

Deep nation: Australia's acquisition of an indigenous past

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Since at least the 1970s the concept of national heritage has been an inseparable part of the practice of archaeology in Australia, and given that archaeology and cultural nationalism march hand in hand in virtually every country of the world, this is hardly surprising. Nor is it surprising that a settler colony like Australia, in order to bond itself better to the exotic terrain by sending roots down into the continent's past, would at some stage want to appropriate to itself the time-depth represented by the archaeological remains of the indigenous minority. Yet surely, on the face of it, there is something quite radical and extraordinary in the prospect of a settler culture which for so long had pronounced indigenous culture to be a savage anachronism suddenly turning to embrace the past of that culture as its own.

My contention is that Australia's adoption of Aboriginal 'heritage' was, however, a radical departure only in a limited sense. Preceding this act of appropriation and stretching back into the nation's colonial origins there can be seen to be a series of other ways in which the physical, 'archaeological' traces of the Aboriginal past had been actively colonised. This essay attempts to delineate that series of colonial 'moves'. My concern as an archaeologist working in the field known as 'Aboriginal heritage management' is to trace the lineage of my own practice and thus, optimistically, break free to some extent from its colonial complicity. As this implies, I believe that archaeology in Australia can only be post-colonial to the extent that its practitioners deconstruct its colonial underpinnings. Archaeology in Australia must decolonise itself before it can claim to be post-colonial.

In what follows I develop the notion of two diametrically opposed trends operating in southeastern Australia from 1788 onward. On the one hand Aborigines were engaged in transactional relationships with white settlers and were establishing a new cultural geography (i.e., adding to the old cultural landscape new networks of significant places). On the other hand, settler society, while spatially marginalising Aboriginal people and denying the authenticity of the emergent Aboriginal culture of the southeast, was also beginning to regard the archaeological remains of pre-contact Aboriginal culture as a benchmark of authentic Aboriginality. At the same time that various means were being used to decrease the visibility of living Aboriginal people in the landscape of the southeast various other means were being employed to enhance the visibility of the archaeological remains which, in a sense, were replacing them there.

Contact as transaction

The members of the First Fleet who arrived at Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, in 1788 had a momentary glimpse of local Aboriginal culture before it began to change. This is not to say that it was static prior to 1788, simply to note, retrospectively, that Aboriginal society was on the verge of an era of immense and in many ways catastrophic change. Chroniclers of the first years like Tench and Hunter were well aware that the Aboriginal people around Port Jackson were staggering under the immediate effect of the encounter and they hurried to describe what they could of the habits and appearance of these people, to collect their artefacts and to write down words from their language while there was still time.¹ Whatever chaos and confusion might be seen to have entered the lives of the natives, there was, in the minds of these observers and collectors, no question as to the authenticity of the people themselves as true representatives of the strange land.

Gradually, over the space of a few decades, this perception changed. As Aborigines in the Sydney area increasingly modified their lifestyle and their material culture to meet the novel constraints and possibilities attendant upon the arrival of Europeans, the Europeans increasingly lost interest in them. The Aborigines were seen to have lost or to be fast losing that quality which for so many Europeans was the only excuse for being a native, the quality of being authentically primitive. Leaving aside for the moment the question of how Europeans defined authenticity, it is important to understand that they saw themselves as the exclusive agents of change.² Lacking such agency, the natives could only ever be the passive recipients of European ways and products. And it was for this reason that with few exceptions the early observers failed to attend to the process by which Aborigines were recontextualising or Aboriginalising elements of European culture. For the reality, of course, was that there was agency on both sides.

A reading of European accounts of the early years at Port Jackson does provide glimmerings of the nature of Aboriginal agency in the contact process—the conventional use of the term 'contact', though, now seems rather too hard edged, evoking as it does an image of cultures as billiard balls and a nineteenth century vision in which 'European culture bumped into non-European culture without merging'.³ Nicholas Thomas's term, 'entanglement', which he uses primarily in the context of cross-cultural traffic in material culture, seems preferable.⁴ It is an entanglement which occurs in the processes of exchange, borrowing, modification, and reworking which are a typical accompaniment to the meeting of cultures. We know that, confronted with a large array of European artefacts at Port Jackson, the Aborigines' desires were focused and specific. European dresses, jackets, and trousers were worn mainly to gain useful favour with Europeans but there is a suggestion that hats and scarves were objects of direct or unmediated desire.⁵ Bread was favoured over other European foods; blankets were sought after by Aboriginal women who recontextualised them as garments and as slings for carrying babies on their backs.⁶ Prior to the Europeans' arrival the Aborigines around Port

¹ Tench 1799, Hunter 1968.

² See for example Adas 1989.

³ Leach 1989, p. 43.

⁴ Thomas 1991.

⁵ Barratt 1981, p. 65; Laracy 1980, p. 179; McBryde 1989.

⁶ Barratt 1981, p. 66.

Jackson were not unfamiliar with the dynamics of exchange but the circumstances of the encounter called for adaptability on both sides. If the British were willing to innovate by engaging with Aborigines in 'gifting'—Cook's voyages would have familiarised them with this practice⁷—the Aborigines for their part displayed flexibility by bartering their 'curiosities' and providing certain services in return for European goods.

The flow of Aboriginal products and knowledge into European hands was seen by Europeans in the contexts of curiosity and science. They did not feel their integrity as Europeans had been brought into question by this traffic, yet the equivalent flow into Aboriginal hands was seen both as a symptom of primitiveness and a cause of cultural collapse. In an ever-expanding field around Port Jackson the native inhabitants were losing their authenticity in European eyes and, as others have noted, they have been losing it ever since.⁸

The construct of traditional culture upon which this view rests has now been exposed to critique, at least among anthropologists. Those who have studied the urban and rural Aboriginal communities of the settled southeast of Australia, hence defying the dictum that real Aboriginal culture was only to be found in the remote Centre and North, have been able to point to the emergence of dynamic and adaptive forms of Aboriginality.⁹ A more general critique of the culture concept in anthropology is exemplified by James Clifford's argument that tribal societies, rather than being fragile 'endangered authenticities' with a tendency to shatter upon contact with the West, are no less inventive than their larger scale counterparts.¹⁰ It is characteristic of all human cultures to be constantly negotiating change.

Clifford writes against the following characterisation or narrative of tribal peoples:

'Entering the modern world', their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly 'backward' peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.¹¹

If Aborigines did continue to invent local futures after 1788 then what, one might ask, were they? The example might be given of a distinctively Aboriginal valuation of Australian money.¹² Or of the way roads and motor vehicles have been used in a novel way by Aborigines to maintain kinship links along 'beats' and 'runs'.¹³ A myriad of settler social and economic practices were sampled and reworked by Aborigines, but here I want to look at inventiveness specifically in terms of places and objects. It is apparent that while Aborigines were busy inventing local futures and signifying the places and things which went with them, European settlers were hard at work ignoring these in favour of the places and things the 'old' Aborigines had left behind.

⁷ Kaeppler 1988.

⁸ See for example, Beckett 1988a.

⁹ See for example, Beckett 1988b; Keen 1988.

¹⁰ Clifford 1988, p. 5.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹² Sansom 1988.

