

REPORTS FROM A WILD COUNTRY

ETHICS FOR DECOLONISATION

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degree of abstraction, ethics are properly always situated. In the words of John Roth (1999: xiv): 'Any ethical system that thinks it has the solution to every problem has the potential to be genocidal. Ethics must no longer be a closed system, but a way of living ... in openness to the vulnerability of others ...' Like the living beings who call and respond, ethics are situated in bodies and in time and in place. Situatedness poses significant challenges for our New World societies. Our immersion in concepts of disconnection, our future-orientation, our seeming indifference to the losses that colonisation entail – these and other specificities of our way of conceptualising and actualising time and place ensure that ethics place particular, perhaps unique, demands upon us.

Throughout this book I aim to offer wide-ranging and nuanced accounts and contexts of ethics. The book is divided into three sections, each of which is focused on a different aspect of time and place. Part I, 'Here and Now', examines issues of time and place in the mode of the past. Part II, 'Battlefields', examines claims to the future, as evidenced in struggles over the bodies, souls, and country-relationships of Aboriginal people. Part III, 'Tracks', works within the present moment, and explores the idea that the ground itself – the earth and its living things – holds traces not only of our damage but also of our alternatives. Throughout the book the stories and analysis diverge in some places and converge in others; in Part III I bring the various strands together in the interest of more densely woven accounts. Chapters 10 and 11 speak quite specifically to reconciliation and to countermodern alternatives. My purpose is to show that ethics for decolonisation work with harm, twisting violence back into flourishing and life-affirming relationships.

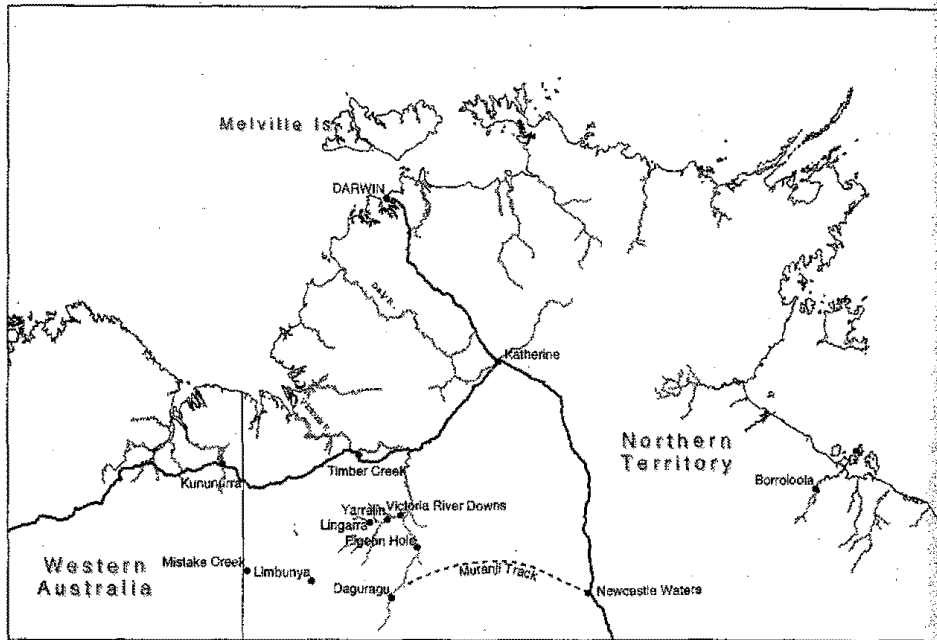
PART ONE

HERE AND NOW

Many of my Aboriginal teachers in the Northern Territory expressed views that I understood to indicate that they believed that Whitefellas were in a state of epistemological crisis. In particular, they pointed to actions and ideas which to them indicated that Whitefellas were trapped in a state of confusion about their own past and their own place. Not knowing what to remember and what to forget, Whitefellas, according to Victoria River people, follow dead laws, fail to recognise living ones and, in our power and denial, continue to promote death. Similarly with regard to place, people spoke of Whitefellas 'coming up blind' and bumping into everything. The living presence of the living country in its own flourishing particularity was not noticed by Whitefellas, whose mission was conquest. Their purpose was to 'put the flag' (to quote Anzac Munnganyi of Pigeon Hole, in Rose 1996a: 18).

Aboriginal people's questions and analysis arise from contexts in which the here-ness of the place is vividly present, and in which the now-ness of the living moment is the time of life and encounter. These chapters look to some of the ways in which Whitefellas have deflected the living 'here and now'. The analysis focuses on structures and processes of distance – on ways of pushing away the people and places and times that truly are close to us.

RECUPERATION



Historians must also consider how the past has become the present and how the present relates to the past. Nations rest on such historical consciousness – on a chain of connection between ‘them’ and ‘us’ – and so we need histories that create a sense of moral engagement with the past in the present. (Attwood & Foster 2003: 26)

Hobbles Danaiyarri spoke of efforts to conceal and contain the histories of colonisation as they affected Indigenous people: ‘Captain Cook bin coverem up me gotta big swag.’ He spoke out of the knowledge that much has been silenced, that history is contested, and that knowledge has been and will continue to be manipulated. His intention was to promote the kind of moral engagement Attwood & Foster call for in the succinct statement of purpose just quoted.

The past is contested territory, and so memory, ethics, and narratives are also contested. Some politicians, for example, exhort us to accept an account of history that enables us to feel ‘comfortable and relaxed’ (John Howard, quoted in Attwood & Foster 2003: 13). Remembrance, it would seem, should focus on that which causes no discomfort. By default, amnesia should surround that which causes discomfort. My Aboriginal teachers in the Victoria River District would have understood this exhortation as further evidence of both epistemological chaos and the colonising practice of concealment – of covering people with a big swag.

