

Introduction

After Aboriginalism: power, knowledge and Indigenous Australian critical writing¹

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*'Recalling [Ralph] Ellison, we may be invisible, but we are not blind.'*²

SINCE THE EARLY 1980s, the burgeoning interest in and publication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing across a number of genres—notably life-writing and oral histories, autobiography and memoir, prose fiction, poetry, drama and children's literature—has become increasingly well-established. The strength and expansion of Indigenous Australian contributions in these genres has permanently transformed the Australian and international cultural landscape, and contemporary readers can now make themselves familiar with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imaginative, historical and personal writing in ways that were impossible a generation ago. The rise of Indigenous Australian publications in these genres has been accompanied, however, by comparatively limited attention and exposure for modes of Indigenous Australian writing less aligned with creative and personal expression and more informed by intellectual and theoretical analysis and critique.

This has not always been the case. The modern history of Indigenous Australian writing is widely held to have begun in 1964, with the publication of Kath Walker's first collection of poetry, *We Are Going*³ (although a compelling case exists for revising this history to begin with David Unaipon, a Ngarrindjeri activist, preacher and inventor who began writing and publishing in the 1920s).⁴ Walker's poems of the 1960s and 1970s in particular

challenge easy or complacent distinctions between the 'creative' and the 'critical', and her writing during this period can be situated within the context of what Barbara Harlow terms 'resistance literature',⁵ that is, creative and aesthetic genres animated by the imperatives of radical critique, political action and social change. Walker (who subsequently adopted the name Oodgeroo Noonuccal) continued to command a prominent place as an Aboriginal poet and activist over the next two decades. Her poetry and essays were joined by the publications of several other Black Australian poets, novelists, essayists, short-story writers and autobiographers in the 1970s and 1980s,⁶ work that served collectively to affirm bell hooks's observation that for the hitherto marginalised, writing is never 'solely an expression of creative power, it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless'.⁷

The period 1987–90, however, marked a crucial turning point in the uptake of Indigenous Australian writing and publishing. Magabala Books, the first Australian press devoted exclusively to publishing work by Indigenous Australians, was established in Broome in 1987, bringing out Glenyse Ward's autobiographical *Wandering Girl* as its first publication in that year. Also in 1987, Fremantle Arts Centre Press published Sally Morgan's *My Place*, a hugely successful narrative of family history and autobiography, and Penguin Books followed in 1988 with Ruby Langford's⁸ *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, a searingly moving and witty account of Langford Ginibi's life that occasioned critical and popular controversy as it made its way on to bestseller and then secondary school and university booklists. A significant number of Indigenous Australian autobiographical and life-writing texts followed throughout the 1990s and into the present,⁹ consolidating the profile of Indigenous Australian contributions in these genres and directing readers toward a more nuanced and textured appraisal of the shared histories, regional differences and gendered specificities of Indigenous Australian lives and strategies of narrative self-representation. But it was the appearance in 1990 of *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings*¹⁰ that served as a particular kind of watershed in the publication of Australian Indigenous texts. Energetic, passionate and explicitly polemic in intent, the anthology offered—and in some cases demanded—a newly focused, newly radicalised mode of reading and valuing varieties of Black Australian writing. Published two years after the Australian Bicentenary celebrations in 1988—an event counter-observed publicly by a great many Indigenous Australians as Invasion Day—*Paperbark* reinvigorated the need to examine and redress the ways in which Indigenous Australian voices, particularly literary and polemical voices, had been systematically excluded, marginalised or dismissed within the broader culture of the Australian written word.

In general, the kind of work that fuelled the publishing arm of what is sometimes called the Aboriginal Renaissance¹¹ of the late 1980s and early 1990s has been critically important in a number of ways. First, it has compelled readers, amongst other things, to revisit the received narratives of colonially-driven national history and identity that have governed non-Indigenous understandings of, and relationships with, Aboriginal peoples since contact. Second, it has been crucial in forging a reconsideration of the kinds of resistance such work offers to the continuing hegemony of institutionally-sanctioned discourses of Aboriginality, both past and present. Finally, it has cultivated and sustained for non-Indigenous Australian readers in particular a heightened awareness of the diverse interests of Indigenous Australian writers working within and across a range of situated knowledges, communities and perspectives. In these respects, Indigenous Australian writing over the last twenty years has had a profound impact on the range and register of interventions in what Marcia Langton calls the inter-subjective realm of cross-cultural discourses of 'Aboriginality'.¹²