¹³ Beckett 1988c; Birdsall 1988.

The opening of a gap

The most widely accepted narrative of the Aboriginal experience in the southeast of the continent through the course of the nineteenth century presents it as an unmitigated slide into dependency. Among the recent challenges to this narrative is Goodall's presentation of the 'forgotten' history of Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry in western New South Wales.¹⁴ Goodall also documents the eagerness of many New South Wales Aborigines in the early and mid-nineteenth century to adopt elements of the settlers' farming economy and the efforts they made to re-acquire land and clear it for agriculture.¹⁵ In a counter-narrative which sits uncomfortably with the accepted vision of fringe camp lethargy and degeneracy she writes about the building of houses, the planting of gardens, and the spending of farm profits on curtains, pianos, and, particularly, horses.

We now accept that it was not an inability to cope with the new which devastated Aboriginal morale. This resulted, rather, from the experience shared by many Aboriginal people of being moved off any land where they had tried to build an adaptive lifestyle (see, for instance, Read's account of the dispersal of the Wiradjuri people in Western NSW¹⁶) and of being confined to small designated reserves where they had to subsist on rations while they watched settlers take up the land they themselves had cleared. This is not to say that reserves, or the Protection period generally, represented a termination of Aboriginal ability to innovate. Rather than helplessness in the face of an irresistible settler culture we see that many Aboriginal people were still reaching for the good life (which does not have to mean the European life). In the fringe camps and on the missions and reserves cultural change was being transacted and not just imposed.

Christmas camps constitute a case in point. The celebration of Christmas was introduced to Aborigines by missionaries in the nineteenth century in the belief that by distributing gifts and special foods such as Christmas cake and pudding they might attract people to the missions, reinforce the importance of the birth of Christ, demonstrate Christian kindness, and civilise Aborigines via their participation in one of Western civilisation's great rites.¹⁷ By the early to mid-twentieth century Aborigines had absorbed elements of the settler Christmas into a yearly ritual of leaving the missions to camp together in the bush or on the coast. Christmas cakes were baked, cricket was played and at night there was singing and dancing to the sound of violins and gum-leaf bands. Kin groups were brought together. Though the practice has now stopped, the locations of the Christmas camps are fondly remembered by the parental and grand-parental generations in Aboriginal communities. The Christmas camps are now part of an Aboriginal cultural landscape which consists, in any one area, of a constellation of places such as old missions, mission cemeteries, and the sites of old fringe camps. It is a landscape which overlays or overlaps rather than replaces the Aboriginal cultural

¹⁴ Goodall 1996.

¹⁵ Goodall 1990.

¹⁶ Read 1984, 1996.

¹⁷ For references to Christmas camps see Attwood 1989 and Thomson 1989.

landscape of pre-settler days. Some Christmas camps, for instance, are on prehistoric coastal fishing and shellfish gathering sites which are marked by shell middens.¹⁸

The religious or sacred landscape of Aborigines was also being re-formed. As European settlement cut across the old sacred landscape, Dreaming sites marked by mountain peaks, rock outcrops, and water holes were often now on the other side of boundary fences. The raised-earth circles (*bora* grounds) which had been used for initiation rites were liable to be bisected by roads or crossed by telegraph lines. Sacred carved trees were cut down.

According to structural-functional anthropology's understanding of the Dreaming as a fixed 'charter' handed down to the living by ancestral beings and anchored to 'sacred sites', this scale of European intervention in the sacred landscape would surely have shattered Aboriginal spiritual life. The revision of the 'charter' model in recent years, however, underlines the agency of the living Aboriginal actor not only as receiver and transmitter but as interpreter and modifier of the Dreaming. According to Nancy Munn, writing of the Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia, what is passed on is not just the 'law' but 'a form or mode of experiencing the world in which the symbols of collectivity are constantly recharged with intimations of the self'.¹⁹ These symbols of collectivity include the landscape and ritual objects. Writing of the Pintupi, Fred Myers helps us to see that the Dreamtime as understood at any one time is not contradicted by novel events or the arrival of the totally unprecedented (e.g., white settlers).²⁰ These are not so much incorporated into the Dreaming as revealed, through visions, to be a previously unrealised dimension of it. This new understanding provides a background against which to consider evidence collected on the North Coast of New South Wales (NSW) in the middle decades of the twentieth century which reveals the existence of a greatly changed Aboriginal 'mythology' but one which was successfully assimilating elements of settler culture.²¹ Many elements of the settler landscape (a bridge, for instance, and a race-course) had been invested with specific supernatural attributes; stories circulated which associated certain places with the peripatetic activities of Birugan, a syncretic deity with some of the characteristics of Jesus. The new understanding of myth in anthropology may allow us to read such evidence not as indications of a corrupted, atrophying religious life but one which is alive, dynamic, and transactional.

A comparison might be drawn between the resignification of sacred space in post-1788 New South Wales and that resignification which was occurring in Christendom in the early first millennium AD as the sacred space of paganism, rather than being obliterated by Christian churches, shrines, and insignia, lived on inside the sacred space of Christendom.²² An equivalent process took place in Thailand as Mahayana Buddhism colonised the space of animism.²³ In Spanish America, Catholicism sought to domesticate the sacred places of the Aztec and Inca religions with curiously syncretic results. Gary Urton, for instance, addresses himself to the way the Spanish in the Andes

¹⁸ Information in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service's Aboriginal Sites Register.

¹⁹ Munn 1970, pp. 157-58.

²⁰ Myers 1986.

²¹ Calley 1964; Creamer 1984, p. 2.6; Hausfeld 1963; Radcliffe-Brown 1929; Sharpe 1985.

²² Fox 1988; Le Goff 1988; Russel 1984.

²³ Byrne 1995.

appropriated Inca sacred space to bolster colonial institutions while the Inca, not exactly at cross purposes, did something similar with the institutions and practices of the introduced religion: there are no institutions or practices untouched by history, there are no 'innocent survivors'.²⁴ Urton's comment might equally well apply—he shows this to be true—to places and spaces, sacred or secular. They are rarely pure, never immune to the reworking of history.

I suggest that one of the functions of the static-fragile conception of 'tribal' society against which Clifford writes has been to facilitate the wishful vision of a precolonial order swept away. The notion of a precolonial, indigenous intelligence persisting in 'settled' eastern Australia in the form of a signified landscape 'inside' the colonial landscape is in some ways subversive; that this signification might include the borrowing and recontextualisation of elements of the coloniser's own culture threatens the perceived solidity of that culture and hence, in a sense, its right to be there. As a branch of the colonial culture's spatial knowledge, archaeology has had a role in blinding us to this sort of agency on the part of the indigenous. Through a process of monumentalisation, archaeology has helped conceptualise 'genuine' indigenous culture not so much as entirely swept away but as contained or confined in the form of archaeological sites. Colonial archaeology, in this sense, is characteristically reductive.