In this chapter I take up Attwood & Foster's challenge to explore the basis of a moral engagement with the past in the present. Three main themes draw my attention: ethics and history, practices that entice us to abandon our moral presence, and the project of recuperation.

The Weight of History

Ann Curthoys (2003: 186) links Australia's contestation over history to similar debates in countries such as Japan, Germany and the United States. She reminds us that our debate is about more than the suppression or partial representation of certain strands of history: 'It is a debate about the moral basis of Australian society.' Among the issues at stake is a perception of White Australian innocence (p. 187). The argument seems to be that if settler Australians' conquest of the continent meant death, dispossession, perhaps genocide for Indigenous people, then an aura of guilt must hang over White Australian people, and the nation must rethink its moral basis.

Along with many other scholars, I have encountered and published various forms of evidence concerning death, dispossession, and actions that could reasonably be termed genocide (see Curthoys & Docker 2001 and other essays in the same volume). I have not, however, aimed to produce a tour guide for guilt trips. My purpose is more challenging. In linking knowledge of the violence of the past with an ethics that demarcates a path towards decolonisation, I work with the distinction proposed by the great 20th-century philosopher of ethics, Emmanuel Levinas. James Hatley, in his excellent analysis of 'testimony and history', discusses Levinas's distinction that guilt 'is the burden I or the other may carry for our specific actions or comportment', while responsibility 'is the burden upon me of the other's vulnerability to suffering' (Hatley 2000: 104). The distinction to be made is that between one's own actions (concerning which one may have cause for guilt), and the human condition of living with and for others.

To lift even a corner of the 'big swag' is to move into a realm of ethics and moral challenge. I reject concepts of collective guilt and descendants' guilt, but there are quandaries nevertheless. The immediacy of quandary was articulated beautifully by Miloš Vasić, one of the founders of the Yugoslavian independent weekly *Vreme*.

His situation was acutely uncomfortable: having been a member of the minority opposition to Milosovich's policies and practices, he could absolve himself from personal guilt. And yet he said that he felt ashamed 'as a human being' – not as a Serb but as a human being. He went on to say that 'history sometimes hangs over us in terrible ways' (reported in Paris 2000: 454, 462).

A moral engagement between past and present must acknowledge violence, and having done so, must acknowledge the moral burden of that knowledge. Levinas defines violence as acting as if one were alone; it denies relationship, denies responsibility, and thus effectively denies others. The physical manifestations of violence create pain, destruction, and catastrophe. Discursive practices equally can cause pain and may be a first condition for catastrophic destruction. 'Totality cannot stand alterity', Hatley (2000: 81) writes, concisely summing up Levinas's thought on violence.

Bernhard Casper (1988: 104) connects the ethical thought of Levinas with that of Rosenzweig and Buber. He writes that these scholars, Levinas pre-eminently, have articulated a new sense of ethics that brings two millennia of dedication to the absolute into the here and now of the contemporary western world, connecting our ethics to our lives as they unfold within relationships of responsibility.

The radical turn that Levinas articulates for us is an intersubjectivity in which each of us is always, already, responsible for others. 'Self is not a substance but a relation', Levinas writes (1996: 20). There is no self without other. Life with others is inherently entangled in responsibility. Levinas thus claims the primacy of ethics as an inherent and inalienable aspect of the human condition. He teaches an ethic of human connectivity: 'consciousness and even subjectivity follow from, are legitimated by, the ethical summons which proceeds from the intersubjective encounter. Subjectivity arrives, so to speak, in the form of a responsibility towards an other ...' (Newton 1995: 12).

This ethic of connection, of mutually implicated humans whose primary duty is to respond to the calls of others, particularly those who are vulnerable, does not demand a suppression or denial of one's own self. Rather to the contrary, the argument is that one finds one's own self in responding to others, and so both self and other become entangled in ethical relationships, or, if responsibility is abjured in favour of violence, in abuse of ethics. The self includes one's capacity for moral knowledge and action: 'I become a moral

agent and not a power instrument, when I understand that my existence is entangled with other lives and is, therefore, responsible' (Kaplan 2000: 71).

In one sense one is always situated as a moral agent: 'self is a relation not a substance.' What this means for how one goes about acting in relation is not, however, straightforward or easy. Bauman states the condition plainly: '[the] self finds itself alone in the face of moral dilemmas without good (let alone obvious) choices, [with] unresolved moral conflicts and the excruciating difficulty of being moral' (1993: 249). In spite of the severity of the challenge, Bauman, along with others, contends that moral responsibility is one of the most important forms of action we can take in a world in which our humanity is under assault.

It may be easier to define what is immoral than to prescribe what is moral. Levinas takes it as given that murder and the infliction of pain are immoral. In the domains of our everyday lives, he states that relational closure marks immorality. As discussed in the introduction: 'For an ethical sensibility – confirming itself in the inhumanity of our time, against this inhumanity – the justification of the neighbor's pain is certainly the source of all immorality' (Levinas 1988: 163; see also Hatley 2000: 97).

Our Australian context presses us to consider not only the justification of others' pain, but the denial of it as well. It follows that part of our moral burden is an injunction to hold the memory of violence within our texts. To write as if the suffering of those who were harmed never mattered would be to perpetuate violence in the present. A moral engagement of the past in the present thus resists closure, whether that closure aims to decree that the violence in the past (or even in the present) is finished, or whether it claims more specifically to outlaw or ridicule historians and others who seek to remember violence. Each of these two powerful forms of closure – time and monologue – is embedded in mainstream contemporary practice surrounding the relationships between past and present. I will briefly examine each of them, analysing ways in which they deflect responsibility for others. My argument is that these forms of closure alienate us from our own moral capacities and thus work to produce immorality as Levinas defines it. They diminish us as human beings even as they may promise the illusion of a 'comfortable' life.