A number of more recent anthologies¹³ have continued to update and extend the range of Indigenous Australian writing being published in these genres, and to introduce such work to new transnational audiences. The publication of one such anthology in 1998,¹⁴ however, led me to wonder about the continuing absence of a collection of Indigenous Australian writing that engaged with modes of cultural inquiry and intervention beyond those genres identified *primarily* with creative or aesthetic production. Where, for example, was the book that made available at least a portion of the theoretically informed and critically focused writing produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectuals? How visible or not was the published presence of Indigenous Australian critique aimed at discomfiting the well-worn paradigms by which 'Aboriginal Australia' has come to be known by generations of non-Indigenous readers? And what implications did this continuing absence have for the project of re-orienting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers toward new engagements with Indigenous ideas, politics, and representations?

This gap in the landscape of Indigenous Australian publications struck me as both curious and disturbing. As Ian Anderson notes in his introduction to Part I,

The written text has been employed by Indigenous Australians as a mode of political and cultural self-representation from quite early in colonial history—it is not a new phenomenon. Contemporary Aboriginal critical writing [thus] has its historical foundations in a much longer history of Aboriginal political and cultural critique.¹⁵

As Anderson goes on to remark, the written text has been mobilised by Indigenous Australians as a tool of political intervention since 1847, with the presentation of a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by eight Tasmanian Aborigines.¹⁶ A similar point, albeit with a different generic focus, is made by Michael Rose in *For the Record: 160 Years of Aboriginal Print Journalism*,¹⁷ a collection of Indigenous Australian chronicle, reportage, opinion and analysis published between 1837 and 1995 in both mainstream and Aboriginal-based publications. Rose observes, however, that despite the long history of Aboriginal print journalism, the majority of readers continue to think of 'Aboriginal writing' as something that exists 'primarily . . . in the realm of what White culture calls "creative" writing: poetry, short stories, novels and plays'.¹⁸

The tensions produced by the relative privileging of Indigenous creative and aesthetic cultural production, and the concomitant marginalisation of Indigenous critical analysis and interpretation, have frequently worked to sustain the hegemonic influence of non-Indigenous critiques in the realm of Indigenous affairs, an influence often (though not always) aligned with what are commonly termed 'Aboriginalist' perspectives and practices.¹⁹ Thus it was possible in 1993 for Stephen Muecke to ask 'Where are the Aboriginal intellectuals?'²⁰ as a way of highlighting the problematic effects of what he termed the 'prison-house' of a contemporary Aboriginality defined purely as 'cultural' in ways that simultaneously mystified Aboriginal identities and reduced them to moral or political instrumentalities. One troubling effect of the trend identified by Muecke has been the discursive construction of Indigenous Australians as long on cultural and 'spiritual' capital, but markedly short on intellectual and critical capital. This in turn has helped to maintain a discursive space in which non-Indigenous intellectuals have historically had relatively free rein in making their own critical interventions across a range of Indigenous Australian matters, without the obligation of engaging with the scholarship, arguments or analyses of Indigenous Australian intellectuals themselves.

The origins of that free rei(g)n, as Mick Dodson reminds us, are located not only in the colonial history of Australia more generally, but in the specific legacy of British imperialism and its intellectual tributaries. 'Since first contact', writes Dodson, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been the objects of a continual flow of commentary and classification'²¹ produced by settlers, administrators, anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and others. Such work frequently sought to use Aborigines in an evidentiary manner: to prove or disprove various theories, to legitimate or invalidate various policies, and to investigate or sanction the nature of the changes wrought by encounter with Europeans. This kind of commentary has frequently combined with a persistent European commitment to the

idea that the primary ‘use-value’ of Aboriginal culture was to delineate the scientific, social and cultural features of primitivity; it has also combined, at times, with more pragmatic, less theoretical anxieties about the political threat posed by a literate Indigenous Australian polity.