Aboriginal culture in the southeast was perceived by white settlers to be a faded, static memory of a once vibrant 'traditional' culture. The archaeological sites, on the other hand, retained their integrity; as the Aborigines faded (i.e., changed) the sites stood in for them.²⁵ This is illustrated in the Sydney area where the horizontal sandstone exposures around the harbour and its many deeply-incised inlets bore thousands of engravings, executed by Aborigines prior to 1788, depicting human figures as well as whales, sharks, kangaroos, boomerangs. This land was parcelled out in the nineteenth century and soon houses, boat sheds, garden walls, and lighthouses were built on the sandstone, sharing space with the engravings or covering them over. By the 1830s, European residents of Sydney were commenting on the engravings and sketching them but they were mostly either uninterested or unsuccessful in eliciting information on them from local Aborigines. By the time amateur archaeologists began systematically recording the engravings in the 1880s the few surviving Aborigines of the region had long since been removed to missions. People like the surveyor W.D. Campbell discovered many of the lesser-known engravings by talking to old European landholders, some of whom recalled scraps of information passed on by departed Aborigines.²⁶ By virtue of their physical ownership of the land and their long residence on it these landholders assumed a sort of authority over the engravings denied to contemporary Aborigines who, living on the outskirts of the city, were rarely seen. In more ways than one, the engravings had become European property. Similarly, one of the attractions of Aboriginal stone artefacts in the eyes of the collector was, as Griffiths notes, that unlike Aboriginal-made tourist art, 'they could be 'discovered' and harvested for free, without Aboriginal mediation.'²⁷

²⁴ Upton 1990, p. 15.

²⁵ Allen 1988, p. 86.

²⁶ Campbell 1899.

²⁷ Griffiths 1996, p. 73. See also p. 81.

So the physical traces of the Aborigines were 'taken up' by settlers along with the land. These traces were seen as constituting a more authentic manifestation of Aboriginality than the acculturated persons of the living Aborigines themselves; in the logic of this frame of thought the settlers now possessed, in property, an authentic form of Aboriginality. More important, though, than the physical-spatial separation of Aboriginal remains from living Aborigines was the separation which was effected in certain European discourses. In addressing myself in what follows to the discourses of natural history, ethnology, and antiquarianism, in addition to that of archaeology, I am responding to what I see as the continuity between them. This continuity is not, or not strictly, chronological, but is of the nature of an alliance or formation of discourses.

Separation by discourse: natural history and ethnology

By the time Europeans were describing and settling Australia the discourse of natural history had forsaken the Renaissance tradition in which the magical and legendary attributes of a plant or animal might be included in the account given of it. This tradition had been left behind in favour of an Enlightenment classificatory approach based on observable physical attributes.²⁸ Once classificatory systems such as that of Linnaeus had been established one could relatively easily incorporate into them new plant and animal types encountered either in Europe or further afield. As Mary Louise Pratt observes, circumnavigation of the globe by Europeans brought into being not just a 'planetary consciousness' but a 'European global or planetary subject'.²⁹

One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize ('naturalize') new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system.³⁰

In this way one did not discover new species, one recognised them. What Joseph Banks and Carl Solander did with the plants and animals they found on the east coast of Australia in the mid-eighteenth century was to move them over into an existing European order.

As the exploratory gaze of the eighteenth century voyager scientist moved across the Australian landscape it registered rock outcrops, trees, native huts, lagoons, and natives fishing in lagoons all as a continuum (successive elements of a panorama fused by the sweep of the eye). Seen as an extension of nature, the Aborigines were naturalised. Defined as the description of the visible, natural history paid particular attention to the appearance of the Aborigines, to their bodies and artefacts, to their materiality. 'The peoples discovered are not submitted to an analysis of their internal cohesion', Daniel Defert observes, 'they are exposed to an inventory'.³¹ Given the fleeting nature of their stay such 'analysis' would, anyway, have been difficult for the earliest European observers.

²⁸ Foucault 1973.

²⁹ Pratt 1992, p. 30.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 31.

³¹ Defert 1982, p. 13.

An inventory had the advantage of being able to be compiled even when the natives were not around. In 1623 Jan Carstenz examined the interiors of the 'wretched huts' of the Aborigines on Cape York, finding pebbles, human bones, and some resin.³² On the west coast of the continent in 1688 and 1699 William Dampier examined camp sites to discover what food people ate and James Cook did the same at Botany Bay in 1770. By inspecting the food near the Aborigines' fires and by observing the contents of their huts Cook determined that they were a people who did not store food but, rather, subsisted from day to day.³³ It was fortunate that objects as well as people could serve as signs because the Aborigines could prove extremely elusive. Despite six weeks on the west coast and sixteen sorties on land by groups of his party, De Vlamingh never saw a soul.³⁴ Tasman's company spent ten days on the coast of Tasmania: 'They saw no Aboriginal people, though they saw fires in the woods, heard voices and deduced correctly, from a study of the distance between scars cut in the bark of trees, that they had been used for climbing up their trunks'.³⁵ Of course, on numerous other occasions Aborigines were encountered in person though it is remarkable how little the Europeans learned from them. The gaze of the explorer taking in an abandoned camp site, penetrating the interior of a vacant hut, remains a strong metaphor for the separation of people from their artefacts.

With the advent of European settlement the classificatory enterprise moved inland. Explorers, surveyors, geologists, and other scientists fanned out from the coastal settlements; trained observers, they frequently depicted Aboriginal camps, burials, and carved trees in their records and collected Aboriginal artefacts. The surveyors plotted rivers and mountains onto maps and laid down a cadastral grid over the land surface. Traces of Aborigines on the land were sometimes plotted onto maps where, fixed in the imperial space of English-style parishes and counties, they were recontextualised as items of quaint interest in an imperial inventory of resources.

The collection had a privileged place in the technology of natural history. As a pressed plant in a herbarium can be thought to definitively represent a species, so also the nature of Aborigines was approached as if it could be captured by collecting the artefacts, the bones, and even sometimes the persons of Aboriginal people. As voyager scientists were replaced by settlers and as Aborigines and their material culture were seen to change, the earlier collections began to acquire a certain cachet, representing, it was believed, the true nature of true Aborigines more accurately than did the living Aborigines and their products.

Thomas points out that in depicting the natives' artefacts as floating freely upon the page with no hint of their human associations, Banks' draughtsmen were concerned to show that their natural history was free of the licentiousness usually associated with curiosity.³⁶ Here the act of detachment can be seen to stem from natural history's effort to legitimise itself as a science but the detachment, nevertheless, was in tune with the

³² Mulvaney 1977, p. 263.

³³ Beaglehole 1955, p. 309, 312.

³⁴ Mulvaney 1958, p. 133.

³⁵ R. Jones 1992, p. 749.

³⁶ Thomas 1994a.

subsequent habit of treating artefacts as a form of Aboriginality free-standing and independent of Aborigines themselves.

The contention here is that the practice of natural history set the stage for the practice of heritage management by introducing the classificatory habit, with the inventory as a component device, and by encouraging the idea that objects (artefacts, sites, and the like) could be used to represent peoples and cultures. I will go on to argue that it is possible to see the same emphasis on observable physical attributes operating in racial classification.