Past and Present

An examination of practices of discontinuity and continuity in Whitefella cultural constructions of time indicates the links between closure and the deflection of responsibility. The hypothesis that there is a link between time concepts and violence is, on the one hand, self-evident. If there were no links, there would be no controversy over the meaning and punctuation of history. On the other hand, the links go deeper than a struggle for who gets the last word concerning the European conquest of Australia. A seemingly commonsensical orientation towards the future, in a society built upon destruction, enables regimes of violence to continue their work while claiming the moral ground of making a better future.

Punctuation and intertemporality are two lenses for examining western time-constructs. How are moments of time differentiated from each other, and what are the relationships between different moments? As there is far more to be said about time than can be conveniently packed into one chapter, I restrict myself here to the western conventional moments labelled past, present, and future, and take up a more nuanced analysis in chapter 3.

Two core features of early medieval Christian Europe's cultural construction of time – disjunction and irreversible sequence – are the core properties of modern punctuation and intertemporality (Gurevich 1985: 111). In that period the life of Christ was held to be the major ontological disjunction for Christians, as the western calendar still indicates. With the concept of disjunction it was possible to break up the history of the world into epochs, each of which was differentiated not just by duration but also by inner value – from the promise made, to the promise fulfilled, to the final re-creation of Heaven on Earth (Gurevich 1985; Baudrillard 1994; Cohn 1993).

The second core feature is the concept of irreversible sequence within a teleological frame. Zoroaster (c.3500 BP) is credited with introducing to the world the idea that through conflict the world is moving towards a conflict-free state (Cohn 1993: 220). These concepts were incorporated into Christianity, and gave to western history a teleological and apocalyptic structure and content (Gurevich 1985: 143). The final goal for both individuals and the world was the achievement of eternal life in a post-historical new heaven and new earth (Cohn 1993: 218).

The stretching of time between two key moments of ontological

significance (life of Christ, return of Christ) had the effect of 'shrinking' the present to a moment of transition in which the future became the past. According to Gurevich (1985: 112), 'past and future were of greater significance and value than the present, which was fleeting'; he quotes Augustine's view that history unfolded itself 'in the shadow of the future'.

With the secularisation of western culture under the Enlightenment, many Christian concepts, values, and root metaphors were taken across from religious thought to socio-cultural thought, or abstracted into vague notions such as 'spirit'. Indeed, Boer & Conrad (2003) pursue an analysis initiated by Certeau to argue that Christian discourse not only 'dissipated into society at large' but also that Christian theology transformed itself into the secular academic disciplines that took shape after the Enlightenment. Thus even the more modest claim that Christian discourse transformed itself into secular discourse gives us good ground for examining the continuities across religious and secular time concepts.

The core features of disjunction and irreversible sequence continue to be constitutive of both modernist philosophies of history and everyday time-constructs. Rather than postulating major disjunctions brought about through eruptions of the divine into human history, modernity has privileged a paradigm of progress within which human agency is the driving force. Walter Benjamin gives us the most succinctly perceptive assessment of the links between progress and violence. His ninth thesis on the philosophy of history deploys the now famous image of the Angel of History who 'sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage'. The Angel is caught in the storm of violence, and that 'storm is what we call progress' (1969: 257-58). Where the Angel of History sees one ongoing catastrophe, and where scholars such as Benjamin see an ongoing sequence of catastrophes, apologists for progress would focus on a bright and beautiful future.

Within the paradigm of progress, history is a process of conflict and change such that the present emerges from, and is differentiated from, the past, and such that the future will emerge from, and will be differentiated from, the present. It puts a positive value on change, and posits that history, or society, is moving towards the resolution of conflict and contradiction. There is thus held to be an 'end' in the sense of a goal: a future point towards which our lives are directed.

This secular paradigm of violence and redemption expresses the kind of thought and behaviour that Hobbles and others characterised as 'the wild'. Much of that assessment derives from the apparent disregard that progress-oriented people have for the damage they do in the present. This paradigm has been subject to analysis by key thinkers throughout the 20th century and recently has been linked with Al Qaeda (Gray 2003). It is perhaps best known in social practice through the analysis of the revolutionary applications of Marx's philosophy of history. Whether it was Hegel developing the dialectic of 'spirit' fulfilling itself in history, or Marx developing a dialectical materialism, we see a disrespect for human or other suffering. Present distress can be claimed to be leading towards, and thus to be justified by, a more perfect future. In a brilliantly argued essay, Glowacka (2000: 39) reminds us of 'Hegel's slaughter-bench model of history'. Hatley (2000: 33) expands this pungent point, saying that Hegel felt justified in arguing 'that the suffering of those who are "immolated upon [history's] altar" is secondary to the larger work of spirit in history'.

In our post-Hegelian, post-Marxist period, the progressive paradigm of history continues to excuse any number of troubling actions and thoughts. Bauman (1993: 225) contends (drawing on Lyotard) that emancipation, the grand idea of the Enlightenment, draws its power 'from the shackles it wants to fracture, the wounds it wants to heal'. He connects the ideal of emancipation with future-oriented thought that discounts present suffering, and concludes that 'future bliss [is] served as the cover-up for the repulsiveness of the present'. That 'repulsiveness' includes the loss of one's moral presence in a world of ethical encounter.

The vision of a future which will transcend the past, a future in which current contradictions and current suffering will be left behind enables us to understand ourselves in an imaginary state of future achievement. It thus enables us to turn our backs on current social facts of pain, damage, destruction and despair which exist in the present, but which we will only acknowledge as our past. It is not necessary to our time-constructs that we shall be indifferent to others, but for Marxist revolutionaries as much as for the people engaged in 'New World' conquest, suffering was justified by reference to the future. Following Levinas's assessment that immorality is constituted in the justification of others' suffering, it is clear that

future orientation has been a major tool in deflecting us from moral responsibility.

