self towards the brute fact at its core: Australia was founded upon an act of dispossession. The fallacy of *terra nullius* has never been legitimate grounds to presume the rightful

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122 McLean, *White Aborigines*, p. 7
123 Ibid, p. 150.
appropriation of Aboriginal land by Europeans. As Andrew Fitzmaurice has shown, the term itself is an anachronism in the period of time which saw the majority of the Australian landmass come under European occupation.\textsuperscript{124} In appropriating Aboriginal culture by acting on the impulse created by the spiritual absence at its core, in combination with the belief that Indigenous Australians lack the fortitude to continue as its custodians, it is hard to see how the ongoing non-Indigenous presence within Australia can go anyway in reconciling the fact of dispossession which faces all settler nations. In an analysis of the cultural phenomenon pertaining to 1930s Victoria in which various townships sought to incorporate Aboriginal people in the celebration of their respective centenaries, Sianan Healy has revealed how such sentimental and popular manifestations of Aboriginality within the Australian cultural imaginary have been accompanied by a complete lack of reflexivity in terms of the fact that Aboriginal people had been dispossessed of their lands but few generations prior.\textsuperscript{125} And so it can be said for the broader presumption that Aboriginality exists as a quick and easy point of cultural reference from which non-Indigenous Australians can reinforce their historical connection to the Australian landscape.

\textsuperscript{124}Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'The Genealogy of Terra Nullius', \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 38 no. 129 (April 2007), pp. 1 – 15.

\textsuperscript{125}Sianan Healy, 'Years ago some lived here': Aboriginal Australians and the Production of Popular Culture, History and Identity in 1930s Victoria', \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 37 no. 128 (2006), pp. 18 – 34.
Conclusion

This thesis began with the seemingly innocuous account of my own childhood absorption of Aboriginality via its representation within Australian popular culture. Perhaps the idea of Turramulli emerging at the sound of thunder offers as much respite from the loose threads of meaning offered by modernity as anything conjured by the imaginations of either Strehlow or the Jindyworobaks. What can be said is that any such romanticisation of Aboriginality expressed within the Australian national imaginary is layered with political and ethical dilemmas. As this thesis has brought into particular focus, the romanticisation of Aboriginality in the course of meeting the shortcomings of the non-Indigenous connection to the Australian landscape, in addition to its perceived capacity to neutralise the ills of modernity, has not only been inadequate towards these ends but paradoxically furthered the exclusion of Aboriginal people. Most importantly, particularly in Strehlow's case, it has undermined the ability of Aboriginal people to engender political agency through their own cultural heritage.

The romantic ideal of delineating Australia's sense of nationhood away from its European cultural inheritance has not been a task that has entailed singular recourse to Aboriginality. Nor is this phenomenon simply reactive to the decreasing relevance of Britishness as a key factor in the formation of Australian national identity. In writing *The Australian Legend* in 1958, Russel Ward brought into vivid relief a romantic figure whose origins lay well within Australia's colonial past, and whose presence can still be felt today. By the time they had come to embody a national mystique, according to Ward, the “nomad tribe” of Australian pastoral workers set an attitude and mode of behaviour “that most [Australians] liked to believe they tended ‘naturally’” towards.¹²⁶ Interestingly, the tropes of egalitarianism and mateship in Australian nationalist rhetoric today seem to have as much purchase as they did in their nineteenth century frontier crucible; this is despite the

fact that as this ethos was first embodied by the noble bushman it could only ever exclude many Australians: notably women and people of non-European background which of course encompasses Aboriginal people.

That being said, Ward was the first to recognise the romantic continuity between the “nomad tribe” and Aboriginal people:

the essential attributes of this early heroic frontiersman corresponded very clearly with those of the obsolescent noble savage. Both were guileless, yet not gullible, sons of ‘nature’, whose physical and moral excellence is held up to the admiration of readers ‘corrupted’ by the artificialities of a sophisticated society.127

In the case that the romantic appeal of Aboriginality owes to its apparent juxtaposition with the materialistic and socially disconnected nature of modernity, according to Ward,

[as mechanisation and urbanisation proceeded in Western Europe and along the eastern seaboard of the United States, the noble frontiersman became a kind of popular culture-hero possessed, like the Divinity, of three aspects. He provided for the Romantic imagination, first, a symbol of escape from the drabness of urban, industrial civilisation, second, a symbol of compensation and justification for the evils incidental to the process of expanding imperialism, and third, a symbol for the polarisation, particularly in ‘new’ countries like Australia and America, of patriotic nationalist sentiment.128

Aboriginal culture is thus not alone within the Australian national imaginary as a source of romantic inspiration. Moreover, the appeal of both Aboriginality and the mystique of the “noble frontiersman” relates to similar contrasts they respectively offer to the push of modernity. However, the fact is that one of these historical representations is rightly included in the discussion of non-Indigenous Australian identity while the other is expressly not. As this thesis has demonstrated, on the occasions that Aboriginality has been included in such discourse it has been premised on the belief that Aboriginal people have lacked the ability to function as custodians of their culture owing

to the presence of modernity. In a clear embodiment of Homo Sacer, Aboriginal people have in this sense been included in Australian nationalist discourse only by way of their exclusion.