Ethnology took up its place under the meta-discourse of natural history as a specialist field for the classification of Aborigines and their products. Nineteenth century racial classification was combined with Darwinian theory to arrive at the finding that Aborigines were not only naturally inferior to Europeans but were also serially prior to them. This established a pseudo-logic for Aboriginal mortality (as fossil survivors from another time they were fated to be supplanted) and, by denying Aborigines coequality with Europeans, it instituted the idea that Aboriginal artefacts of the present and recent past could be treated as the equivalent of those from the remote past. The principal significance of both was that they illustrated the Aborigines' otherness.³⁷ One result of this was the peculiar disjunction of competing identities which saw Europeans collecting stone artefacts at a time when Aborigines were rejecting them in favour of steel hatchets and flaked glass artefacts. Europeans categorised Aborigines as users of stone artefacts while Aborigines, presumably, saw themselves as users of steel and knapped-glass. The settler's construction of Aborigines thus always backdated them.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century natural history moved on from a classification based on observable phenomena to an interest in establishing the character of natural beings on the basis of what David Spurr has called 'the internal principle of organic structure':

This principle gave rise to a system or ordering that allowed for a hierarchy of characters depending on their relative complexity of organic structure and for classification according to certain key functions: how a species reproduces or what it eats. To classify therefore meant no longer simply to arrange the visible, but to perform a circular analysis that related the visible to the invisible, its 'deeper cause,' then arose again toward the surface of bodies to identify the signs that confirmed the hidden cause.³⁸

In their dual role as both evidence and proof of the Aborigines' character and place in the hierarchy of human development, Aboriginal artefacts became increasingly important display items. With the intensification of Western industrialisation during the nineteenth century Westerners came to see inventiveness as the hallmark of their society and to see technology, more than any other measure, as the index of their civilisation's superiority.³⁹ This goes a long way to account for the enthusiasm of Australian colonial governments to be represented at the great international expositions of the nineteenth century where Aboriginal artefacts would be laid out in juxtaposition to the products of

³⁷ Fabian 1983.

³⁸ Spurr 1993, p. 63.

³⁹ Adas 1989.

Australian settler society. Perhaps what was best exposed at these venues was the extent to which capitalism had commodified humanity.⁴⁰ Aboriginal artefacts became the baseline in an epic of technological progress which spoke of the immense distance Australia had travelled since 1788.

As the West discovered the world beyond its borders it began to seek its identity in relation to that world and against it; in other words, by reference to what was outside and opposite. The unilinear models of human progress already being advanced in the mid-eighteenth century allowed the non-Western world to serve as evidence of the West's prehistory. Voyages of discovery, as Johannes Fabian shows, became ventures in time-travel and the discovery of places like Australia became exercises in archaeology.⁴¹ The native Other became a dimension of the European subject. One appreciates that the sort of alterity which posited the Aborigines as the settlers' Other also brought the settlers into a certain intimacy with the Aborigines (the non-West, it has be argued, gave the West its identity, the concept of the West having no positivity of its own).⁴² White Australia became locked into maintaining its construction of the traditional-static Aborigine partly because the stability of its own identity depended upon it.

'Character,' understood in the sense used by Spurr, was an essence which could not be amenable to change—too much hinged on it. It was closely allied to the concept of race and because the racial type 'Aborigine' was, like all racial types, believed to be the embodiment of a particular physical essence, it followed that, via miscegenation, it could be found at an individual level either in a pure or diluted form. The Aboriginal type itself in this view could thus be sub-divided into 'half-castes', 'quarter castes' and even finer discriminations (e.g., 'octaroons'). In the one-way street of racial discourse Aboriginality could be lost, but not added to.

When the concept of biological race was abandoned by anthropologists in the mid-twentieth century it was left, Gillian Cowlshaw notes, to social anthropologists rather than physical anthropologists to define who the Aborigines were.⁴³ In the event, the former defined them by reference to the surviving elements of 'traditional' Aboriginal culture in the north and centre of the continent. Culture took the place of blood and the concept of the 'pure' or 'full-blood' Aborigine was replaced by that of the 'traditional' Aborigine.⁴⁴ Since Aboriginal culture in the southeast had so obviously changed from what it was in 1788, then those in settler society who had an interest in 'real/authentic' Aboriginality were forced to seek that essence elsewhere. They sought it in the past and on the frontier (the frontier being as remote to most settlers as was the pre-1788 past). Meanwhile, Aboriginal culture *as lived* by Aborigines in the southeast continued on under the noses, as it were, of the settlers. The gap opened up between the 'real'/remote Aborigines and Aboriginal people of the southeast is, of course, purely conceptual, but it continues to be used as a political weapon against Aborigines in places like New South Wales. One of the perils of heritage practice and its privileging of the past is that in the 'wrong hands' it becomes part of this general offensive.

⁴⁰ Breckenridge 1989; Lucáks 1971.

⁴¹ *op cit.*

⁴² Todorov 1985; MacLean 1992-93.

⁴³ Cowlshaw 1987.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ingold 1986.

Ethnology and archaeology were practised as inseparable discourses in Australia up till the mid-twentieth century. John Mulvaney in 1958, in an almost ritualistic cleaning of the slate before 'modern' archaeology began, held the cultural evolutionism of ethnology to account for the damage it had done to Aborigines.⁴⁵ In what follows, however, I have paired antiquarianism with archaeology, doing so in the interests of drawing out their shared propensity to produce Aboriginal remains as a particular kind of 'cultural capital' in settler and national society.⁴⁶

Separation by discourse: antiquarianism and archaeology

Originating in Renaissance humanism, antiquarianism was saved from being assimilated by the later discourses of art history and archaeology by the extent to which it treated the possession and display of antiquities, at both a private and state level, as an end in itself rather than a means to knowledge.⁴⁷ Antiquarianism, however, has tended not to be allocated a separate place in the history of 'Aboriginal studies', the private collectors of Aboriginal artefacts tending to be seen as practising amateur forms of archaeology or ethnology in the 'vacuum' which existed prior to the advent in Australia of professional anthropology in the 1920s and professional archaeology in the 1960s. In choosing to give antiquarian collectors separate consideration here I am persuaded by their importance in circulating Aboriginal artefacts through settler society, broadcasting the notion of Aboriginal culture as collectable.

It followed from the perception of Aboriginal culture as 'fossilised' that little distinction was made between wooden spears and shields obtained from living Aborigines and stone implements which may have been millennia old. Both were collected, frequently by the same people. The balance between old and new depended partly on where the collector was situated: on the frontier, wooden artefacts, baskets, ritual objects, and personal ornaments were obtainable whereas in settled areas only prehistoric stone artefacts were collectable in a primary sense. Of far greater importance was the distinction alluded to earlier between those collectors driven by unadorned curiosity and those whose curiosity was legitimised as science.⁴⁸ At Port Jackson both the convicts and the officers of the First Fleet collected avidly, though the line between collecting for profit and collecting for knowledge was somewhat blurred.⁴⁹ The strong market for 'ethnographic' objects among private metropolitan collectors would soon find its counterpart in the Australian colonies themselves.

In most parts of Australia prehistoric Aboriginal stone artefacts could be found on the surface of the ground—eroding, for instance, from sand dunes and stream banks or

⁴⁵ Mulvaney 1958.