These time concepts support a peculiarly dizzy detachment of agency in human affairs. The past is always already discontinuous with the present. The discontinuity that marks what we choose to call the past is reflexive: the past is not necessarily that which has already happened, but equally a label to be applied to that which we wish to finish and forget, or from which we wish to differentiate ourselves and thus to absolve ourselves from responsibility.

In future orientation we hasten on our way to fulfilment. Resolution in any large or permanent sense, however, is framed as a forever imminent tomorrow. It always lies just ahead of us, and thus there is a sense in which we will never achieve the resolution we may believe to be our future state precisely because it is always already posited as a future state. It is becoming increasingly clear pragmatically that resolution is unachievable because the damage we do on our way to the future is already destroying the future we hope to inhabit. And yet we keep doing more of the same, not least because of the sense of hope we attach to the future.

Our lives are thus suspended in a web of time concepts that hold us always about to be that which we would believe we truly are. The qualitative differentiation of past and future means that the present is discontinuous with both. In this disjunctive moment, it can appear that our responsibilities can be understood to be most properly directed towards the future rather than towards the people and places of this moment because the present is always already becoming the past which is in the process of being transcended.

The present becomes a place in which we are estranged from the actual conditions of our lives, where agency is alienated, responsibility cast elsewhere, and morality subjected to a double deflection as it aims towards a future which will, in due course, become the past. The 'now' becomes a site of such alienation that it hardly bears thinking about, and that is my point. We are suspended in a bereft and hapless moment. The headlong rush towards the future may be an attempt to escape accountability, but even for those who seek responsibility, the most plausible action often appears to be to look to the future and thus to act towards a moment that our time-constructs enable us to think may yet be remediable.

The very justification made possible by orientation towards the

future enables another attitude, that of complacency. Arendt (1969: 47) notes the amoral quality of complacency in her summarising statement that 'we need only march into the future, which we can't help doing anyhow, in order to find a better world'. Whether idealistic or complacent, the idea of disjunction can be deployed to evade responsibility. The logic is to declare the present disjunctive with the past, and then to declare that the present is about to be transcended and that we will soon live in a period that is disjunctive with our 'now'.

This benighted 'now' in which we actually live our lives is circumscribed and rendered largely irrelevant through progress ideology. What is most demeaning for us is that it displaces ethics, as if, in a secular mimicry of Messianism, the mere passage of time will somehow alleviate us of present responsibilities and will restore our true moral capacity to us in that illusory unblemished future.

The project that Attwood & Foster call for – creating a sense of moral engagement with the past in the present – is thus a much larger task than it might initially appear. It involves rejecting a paradigm of future social perfection or some form of redemption, and revaluing the present as the real site of action in the world.

'Us' and 'Them'

A further challenge to closure builds on the violence of totalising monologue. Whose past and whose present are implicated in the moral work of engaging the past in the present? Monologue is another primary form of closure. Critical theory of recent decades has shown western thought and action to be dominated by a matrix of hierarchical oppositions which provided powerful conceptual tools for the reproduction of violence. In this matrix the world is formed around dualities: man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, active/passive, civilisation/savagery, and so on in the most familiar and oppressive fashion. In fact, however, these dualities are more properly described as a series of singularities because the pole labelled 'other' (woman, Nature, savage, etc.) is effectively an absence. This point is articulated extensively by feminist theoreticians. Luce Irigaray (1985), for example, shows that the defining feature of woman under dualistic thought is that she is not man.

Ecofeminists extend the analysis to include 'Nature', and show that the same structure of domination controls women, Nature, and

all other living beings and systems that are held to be 'other' (Warren 1990; Salleh 1992). Val Plumwood (1994: 74) speaks directly to the centrality of this structure: 'the story of the control of the chaotic and deficient realm of "Nature" by mastering and ordering "reason" has been the master story of Western culture.' Within that 'chaotic and deficient realm' were all those others who were classed outside the 'Us' that is the hero of the story.

Stripped of much cultural elaboration, this structure of self/other articulates power such that 'self' is constituted as the pole of activity and presence, while 'other' is the pole of passivity and absence. Presence is a manifestation both of being and of power, while absence may be a gap awaiting transfiguration by the active/present pole, or an enabling background; in either case, without power and presence of its own (Plumwood 1997).

A crucial feature of the system is that others never get to talk back on their own terms. Communication is all one way as the pole of power refuses to receive the feedback that would cause it to change itself, or to open itself to dialogue. Power lies in the ability not to hear what is being said, not to experience the consequences of one's actions, but rather to go one's own self-centric and insulated way. Plumwood (2002: 27) notes two key moves in sustaining hierarchical dualism and the illusion of autonomy – dependency and denial. The pole of power depends on the subordinated other, and simultaneously denies this dependence.

The image of bi-polarity thus masks what is, in effect, a singular pole of self. The self sets itself within a hall of mirrors; it mistakes its reflection for the world, sees its own reflections endlessly, talks endlessly to itself, and, not surprisingly, finds continual verification of itself and its worldview. This is monologue masquerading as conversation, masturbation posing as productive interaction; it is a narcissism so profound that it purports to provide a universal knowledge when in fact its violent erasures are universalising its own singular and powerful isolation. It promotes a nihilism that stifles the knowledge of connection, disables dialogue, and maims the possibilities whereby 'self' might be captured by 'other'. Levinas equates these totalising monological narratives with war.