Where the salience of this point is clear in view of the period in Australian history dealt with by this thesis, its contemporary resonance rings true when one takes into account the musings of cultural pontificators such as Germaine Greer suggesting that

[i]f Australia were to declare its Aboriginality, all the trappings of fake Britishness could be ditched; the states already have premiers and do not need governors, but if we felt that some such outrigger was needed for the ship of state, we could appoint a council of elders who could comment on legislation from the point of view of Aboriginal law and custom if they felt like it.129

In entertaining this prospect of national self-realisation Greer makes it clear that she has herself already gone some way in securing her Aboriginal bona fides, pointing to instances of her inclusion within certain Aboriginal communities. However, it is less transparent whether she has consulted with individuals of such communities regarding their potential roles as oracles presiding over the Australian nation. In any case, it is patently obvious that Greer is convinced that making such use of Aboriginality is part of Australia's progression towards a more distinctive sense of nationhood. But of course accompanying such an instrumental attitude towards Aboriginal culture is the risk of excluding actual Aboriginal people. This appears to be a risk of which Greer is unaware.

The matter of cultural appropriation aside, the contemporary relevance of Homo Sacer in describing the political status of Aboriginal people is also highlighted by the approach to 'Indigenous affairs' characteristic to successive Australian governments since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In resoundingly voting 'yes' at the1967 referendum, Australians bestowed upon the Commonwealth the capacity to legislate specifically for Aboriginal people, a responsibility previously the prerogative of state governments. In conjunction with the Racial Discrimination Act

In 1975, the federal government has since been beholden to the ideal of legislating fairly in the interests of Aboriginal people. However, whether this ideal exists as a constitutional responsibility has become a matter of dispute. In his leadership of the federal Liberal government between 1996 and 2007, John Howard in particular brought into question whether or not the 1967 Referendum required the Commonwealth to legislate for the benefit of Aboriginal people. By upholding the Howard government's decision to exclude the Ngarrindjeri people's claim to Hindmarsh Island under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* in 1998 to allow the construction of the Hindmarsh Bridge, the High Court proved the apparent absence of any such constitutional responsibility.130

Any ideal that the events of 1967 conferred the Commonwealth responsibility of legislating fairly in the interests of Aboriginal people were further undermined by the Howard government's response in 2007 to reports of child sexual abuse and neglect in a number of remote Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. As it has continued and even broadened under successive Labor governments, the question remains as to whether the Northern Territory National Emergency Response ('the Intervention') has ameliorated these concerns. What can be said less equivocally is that, with all the dimensions of a juggernaut, 'the Intervention' has excluded many Aboriginal people from the full compliment of their civil rights in line with the curtailment of their access to social welfare. Addressing incidences of child abuse and neglect within the Australian community is the prerogative of any Australian government, but to act upon it through the partial suspension of a previous act of parliament which sought to enshrine the ideal of racial equality equates to a blatant contradiction and runs the risk of excluding certain members of the Australian community.

As this thesis has shown, contradiction is indeed a feature common to the relationship between Aboriginal people and white Australia. A relationship consisting in an intercultural dynamic above which the spectre of Homo Sacer constantly hovers. Of the political consequences

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of appropriating certain aspects of Aboriginality in the course of fulfilling the deficits of Australian national identity, the crime of denying Aboriginal people access to their own culture as they consolidate an identity of their own is the most grave. As Ann Curthoys has explained, a sense of alienation from the natural environment informs a central narrative in the European history of place in Australia from which many white Australians have derived a sense of victimhood that obscures their ability to properly account for the European oppression of Aboriginal people. Yet being able to establish a comfortable sense of place remains key to the pursuit of a people's ability to cohere as a nation. If Benedict Anderson is correct in ascribing the 'imagined community' of the nation with the role of providing meaning in line with modernity's amelioration of religious 'fatality' and 'contingency', then Australians are likely to continue searching for a more secure connection to the Australian landscape in much the same way that Strehlow searched for such a foundation for truth. Whether this search will take into account the implications of appropriating Aboriginal culture and be conducted with less confusion as to who can claim victimhood in view of Australia's history as a settled nation remains to be seen.


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