⁴⁶ This is a very free adaptation of Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic and cultural capital. The labour and time which go into collecting artefacts and sites is offset by the accumulation of what is a symbolic resource which can be converted into a form of prestige (in identity), improving the standing, authority, and ultimately the power of the nation state (Bourdieu 1977, p. 171-83).

⁴⁷ See Pomian 1990 who links this development to the development of the secular state.

⁴⁸ Thomas 1994a. See also Thomas 1991 on the tension which existed on board the *Endeavour* between the collecting activities of the natural scientists on the one hand and the common sailors on the other, a tension which he shows to be so revealing of the state of European knowledge on the brink of the Age of Science.

⁴⁹ McBryde 1989, p. 176.

turned up by the plough. The budding anthropologist A.P. Elkin noted in the early part of the present century that Australia was a country 'where a 1918 motor tyre may easily be punctured by a Paleolithic (sic) or Old Stone Age spear head'.⁵⁰ This view of Aboriginal archaeological sites as two-dimensional metaphorised the 'flat time' in which Aborigines were believed to dwell.

The exploits of stone artefact collectors were acknowledged in *Science of Man*, a journal published by the Sydney-based Anthropological Society of Australasia (1895-1913), and later (in the 1930s and 40s) in *Mankind*, the journal of the Anthropological Society of NSW. The ASNSW and its equivalent in Victoria functioned somewhat as clubs of private artefact collectors who, in a practice which may have been borrowed from the Society of Antiquaries in London, exhibited their acquisitions for the benefit of other members at Society meetings. It would be wrong to say the collectors were uninterested in the theory or practice of ethnology and archaeology.⁵¹ In New South Wales in the 1930s some of them assisted Fred McCarthy in the excavation of rock shelter deposits and in Victoria they helped familiarise Mulvaney with that state's archaeological record when he began his archaeological research there.⁵² Many collectors were keenly interested in classification and helped produce the early stone tool typologies.

Their collections, however, took first priority. They were first and foremost *personal* collections, virtual extensions, as Susan Sontag brilliantly shows, of the collector's person.⁵³ In Griffith's sweeping history of antiquarianism in Victoria he writes of how this could extend to a nostalgic attachment by the collector to the sites from which Aboriginal stone artefacts had previously been collected.⁵⁴ The collectors might—many indeed did—donate or bequeath their collections to public museums but it was *collections* they handed over, nurtured creations, not just raw job-lots of material.⁵⁵ Also, following Pierre Bourdieu, the collections constituted a form of cultural capital which enhanced the social position of the collectors.⁵⁶

In the 1960s and 70s Australian governments passed legislation protecting Aboriginal 'relics', simultaneously designating professional archaeologists as those licensed to collect or excavate them.⁵⁷ I will argue later that the state only moved to protect Aboriginal cultural remains when it was ready to graft Aboriginal culture, or a reified version of it, onto the national identity. In this view of things, archaeology thus only achieved supremacy over antiquarianism when the artefacts were 'nationalised'. Which is to say that the artefacts, which had accumulated cultural capital for the

⁵⁰ Wise 1985, p.26.

⁵¹ Mulvaney 1977.

⁵² Mulvaney 1981, p. 18.

⁵³ Sontag 1993.

⁵⁴ Griffiths 1996, p. 85.

⁵⁵ One of the best known Sydney collectors of the 1920s-40s, C.C. Towle, left a collection of 14,000 Aboriginal artefacts, mostly stone, to the Australian Museum (*Mankind* 3, No. 10, 1947, p. 307). See also Griffiths 1996, pp. 66-85.

⁵⁶ Bourdieu 1977.

⁵⁷ Joan Evans 1956 traces institutional aspects of this separation in England; John Mulvaney 1981 refers to the situation in Victoria, and Hilary du Cros 1983 addresses the process of closure against collectors in NSW.

collectors as private citizens, now were able to accumulate a form of cultural capital for the state.

Archaeology in the last few decades has engaged selectively with living Aboriginal culture. Murray, however, observes that archaeology's particular use of ethnography has perpetuated the idea of a timeless Aboriginal culture originally promoted by cultural evolutionism.⁵⁸ He points to 'the tendency among archaeologists (who use the ethnographic database uncritically) to create timeless ethnographic presents which are simply retrodicted into prehistory as reliable guides to the nature of prehistoric society'.⁵⁹ The uncritical ethnoarchaeology and ethnohistory to which he refers has focussed respectively on the remote Aborigines of the Centre and North and the historical recordings of Aborigines in the South and thus it conforms to the formula that authentic Aboriginality resides only on the frontier or in the past. Correspondingly, there has until very recently been an almost studious avoidance of 'contact' archaeology.⁶⁰ There has been little research interest by archaeologists, for instance, in the early incorporation of glass and ceramics as raw materials for artefact knapping. It is this type of interest which might open up the issue of Aboriginal agency in technology transfer or of Aboriginal agency in making over other Europeans products and practices. Archaeology has furthered the conceptual separation of pre- and post-contact Aboriginality by avoiding precisely that area where continuity would be found.

Others have written more fully on the four discourses I have singled out here. My particular concern has been with their colonial context and application. I turn now from the question of how settler society has seen Aborigines and Aboriginality to the question of how settler society has seen itself.

National identity without Aborigines

By 1880 seventy percent of the settler population was Australian-born. The six Australian colonies had attained a substantial degree of autonomy from Britain and were twenty years away from Federation and nationhood. Early settler society may have been a 'fragment' of Britain but despite the best attempts to reproduce the homeland in Australia the class structure, the economy, and the political process, to say nothing of the natural environment, had all been radically different from the outset.⁶¹ By the 1850s there was already a consciousness among settlers of being different to the British, a sense of distinctiveness which by the 1890s had produced a mythologised Australian 'type': sturdy, bush-wise, independent, and male, he was an amalgam of the outback pioneer and the gold digger.

There was a strident, chauvinistic note to the way Australian identity was asserted in the 1890s which had not been present earlier. Also evident was a belief in an intimate connection between the emergent 'new breed' and certain unique qualities of the land. This belief is of central importance here and it calls for some comment on the phenomenon of nationalism from which it proceeded. Emerging first in the Americas, the model for the modern nation state was exported to Europe in the nineteenth century

⁵⁸ Murray 1992a.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Colley and Bickford, 1996; Murray 1996.

⁶¹ Hartz 1964.

and subsequently adopted by the settler colonies.⁶² Despite possessing typically polyethnic, polyglottal communities, and despite possessing borders drawn by international peace conferences or colonial masters, nation states nevertheless and remarkably assert an abiding and almost religious connection with the national soil.⁶³ As a counter to their actual heterogeneity, nation states have tended to rely heavily on the use of unifying emblems, the performance of rites of commonality, and on the invention of tradition.⁶⁴ They have also relied on the use of alterity. In conceptualising itself, the 'imagined community', to borrow Benedict Anderson's term for the nation, simultaneously imagines its Other (the 'not we') in the person of the nations which surround it.