This is not to say that monologue itself lacks debate and conflict, but more deeply that it is self-totalising in only including what it can accommodate within its own narrative, and by insisting that others,

if they appear at all, appear as they are construed by that monological narrative. Indeed some monological narratives are so broad as to be able to encompass everything, but only within the terms of the narrative. Elizabeth Povinelli's (2002) brilliant new study of Australian multiculturalism gives a much more complex face to public monocultural discourse than I am able to present here. She focuses on the 'cunning of recognition', examining the impossible necessity for Aboriginal people in certain contexts to be able to produce for the nation an identity that the nation defines as authentic (see also Merlan 1998). This is one of many ways in which monological narrative scoops up others on its own terms and within its own self-understanding (see chapter 3).

The dismantling of the warlike theory of 'self' is a necessary step in moving towards decolonisation. The consequence of unmaking narcissistic singularity is that we embrace noisy and unruly processes capable of finding dialogue with other people and with the world itself. In doing so we shake our capacity for connection loose from the bondage of monologue. As Povinelli (2002) analyses in depth, plurality poses seriously disjunctive moments for individuals, and for states. Plurality is an ethical direction but by no means is it a paradox-free or conflict-free zone.

The ethical alternative to monologue is dialogue. And this dialogue is not the Platonic or Socratic dialogue, which Arendt (1970: 10) describes as a 'silent dialogue between me and myself'. It is specifically a form of dialogue that requires difference. It seeks relationships across otherness without seeking to erase difference. Emil Fackenheim (1994: 129) draws on the work of Franz Rosenzweig to articulate two main precepts for structuring the ground for ethical dialogue. The first is that dialogue begins where one is, and thus is always situated; the second is that dialogue is open, and thus that the outcome is not known in advance. Fackenheim developed this paradigm of dialogue in this era after the *Shoah*, asking, as have other philosophers, whether any dialogue can again take place between those who have been radically harmed and those who harmed them. Because he develops a form of dialogue that can work across chasms of radical harm, his paradigm is especially appropriate for our settler societies.

Our situatedness as settlers is clear. In Australia, settler-descendants are situated in damaged places; we bear the burden of the vio-

lent history of conquest, and oscillate between hope and despair. Aboriginal people are also situated in damaged places, have borne the brunt of social violence, and are similarly urged to link their hopes to practices that are linked to destruction. These are harsh situations, and as I have argued elsewhere, ethical dialogue requires that we acknowledge and understand our particular and harshly situated presence (Rose & Ford 1995; Rose 1999).

From a situated perspective, what lies between us are these terrible histories: the invasions, the dominations, the deaths and exclusions. Violence, both legal and extra-legal, wars, disposessions, extinctions and invisibilities lie between us. Silence, the big swag, also lies between us. Before we lose heart, however, we must also consider that violence is not the whole story. What lies between us, or between some of us some of the time, is love, respect, sympathy, and the determination to act together. The possibility of dialogue, and its accomplishment in many contexts, rests in the fact that our situatedness is neither wholly violent nor wholly non-violent. Entanglements give us grounds for action.

The concept of openness may sound obvious, but it is equally challenging. Openness is risky because one does not know the outcome. To be open is to hold one's self available to others: one takes risks and becomes vulnerable. But this is also a fertile stance: one's own ground can become destabilised. In open dialogue one holds one's self available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed.

Openness also challenges us because it contains a contradictory set of injunctions. On the one hand openness is unlimited, since one always wants to try to understand others, and to listen with an open mind. On the other hand, openness has limits: an ethical position does not remain open to assisting violence or to sustaining the silences that oppress. Openness, in brief, is both unlimited in its even-handedness and at the same time is counterbalanced by commitment to the decolonising process.

The connection between temporality, monologue, and ethics can be demonstrated vividly through consideration of past violence and continuing pain. We live our lives in the present, as our bodies tell us even when our minds are cast into the future. Along with other scholars, I see a doubled violence: the practices that hurt others, and the sustained indifference to the hurt of others that is a key index of

power. Elaine Scarry (1985) works with an analysis of torture to develop the point that pain is amplified through denial. My point is that monologue constitutes an equally pain-amplifying denial. In Australia, the injuries of colonisation stand as concrete evidence of a violence which monological settler ideology denies or trivialises. Moreover, the articulation of injury comes to be represented in some public discourse as itself an act of aggression: as if Aboriginal people sought explicitly to destroy White Australians' comfortable attitude towards history. Aboriginal people's injuries testify to an ongoing war. Their existence calls forth rejection and denial, both of which are injurious in their own right. Inescapably, denial reinflcts past harm and sustains present injuries.

Monological history derives from a singularity and must seek to protect that singularity. The results are themselves catastrophic; Hatley is eloquent:

Only humans can conspire to repress, to destroy the future of human [groups]. In doing so, humans show the reprehensible capacity to turn their history, their remembrance of time across the aeons, the generations, into a sort of narcissistic mirror. One eliminates all the strangers, all the disruptions of one's own vision, so that one's history only articulates one's own concerns, one's own needs. One writes the past and the future as a mode of colonisation. All the other times are resources for one's own. (Hatley 2000: 63)

A consequence for the human person who finds herself or himself situated near the pole of power is that in assenting to a monological history and abandoning one's own moral agency, one explicitly or implicitly becomes an instrument of the violence that excludes, denies, suppresses, abandons or destroys. Monological history, ideologically driven to protect power, is written as if the victims of power never mattered (Hatley 2000: 204). Prime Minister John Howard's idea that monological history could leave us feeling comfortable is as violent as it is appalling. It attacks our moral presence in the world.