At the end of the nineteenth century settler Australia was almost homogeneous from an ethnic standpoint. It had a single common language and enjoyed a degree of geographic boundedness rare among nations. What it lacked was historical depth, that attribute which Eric Hobsbawm has identified as the strongest known 'proto-national cement'.⁶⁵ What it lacked was a rationale for why this particular population should be located in this particular place. Had things been slightly different, had for instance the Dutch East India Company been less mercantile and more territorial in ambition, Australia might quite easily have been subsumed within the Dutch East Indies. But it was not merely the plain fact of the absence of historical depth which was problematic for Australia—plenty of the new European nations had no single history they could call their own. Rather, it was the question of how such depth could be finessed in a situation where the pre-1788 past was plainly Aboriginal. Efforts were being made in the 1890s to address this matter.

In the field of art, Bernard Smith has detected a shift late in that decade from a nationalism which, 'exuberant and generous,' had celebrated what seemed unique in the Australian landscape, to a nationalism which changed into an 'anti-foreign chauvinism'.⁶⁶ Conrad Marten's watercolours were attacked by Sydney Long for not being evocative of the 'weird mystery' of the bush and the native-born Arthur Streeton became a culture-hero: 'To paint Australia you had to be Australian... Unless you were born with 'Australian' eyes you could not hope to 'see' the Australian landscape'.⁶⁷ As to the weird mystery of the bush, it was, as Smith points out, not

...an intrinsic quality of Australian nature but a notion elaborated by Marcus Clarke. By the time Long received it the idea had become sufficiently acclimatized to appear as a quality native to the bush itself and not, as in truth it was, the distillation of a century of colonial experience of bush life.⁶⁸

Streeton's paintings 'vibrate in our national being' wrote J.S. MacDonald, Director of the National Gallery in Melbourne, 'For we are not only a nation, but a race, and both occupy a particular territory and spring from a specific soil'.⁶⁹ If the project of

⁶² Anderson 1991.

⁶³ Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1986.

⁶⁴ Hobsbawm and Ranger 1989.

⁶⁵ Hobsbawm 1990, p. 73.

⁶⁶ Smith 1975, p. 231.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Quoted in Hughes 1970, p. 66.

colonisation required the presence of an Aboriginal Other for the purposes of alterity (they who were inferior and prior to us) then the project of colonial nationalism required the presence of an additional Other—in this case, they who cannot 'see'. The Other, whether of the colony or nation, has this quality of being always there at the core of the 'We'. In Homi Bhabha's words:

The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'.⁷⁰

The first of a series of translations had thus begun whereby the land's strangeness became an essential quality perceptible only to the Australian-born. First they could see the strangeness of the land, later the strangeness would mystically come to reside in them as an essence. It was a process of translation by virtue of which settler Australia mythologised itself as indigenous.

New natives were emerging. What, then, of the other natives, the Aborigines? At the time Australian national identity was first being formulated, Aborigines were perceived to be a dying race whose membership or otherwise of the national community was hardly an issue. Cultural evolutionism, moreover, defined their society as a low and savage anachronism. So, while Aboriginal artefacts might usefully be juxtaposed with settler products in a narrative of technological progress, any equivalent of the 'Indianization' of eighteenth century North American settler identity would seem to have been out of the question. The ostentatious emulation of certain Indian ways which accompanied the massacre of Indian persons was enabled by the Enlightenment conception of the Indian as a type of natural man.⁷¹ Times and views had changed. Eighteenth century Americans and early twentieth century Australians both had come to the conviction that the frontier had produced a superior fighting man, but whereas the Americans' saw their way of fighting as coming from the Indians, the Digger at Gallipoli was seen as having been spawned by the bush and the goldfields.

Yet certain aspects of Aboriginal culture were powerfully attractive to a new nation casting around for symbols and emblems of essential Australianness and some of these aspects were admissible. Aboriginal words provided original-sounding place names and were used from the earliest days of the colony; depictions of Aborigines were introduced into the work of silversmiths and other decorative artists in the 1880s, along with native ferns, kangaroos, emus and emu eggs. Later, and at a more serious level, the sacred designs of the Aranda found their way into the work of artists like Margaret Preston and during the 1930s, 40s and 50s the concentric circle motif of the Aranda *tjurunga* appeared on European secular objects ranging from book covers to caravan curtains.⁷² There was a limit, however, to how far these references might be taken.

It was the importance to Australian national identity of the notion of racial purity which stood as the most significant barrier to such borrowings. The White Australia immigration policy, supported by both conservative and left governments from the 1890s right up until the 1960s, was designed to ensure that racial purity was maintained. Until the proximity of the populous Asian neighbourhood began to unnerve those

⁷⁰ Bhabha 1990, p. 4.

⁷¹ Slotkin 1973.

⁷² P. Jones 1992, p. 107.

Australians committed to white supremacy in the 1890s it had been 'safe' to proclaim the non-Britishness of Australia; after that time the unblemished quality of the Anglo-Saxon stock was proudly and unreservedly maintained.⁷³ In White Australia the Aborigines were not counted in the national census; in a sense they were the foreigners within. When the embargo on the use of Aboriginality in the framing of national identity was finally removed in the 1960s it was not the innovative, transactional, frequently urban and ghettoized Aboriginality shared by living Aborigines which was drawn upon by white Australians but the 'traditional,' static, materialised Aboriginality with its complement of archaeological remains.

The production of a deep nation

In the decade from 1965 a series of laws was passed by the State and Federal Governments in Australia to protect Aboriginal artefacts and sites (including Aboriginal 'archaeological' sites, human skeletal remains, and places of sacred significance). The prevailing view was that the legislation was an obvious and long-overdue response by government to the rapid loss of Aboriginal archaeological remains and the obvious need to actively manage what survived.

Why were measures not taken previously? There had been pressure for protective legislation in New South Wales since 1889 when Robert Etheridge described the lack of action to stop the tide of loss as almost 'a national disgrace'.⁷⁴ The question of protection for the rock art of the Sydney area was raised in the NSW parliament in 1905 and the Anthropological Society of NSW mounted a campaign in the 1930s for government protection of Aboriginal 'relics.' McCarthy used the offices of the Museum to petition State parliament which seemed to show some interest in 1939 but then the outbreak of war and a change of government intervened. The campaign was revitalised in 1947 yet nothing concrete was achieved in NSW until 1970 when blanket protection was afforded to Aboriginal sites by an amendment to the National Parks and Wildlife Act. What is remarkable is that when the change came, it came without fuss. There was almost no debate on the proposed legislation in the NSW parliament and no opposition to it. The pattern was similar in the other states while at the Federal level the Australian Heritage Commission Bill passed through Federal Parliament quite without controversy.

The enabling agencies set up to administer the new laws were staffed mostly by archaeologists. The turnaround described above occurred only a few years—a decade at most—after the establishment of professional archaeology in Australia and the profession has tended to see itself as playing a central role in bringing it about. The truth, I suggest, was otherwise and is dramatically apparent in the language of the parliamentary debates of the time which drew heavily upon a discourse of heritage then emerging in Australian politics. Introducing the legislation into the NSW House of Assembly in 1969 the government minister responsible warned that if 'our more valuable relic areas are not protected... we will, as a nation, be immeasurably impoverished'.⁷⁵ In the Victorian parliament the Minister introducing the Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Bill in 1972 argued that 'These relics should be

⁷³ Cole 1971, p. 515.

⁷⁴ Etheridge 1889, p. 15.