Recuperative Work

Hannah Arendt used the term 'dark times' to refer to periods when the construction of law-like generalities and theoretical models is cut loose from human knowledge (Luban 1983). Her work is pertinent

to our time now for three reasons. First, our postmodern condition is one of failed master narratives; we no longer desire the great stories that once may have made sense of the world for us because we have been required to understand the violence they conceal. Second, we are entering a period of deep uncertainty, in which many unthinkable things have happened, are undoubtedly happening right now, and will continue to happen. Arguably, current levels of risk and terror exceed our capacity to plan rationally in order to avoid or manage them. The third reason concerns my specific focus on decolonisation. The process of decolonising modern settler societies is a new phenomenon; we have no models from the past to guide us. It is equally a dialogical project; we cannot theorise in advance just how it will happen and still be committed to openness. We have to work it out step by step dialogically with and among each other. If it happens at all, it will unfold in real time, and will be shaped by the Indigenous, 'old' settler, and recent migrant peoples who share the here and the now of our homelands.

As stated, the beauty of Arendt's work for me is that she insists on affirming the possibility of moral action by proposing that what sustains our understandings in dark times is the web of stories we are able to weave out of our historically grounded experience. My recuperative project is based on the premise, articulated so elegantly by Arendt (1970: ix), that even in dark times there will be some illumination. Recuperative histories and ethnographies are not aimed towards dialectical opposition or overcoming; rather they trawl the past and the present, searching out the hidden histories and the local possibilities that illuminate alternatives to our embeddedness in violence.

I use the term 'recuperation' in preference to more familiar terms such as 'recovery' or 'restoration' because in contemporary usage it seems to communicate the humility of the project. Central to my argument is the proposition that there is no former time/space of wholeness to which we might return or which we might resurrect for ourselves (chapter 10). Nor is there a posited future wholeness which may yet save us. Rather, the work of recuperation seeks glimpses of illumination, and aims towards engagement and disclosure. The method works as an alternative both to methods of closure or suspension and to methods of proposed salvation.

Recuperative work is oppositional in several major senses of opposition and encounter. I will examine time and monologue in a

recuperative mode, and will then contextualise the analysis through analysis of time and the dead, the position of witness, and the existential question of hope and intent.

Time

Recuperative work takes an ethical stance in opposition to the temporal and monological practices that cause suffering and damage and that exclude or deny the reality of that suffering and damage. Breaking up the linearity of past → present → future, recuperative work imagines all accessible time as rich with possibility. Time work impels one immediately into moral responsibility. As Benjamin tells us in his sixth thesis, the past makes urgent moral claims on us (1969: 255). So too does the present, and so, we increasingly understand, does the future (in particular, see chapters 10 and 11).

There are alternatives to linear time. Like many scholars today, I want to consider the time of the generations of living things, including ecological time, synchronicities, intervals, patterns, and rhythms, all of which are quite legitimately understood as forms of time (Adam 1994). Similarly, ecofeminists such as Ariel Salleh (1997: 137) argue that complex time concepts are necessary to understanding ecological processes. In attending to the world of 'Nature' she makes a case for a concept of enduring time – a time of continuity between past and future. In my work I have sought to understand more deeply Aboriginal concepts of time (Rose 1999, and chapters 3, 8 and 9).

As Salleh's analysis suggests, analysis of relationships across moments of time and across kinds of time is significant. Concepts of heterogeneous time demand the understanding that different kinds of time are coeval, that is, coexisting (Fabian 1983). Dipesh Chakrabarty uses the beautiful metaphor of time-knots. In his analysis of subaltern histories he proposes that 'the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a discontinuity of the present with itself' (Chakrabarty 1997: 28–29). In contrast to modernity's privileging of linear sequence in which the past is overcome and consigned to the past, time knots are the entanglements of real life in time: we do not move through 'homogeneous empty time' (Benjamin's phrase, 1969: 261), filling the fleeting 'now' with our homogeneous presence. Rather, the entanglements to which Chakrabarty directs our attention draw us into complex

and co-mingled times. Our understanding is enhanced, Chakrabarty contends, through engagements with plurality, and we learn more about 'the disjointed nature of our own times' (1997: 27).

Along with time's heterogeneity, there is also the question of the quality of relationship between life and death as they are situated in time. I take up this issue in chapter 10 from the perspective of my understanding of Aboriginal time concepts; here I want to lay the groundwork for thinking about time across generations from a western perspective.

In another article (Rose 2003) I have discussed some of the issues that arise for me in thinking about how Aboriginal people's narratives of the past configure life and death. Western culture pervasively imagines the relationship between life and death as a battle. In this battle the grave will always claim at least a temporary victory, as death is inevitable, but numerous cultural practices seek to redeem life. The conceptualisation of death as sacrifice is foundational not only to theology, but also to society and nation (for example, see Inglis 1998; Muecke 1999). Paul's triumphal assertion to the Corinthians that through the resurrection 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (I Corinthians 15:54) sets out the matrix of the war with death. In the contemporary world, historians are deeply implicated here, as Curthoys and Docker (1999: 6–7) note in their analysis of 19th-century history's desire 'to defeat time and death'. History, they contend, is a continuing act of defiance.

My Aboriginal teachers know the pain and grief that death entails for both the living and the dying. They do not give the grave victory, and in part this is because life is not at war with death. Stephen Muecke (1999: 34) ventures a generalisation with which I would agree: Aboriginal philosophies 'are all about keeping things alive *in their place*'. Aboriginal stories are living traditions. As long as they are told, life has the last word. As often as they are erased – in texts, in the courts, in public discourse – the sting of death walks the land.

The dead

The sting of death has been massively amplified, and perhaps given qualitatively different valence, under conditions of modern 'man-made mass death' (Wyschogrod 1985). Hatley (and others) contend that mass death is an attack on death itself. Hatley's specific focus is

on genocide and the corresponding process of aenocide. Aenocide refers to cross-generational deaths, and directs attention to the fact that genocide curtails all the future generations. The claim is that in killing the future, mass death also kills death as we experience it in a non-mass death manner. The argument is that one's death belongs not only to one's self but to others as well: to those who mourn, to those who remember, to those who incorporate the death into a community of memory. Aenocide obliterates those who mourn; it obliterates the community of memory. In this way it can be thought to obliterate death (Hatley 2000: 24).

These propositions take on a further urgency in thinking about relationships across numerous generations. Hatley argues that generations are connected through transmission of wisdom, memory, and traditions. Younger generations receive what is offered and take on the work of the previous generations in its complexity: 'Because each generation dies, the next generation takes up with the lives of the preceding generation in a spirit of commemoration and reverence, as well as criticism and shame' (Hatley 2000: 60). The relationship across life into death, and death into life (through memory, transmitted wisdom and other cross-overs) is a gift, in Hatley's analysis:

Precisely because one is not one's forebearers, [*sic*] one experiences one's time as a gift, the proffering of one's own existence from out of the bodies and lives of the beings who preceded one. One in turn offers this gift to those who come after one. Time is in this offering the articulation of a generosity beyond primordially. (Hatley 2000: 61)

Aenocide can thus be said to kill death because it kills the possibility of connectivities across generations. It can also, in this way, be thought to kill time.

The moral burden of the past in the present includes the work of sustaining the heterogeneous gifts of time. No one foresaw or expressed the implications of the ramifying effects of mass death more eloquently than Walter Benjamin (1969: 255) in his sixth thesis: '*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.' Recuperative work thus seeks to tug on whatever may remain of life's gifts, pulling them from the annihilation of the multiple deaths and enabling them to be rethreaded into the fabric of decolonisation.

Monologue

Recuperative work breaks up monologue; the purpose is not to replace one monologue with another, but rather to reveal a rich diversity of events and people. One result is utilitarian. This work allows us to expand our repertoire of possibilities by enlarging our thinking. Just as heterogeneous time can be understood as rich with possibility, so heteroglossic narratives are richly complex and diverse. Here we enter domains of moral responsibility in relation to truth, public memory and the dead.

If the totalising structure of monologue is resisted there is discursive space for conflicting arguments. Does this mean that everything is relative? Povinelli (2002) provides a complex analysis of limits. In contrast, I take an approach that, while logically problematic, is ethically required. The parameters of my approach – problematic and necessary – are well known to philosophers. Povinelli (2002: 8) explains the issue as the gap or contradiction between ‘the seemingly unconditional nature of ethical and moral obligations and its relation to the enlightenment obligation to public reason (critical rational discourse)’.

Pursuing my ethical necessity, I note that FC DeCoste (2000) identifies the problem with extreme relativism in relation to radical harm: that historical ‘truth’ would always simply be a matter of opinion. Clearly this extreme position is not adequate. Wyschogrod (1998: xi, 1) articulates the proposition that truthfulness is about matching an account of an event with the event or pattern; the proposition is commonsensical, and as she says, is at the same time mundane. While homology may be mundane from an historical view, it is not mundane from an ethical view. In developing moral engagements with the past in the present, truth is absolutely necessary. There must be some degree of certainty about events in the past – certainty about what happened, although there may be different interpretations of why things happened. As Hatley (2000: 110) tells us: ‘If nothing can ever be unproblematically characterized as having actually occurred, then no moral judgement about what occurs could ever matter.’ Facts matter because they enable us to exercise our moral capacity. The creation of confusion incapacitates us.

Another moral domain concerns public remembrance and the dead. As numerous scholars have suggested, the dead are a powerful part of community (for example, Taussig 2001; Margalit 2002).

Michael Ignatieff (1997) reminds us that there is nothing inherently ethical in this relationship. The dead are mobilised in community interests, and the politics of terror mobilise the dead just as surely as ethics for decolonisation. Muecke (1997: 227) contends that death ‘is at the heart of the formation of the nation ... States can be set up as political entities, but they only become nations through the magical or spiritual agency of death ... A people recognises itself as a people, that is as a culture, through the symbolic treatment of its dead.’

Monological definitions of the dead are thus central to monological narratives of nationhood. National histories that commemorate some deaths, but not others, rework monologue, as Tom Griffiths explains with elegance in a recent essay. Griffiths (2003: 138) takes up the issue of white silence, contending that ‘the great Australian silence was often “white noise”: it sometimes consisted of an obscuring and overlapping din of history making.’ The white noise of history-making concerns the dead in extremely immediate ways. Griffiths notes the paucity of public memorials to Aboriginal people who died defending family and country, and he links debates over war memorials to the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ exclusions of past and contemporary cultural life. Here is his discussion of responses to Ken Inglis’s proposal that Indigenous-settler conflict should be included in the Australian War Memorial:

Inglis’s proposal came out of his lifelong study of the settlers’ culture of commemoration and in a book steeped in intelligent sympathy for the rituals of war. It wasn’t a war, wrote his critics. And even if it was a war, then it wasn’t an officially declared war and both sides didn’t wear uniforms. And even if it still rated somehow as a real war, then Aborigines were the other side, and they were the losers, and victors don’t put up monuments to the losers. Aborigines are not Us. Here speaks the real politics of separatism in Australia today. (Griffiths, 2003: 147)

There is, I believe, another distinction to be made: there are the dead who are members of community (and thus those whose deaths matter), and then there are the dead who are outside the community and thus whose deaths matter to the extent that they can be excluded. The first is social and commemorative, the second harks back to the relationship between violence and progress. If progress emerges from violence, and if conquest is not complete, then deaths that are treated as if they do not matter actually still do matter. They

mark progress. Nicholas Thomas (1997: 28) contends that settler societies seek simultaneously to exterminate and exhibit Indigenous people. Arguably, Aboriginal deaths are necessary to Australian nation-making even as the dead are dishonoured through denial and through chilling debates about how much blood has been shed and whose bloodshed counts.