⁷⁵ *Hansard* (NSW) No. 81, pp. 2, 190-91.

regarded as the cultural heritage of the people of the land of their origin'.⁷⁶ We can take it he meant the present citizenry. A Member of the House commended this bill, saying 'we are concerned with the history of Aborigines as part of the history of Australia'.⁷⁷ The same rhetoric of national appropriation accompanied protective legislation through the parliaments of Queensland and Western Australia.⁷⁸ In NSW and elsewhere in eastern Australia Aborigines had been left out of the consultative process and were given no role in the administrative machinery established for site protection (though within a few years most of the agencies had set up advisory committees with Aboriginal representation). The legislation had not aimed at preserving the 'relics' for Aborigines and, given that in these more densely settled areas of the continent the conceptual separation between Aboriginal sites and living Aboriginal people was complete, it appears that the legislators quite genuinely failed to see any connection between the two.⁷⁹

Yet it seems equally clear that the reason the remains were to be protected was not that they were 'archaeological' and thus scientifically valuable. If the archaeological value of the sites appears to have been a consideration for law makers this was, I suggest, because archaeologists had worked to elide archaeology and heritage. While earlier campaigners had argued that Aboriginal sites were the scientifically valuable *property* of the nation, from the 1960s archaeologists argued that they were the *heritage* of the nation.⁸⁰ The distinction is an important one and has to do with the difference between identity (one identifies with and is identified by one's heritage) and possession ('relics' as property of the nation in the sense that mineral and forest resources are perceived as property).

Whether it was archaeologists or legislators who first began to think of Aboriginal sites as national heritage is not as significant here as the fact that archaeologists had begun to articulate their work as part of a national identity project, a project which, in Harry Allen's words would aim at 'grafting white culture directly onto an Aboriginal root'.⁸¹ In this respect the papers presented at the 1968 Conference on Prehistoric Monuments and Antiquities in Australia, held in Canberra and organised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, are interesting in that they mark perhaps the first concerted use by archaeologists of the discourse of heritage. For McCarthy,

⁷⁶ *Hansard* (VIC) No. 19, p. 5001.

⁷⁷ *Hansard* (VIC) No. 20, p. 5407.

⁷⁸ For Queensland see David Trigger 1980, for Western Australia see Elizabeth N. Hawke 1975.

⁷⁹ See Sullivan 1985: 141-42. Changes to the NSW legislation in 1974 'recognised that Aboriginal people in the State might have 'traditional' spiritual attachment to natural landscape features but still did not recognise that 'relics' would be of significance to them. A survey of 'traditional' sites which began in 1973 soon began to show that Aboriginal people in NSW considered archaeological 'relic' sites to be significant as well (see Creamer 1984, 1988; Kelly 1975, 1979).

⁸⁰ For the earlier view see for example the argument that they should not be 'lost to the people of the [NSW] State' by Robert Etheridge in *Mankind* 1, No. 1, 1931, p. 6; the claim that they were the 'State collections and the people's collections' by F. D. McCarthy 1938, p. 122; the claim that they were 'national relics' made by H. J. Wright 1941, p. 7. See also Griffiths 1996, p. 145 on Charles Barrett's argument that Aboriginal 'relics' should be protected as 'national possessions'.

⁸¹ Allen 1988, p. 83.

legislation was essential for the protection of 'our heritage of Aboriginal antiquities'; Mulvaney, similarly, urged the protection of 'this national heritage' and Edwards asked for government support 'to perpetuate this valuable, centuries-old heritage which our young nation has adopted'.⁸²

Recalling that until the 1960s Australian national identity had been constructed partly in *opposition* to Aborigines and the other non-white 'races' one can appreciate just how radical a change had taken place. The real break came, I suggest, with the Second World War and the struggle against fascism; after that, a national identity based upon 'racial' purity was simply no longer tenable, especially not as post-war Australia opened its doors to large scale immigration from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean and later from Asia. Government policy on Aborigines moved painfully from assimilation, to integration, to multiculturalism. The implications of what amounted to an official sanctioning not only of Aborigines as Aborigines but of Aborigines as Australians (the compact of the referendum of 1967) were profound. Unlike white Australian culture which was broadly indistinguishable from Western culture in general, Aboriginal culture was highly distinct and recognisable internationally. A reified version of Aboriginal culture had thus always been perfect as an ingredient in the formation of national identity and the White Australia barrier to its deployment was now removed. Its removal, though, signalled not an approach to the reality of Aboriginal existence but somewhat the opposite, an unrestrained embracing of Aboriginal 'heritage'. It can be seen, I believe, that this was the culmination of the process of separation referred to earlier—natural history, ethnology, antiquarianism, and archaeology all helped produce a 'detached' version of Aboriginal culture which could then be assimilated by the would-be 'deep nation'.⁸³

Not enjoying sovereign power over its citizens, the modern nation state's power rests on the consensus of the citizenry in its rule. Employing the concept of hegemony, Gramsci explained how the state uses the sphere of culture to help obtain this consensus. He showed how the sense of commonality generated in this sphere leads individuals not so much to 'identify' with the state or nation (in the way we normally understand that term) as to experience it as collective individual. Richard Handler's work on the heritage industry in Quebec is perhaps the most detailed explication we have of how objects and places can be raised from the level of being a private resource to that of being a resource of the nation state (or, in Bourdieu's terms, from being the cultural capital of the individual to being the cultural capital of the nation state).⁸⁴ Having no objective existence of its own, these objects and places, which can be listed, curated, and displayed, lend presence to the nation.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the heritage site or place in the process of national identity formation. Places and sites are part of the national soil and terrain—even so-called built heritage has its foundations in the soil and terrain. They are grounded in the body of the nation. The concept of the national 'geo-body', as developed by Thongchai, is useful here in helping us understand the way the modern

⁸² McCarthy 1970, p. xiii; Mulvaney 1970, p. 117; Edwards 1970, p. 159.

⁸³ Bhabha 1990, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Handler 1988.

nation fetishizes its terrain and the borders of its terrain (its boundedness).⁸⁵ I would suggest here that if the state in Australia favours archaeology over antiquarianism this may partly be to do with the way that archaeology respects the in-ground depositional context and integrity of Aboriginal remains; antiquarian collecting, by contrast, to the extent to which it tears artefacts out of (or off the surface of) the ground, represents a violation of the nation's geo-body.⁸⁶

Australia's embracing of Aboriginal heritage as part of national heritage has not, unfortunately, meant an end to treating Aboriginal culture as the Other of white Australian culture. Both Jones and Murray show how the Otherness of Aborigines was changeable, mutating between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a vision of noble savagery to one of ugly brutishness.⁸⁷ Perhaps the current vision of Aboriginality as national heritage represents simply a further shift in alterity; perhaps the essentialism of Aboriginality-as-heritage is really not so different from the essentialism of the nineteenth century 'construction of Aboriginality which, among other things, served to highlight the technological advancement of settler Australia. The latter said to metropolitan Europe, 'we may be at the savage end of the earth but look how similar we are to you in our accomplishments'; the former says, 'we may appear to be the same as you (i.e., Western) but look at how uniquely of this place we are'. In each case identity is moored via alterity to a 'primitivist' construction of Aboriginality which must not be allowed to change.⁸⁸