Dialogue works counter to monological separatism; it requires a 'we' who share a time and space of attentiveness, and who bring our moral capabilities into the encounter. It seems we must also bring the dead into the dialogue. It is not yet possible to know, dialogically, what they may say to us.

Witness

To listen with attentiveness is to take a first step in witnessing. Thus to break out of monologue and into a ground of encounter across difference and harm is suddenly to encounter one's self as witness. In his study *Suffering Witness*, Hatley (2000: 3) defines witness as 'a mode of responding to the other's plight that exceeds an epistemological determination and becomes an ethical involvement. One must not only utter a truth about the ... [person] but also remain true to her or him.'

The demands of witnessing are demands of memory. Fackenheim, among many scholars, asserts that memory work is a refusal to participate in violence. If the purpose of violence was to extinguish certain people, knowledges, and perspectives, then memory continues to resist that violence. Thus the moral burden of the past in the present includes this refusal to succumb to the world of violence and amnesia; witnessing promotes remembrance and works against death and against the comfort of monologue.

The past has a moral claim on us, and so do the people in the present whose memories and actions we witness. The claim is often phrased in terms of the dead, but it is often put to us by the living. I do not here deny the direct claims of the dead. Who, for example, can look at a recent photo of mass graves being exhumed and not find one's self morally claimed by the eye sockets that still seem to search out some connection with the living? In our everyday lives in Australia and other settler societies, however, we are more likely to encounter such claims as they are mediated by the living.

Moral claims are thrust upon one, and then a response is due.

Throughout his study Hatley discusses the problematics of the witness's moral response, and while I do not want to play down the ambiguities of the situation, I also want to draw attention to the dialogical potential at work here. To be claimed is to be called into connection; to respond is to start to actualise that connection. Muecke (1997: 184–85) contends that connections lead to commitment. Connection, in his view, is a new way of reasoning, a way that leads into engagement and purpose. I am saying that decolonisation depends on this process: the moral claim, the response, the recognition of connection, the commitment.

Intention and Hope

Recuperative work takes its intention from the demonstrated fact that violence and damage are not the only things we are capable of. Many of us really do seek to find ways to generate a moral presence for ourselves. Such a presence is founded in the 'now' of our lives, engages with our moral relationships with the past, acknowledges our violence, and works dialogically towards alternatives. Accordingly, this work demands that we consider an ethics of intention.

The ethics I am developing around decolonisation acknowledge the claims of others (thus far I have only dealt with human others), and to acknowledge the existence of such claims is itself a provocation. Response to a claim is itself a call – of refusal of violence, of further claims of responsibility. And so the question must be asked: does it matter if anyone is listening?

Avishai Margalit (2002: 155), for example, argues that people witness as an act of hope, or perhaps of faith, 'that in another place or another time there exists, or will exist, a moral community that will listen to their testimony'. I am absolutely certain that this form of faith informed the decision of Hobbles Danaiyarri and other North Australian historians to share their stories with westerners (discussed in Rose 2003). Indeed, they were quite explicit in asserting their belief that there were others, including White people, who would hear the stories in their moral context and would find ways to make a moral response. For myself, I understood my position as a moral claim on my own life, and this book continues an exploration of that claim.

But what if one had no faith that there were others who would

listen? Would it still be important to witness? Margalit leaves this question open, seeming to conclude that there must be some level of faith in order to warrant witnessing. Other scholars of memory and witnessing contend that one must proceed as if there were hope, whether one can be sure of that or not. Glowacka, for example, works with Fackenheim's (1978) study of hope and suggests that one must continue *as if* there were hope because to do so is still to refuse violence, and to work towards some sort of mending of the assault on humanity brought about by man-made mass death (Glowacka 2000: 39).

Still others are even more stern, claiming that there is always a moral duty to remember and witness. From this perspective, even if one were certain that there was no reason to hope, there would still be reason existentially to define one's self as one who refuses violence. It seems to me as well that as long as there is one person who refuses violence, then there could be some grounds for hope, but that is not really the point. Levinas is the best representative of this most extreme position. He contends that memory and witnessing attest not only to the past and to harm but to the good in the present moment. One is commanded to goodness even if it is futile. In his wisdom, Levinas contends that there is no nuanced philosophical argument for this position. It is given in the nature of ethics: the claim is always there (discussed in Hatley 2000: 99).

The stronger statements of moral response and possible futility take us away from hope and towards an existential ethics of claim. I think this is a good thing. A few years ago I was working with the idea of an ethics of hope, and I offered a short paper on the subject at a symposium at Pitzer College in Claremont California. One of the Native American participants, Robert John, took me up on my use of the concept of hope, and we spent quite a few hours discussing it. In his view 'hope is wishy washy'. He contended that if you really care that something may happen, then you offer your intention. You put your will into it. You do what you can to make it happen. From his intention- and action-oriented perspective, I had to agree that hope does seem banal, and I started thinking about an ethics of connection rather than hope (Rose 1999).

A complementary perspective on hope is put forward by Paul Ricoeur (1995), although he argues for hope whereas I would now argue against it. In Ricoeur's view, hope is connected to concepts of

time that look towards future redemption. History directed towards a vision of a better future is a history of hope (1995: 204–205). I would contend, in contrast, that the evidence for alternatives exists in the present, and that intention towards alternatives does not have to rely on hope. From this perspective, hope could be seen to be implicated in time-concepts that deflect us from our moral presence in the here and now, and thus engage us in violence. This violence consists in ignoring the diversity of life in the present moment in favour of an imagined life in a future moment.

The recuperative project seeks to demarcate a path towards decolonisation, and we can be grateful that here in Australia one does not have to consider in a practical way what one would do if there were no one with whom to share the path and put their footprints alongside ours. Our decolonising work leads us directly into claim, connection, and commitment.