'By definition', writes Ellen Badone, 'the notion of a cultural patrimony presupposes the existence of an authentic cultural baseline, situated in the past, which is being eroded by modern influences'.⁸⁹ In the Australian context, because the 'primitivist' construction of Aboriginality is so threatened by the innovative reality of contemporary Aboriginal culture, increasing effort must be invested by the nation to produce and stabilise the Aboriginality of heritage. It is precisely here that the value to the nation of the archaeological record is established: in its concrete materiality it is a vision of Aboriginality not susceptible to change, not available to the type of erosion to which Badone refers but ideally suited to being made over as cultural capital for the building of national identity. The 'authentic cultural baseline' became the target of the nationwide salvage project initiated and coordinated by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (established 1964) in its early years. Aboriginal 'archaeological' sites were included along with 'traditional' culture, language, and Dreaming sites as the main categories towards which the recording programme was directed. All were seen to be in danger of disappearing, but the archaeological sites, with the exception of rock art sites, were less vulnerable to attrition than was 'traditional' culture. The Institute's recording

⁸⁵ Thongchai, 1988, analyses the way that Siam, as a bordered geo-political entity, came into being only in the last decades of the nineteenth century and how this mapped entity was projected back into the past; see also Anderson 1991, pp. 171-75, for his discussion of Thongchai.

⁸⁶ Elsewhere (Byrne 1993: 173-74), though, I have argued that the modern state's attitude to antiquarianism is one of ambivalence. There is a sense in which the private circulation and 'performance' of antiquities in places like Thailand may be tolerated by the state.

⁸⁷ R. Jones 1992; Murray 1992b, p. 732.

⁸⁸ Marianna Torgovnick 1990 gives a general account of the discourse of primitivism; Nicholas Thomas 1994b, pp. 171-85, discusses its operation in the context of settler societies.

⁸⁹ Badone 1992, p. 811.

programmes, along with those of the state heritage agencies, added to the baseline the weight of tens of thousands of archaeological sites and these, arguably, helped to compensate for the loss of 'traditional' culture.

Australian archaeology has tended to see itself as innocent of power. Innocent, not in the sense of believing itself to be unempowered or unengaged politically—Mulvaney, for instance, advocates the active engagement of archaeology in the 'public arena'⁹⁰ and his career has epitomised this—but in failing to see itself enmeshed by, acted upon, and in a way, diminished by formations which stand outside or around it. Those formations which have concerned me here have been the Australian nation state and the 'culture' of colonialism.⁹¹

In writing of power as it acts upon individuals in the modern age Foucault maintained that:

They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.⁹²

The element of nationalism present in Australian archaeological writing provides an illustration of this—not the more obvious nationalism of heritage, discussed above, but the concern with identity which lies submerged in much of this writing. Murray draws attention to the fact that, unlike much of the history and anthropology carried out over the last couple of decades, prehistoric archaeology has done little to debunk the idea of the timeless/traditional Aborigine—in his words, the 'essential Aborigine'.⁹³ I would suggest the reason for this lies at least partly in the extent to which, during the 1960s and 70s, archaeology entangled itself in the business of heritage. The virtual merging of the discourses of archaeology and heritage which this involved locked Australian archaeology into a form of essentialism.

A post-national archaeology

The nation state perceives itself to be hyper-discrete in space but virtually unbounded in time: its 'geo-body', in other words, is projected back into 'history'. By assisting in this project of deepening, archaeology has to some extent locked itself into the largely primitivist discourse of 'Aboriginal heritage'. I mean by this that however archaeologists, individually, may think about Aboriginal cultural remains, it is now difficult to champion their conservation without engaging in a discourse shaped by national identity builders, tourism operators, Greens, and New Ager. This discourse which essentializes Aboriginal culture as environmentally-friendly, time-less, traditional, and 'threatened by modernity'.⁹⁴

As noted by Murray, Aborigines, for their own reasons, also 'trade in the currency of essentialism'.⁹⁵ This is hardly surprising, considering the extraordinary valorization of the timeless-traditional conception of Aboriginal culture by settler discourses,

⁹⁰ Mulvaney 1988, p. 216.

⁹¹ Thomas 1994b.

⁹² Foucault 1980, p. 98.

⁹³ Murray 1992a, p. 18. See also Murray 1992b.

⁹⁴ Thomas 1994b, p. 177.

⁹⁵ See for example Murray 1996, p. 76.

archaeology among them. But if archaeology has helped to produce this situation it can also help to undo it.

If archaeology in Australia were to cease concerning itself with the nation's desire for 'depth' it might rise, as it were, to the surface. By 'surface' I mean that relatively horizontal (post-1788) space or terrain across which are distributed the traces of the Aboriginal contact and post-contact experience, a terrain where duration is measured in generations (life-times) rather than millennia. An archaeology of the post-contact would counter nationalist archaeology by refusing to locate 'real' Aboriginality in the pre-colonial past.⁹⁶ One would hope that, equally, it would refuse the obsession with cultural purity.

The shortcomings of the term 'contact' were noted earlier; in particular, the perhaps insufficient emphasis it gives to the mutual entanglement on the part of Aborigines, Europeans, Chinese and others. Ann Curthoys and Stephen Muecke have recently suggested that a post-nationalist Australia would be one where the racial purity and exclusion of others which characterised the nationalism of the first half of the present century would be replaced by, among other things, an emphasis on *difference* and *inclusion*.⁹⁷ A post-national archaeology, I suggest, could be one which, breaking free of the essentialist heritage model, focused instead on the trafficking of objects and ideas between Aboriginal and other cultures in the period after 1788 and which turned its attention to the 'traces' of the cultural transactions which occurred in this period.

The 'site' concept, which has always done violence to Aboriginal concepts of land and country, could be abandoned in favour of an understanding of cultural landscapes as artefacts in which the same physical places are experienced and signified differently by different groups.⁹⁸ This, indeed, would be part of a general reversal of the heritage industry's prioritizing of materiality over meaning. The materialist orientation with its paranoia about the erosion of a 'non-renewable resource' (another essentialist manifestation) would be thrown off in favour of a realisation that the 'resource' (the reservoir of traces of Aboriginal past) is constantly being topped up. Not just in the sense of replenishment, of contemporary generations leaving their own traces behind, but also in the sense of re-newal through interpretation.

It is too late to propose an inclusion of Aborigines into the practice of heritage management: they have already been appropriating elements of it for some time and making over of heritage discourse can only de-nationalize it. No longer just assistants to white archaeologists in the production of a past which is unrecognisable to them (a past populated by stone artefacts rather than people), they appear to be using it to create local pasts—Clifford's 'local futures'—which might well, initially, be unrecognisable to us.

⁹⁶ Both Murray 1996 and Colley and Bickford 1996 have argued for a greater focus on the archaeology of the post-1788 period. For Murray, this would be a key component of a 'post-Mabo' archaeology in Australia.

⁹⁷ Curthoys and Muecke 1993, p. 179.

⁹⁸ See Ellis 1994 and Ross 1996 for a critique of the 'site' concept in Australian heritage practice.

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