Against this historical background, the problems posed for Indigenous Australian writers in any period who have attempted to work against the grain of prevailing ideas about ‘Aboriginal writing’ have been formidable. Foremost amongst these has been the construction of Indigenous Australian critical writing as a field that is, at worst, virtually non-existent and at best, both highly specialised and highly marginalised. The outcome, whether intended or not, has been to render Indigenous critical scholarship and commentary as limited, simplistically oppositional or unproblematically consensus-building, and thus less threatening to dominant academic and institutional hegemonies. To ‘resist translation into the languages and categories of the dominant culture’, as Dodson puts it, is thus a project that involves the deployment of a complex repertoire of Indigenous critical strategies and articulations, ‘at times ancient, at times subversive, at times oppositional, at times secret, at times shifting,’²² as a means of challenging the erasures and bracketings that have too frequently characterised the reception of such work by broader critical and theoretical mobilisations.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the answer to Stephen Muecke’s rhetorical question—‘where are the Aboriginal intellectuals?’—is of course that they are everywhere, as the welter of specialist publications and databases dealing with Indigenous Australian affairs attests. Nevertheless, while distinguished critical work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, intellectuals, professionals and activists has long circulated in the public sphere, particularly over the last 15 years or so, very little of it has been broadly accessible in the form of widely published or easily available texts. There are exceptions to this, of course. For example, Marcia Langton’s *‘Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television . . .’: an essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things*, published in 1993, has since become a widely read and cited foundational text of Indigenous Australian cultural critique. Langton’s deconstruction of the cultural rhetorics implicit in the grammar of Australian filmmaking concerned with Aboriginality has produced an enduringly altered critical consciousness regarding the politics and effects of practices related to Indigenous Australian cultural production and representation. More recently, Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* has blazed new trails in its analysis of critical blindnesses regarding discourses of ‘whiteness’, and the implications of this for constructions and articulations of the ‘Indigenous’ by non-Indigenous feminist academics and theorists. And a number of

ground-breaking essays by Indigenous Australian scholars and professionals in the *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*²³ have also had a notable impact on the rules of critical engagement governing the production and representation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives.

Despite these exceptions, however, much Indigenous Australian critical writing has largely been confined to making its appearance in the form of academic journal essays, occasional papers, published lectures and articles in a variety of specialist or ephemeral publications. This can be accounted for in part by the social and political dynamics that have governed the contemporary production of some Indigenous Australian criticism; as Philip Morrissey observes in the essay that closes this volume, one of the distinctive and exciting features of contemporary Indigenous critical writing is its ‘connection with the social world’. This connection has often dictated the appearance of such writing either in forums aimed at having an immediate and concrete impact on public consciousness, or in publications that speak to a knowledgeable but numerically slight audience of academics, bureaucrats, policy analysts and opinion-makers. Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander critical writing has appeared in books in the form of anthologies or collections, it has usually been published alongside, or as a counterpoint to, non-Indigenous criticism dealing with particular thematic, disciplinary or theoretical concerns, such as native title, the Mabo decision, national identity, and perspectives on race. This kind of critical framing, despite its worthiness in other regards, has limited the kinds of dialogues and—crucially—the debates that emerge when the perspectives and analyses of Indigenous Australian intellectuals are encountered as a critical mass, rather than as a token, minority or peripheral presence amongst a wealth of non-Indigenous critical voices.

Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians is a response to these issues on a number of fronts. The collection aims to do several things: to introduce readers to new and recent criticism by Indigenous Australians; to offer new encounters with and contexts for better-known pieces of Indigenous Australian critical writing; to focus attention and debate on how such critically engaged work contributes to and challenges broader formations surrounding transnational Indigenous identities, cultures and histories; and, perhaps most importantly, to provide a starting point for readers interested in learning more about Indigenous Australian critical perspectives, as well as stimulating and extending the thinking of those already familiar with the field. In making more accessible to readers some of the debates, themes, controversies and milestones that mark Indigenous Australian critical interventions, the volume makes visible a critical space in which Indigenous Australians position themselves not as passive ‘witnesses’ of, but active agents in, the conceptualisation and analysis of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. It is also a space in which Indigenous Australian criticism emerges as a discursive formation in its own right, rather than in the liberal guise—well-intentioned, perhaps, but politically and ethically damaging—of an authenticating prop wheeled out in support of the enthusiastic interventions of non-Indigenous critique.

Most of all, *Blacklines* seeks to make visible the presence of an Indigenous critical space that co-exists with that of a culturally informed, politically charged critical community. A critical community, particularly one that is intersubjectively lived and constituted, is not the same as a ‘field’ or a ‘discipline’; its intellectual imperatives are distinct, as are its cultural and political coordinates. ‘Community’ should not be taken here, however, to gesture toward unsophisticated assumptions of pervasive unity and purpose; the critical community that emerges across these essays is marked by principled difference and debate as much as by committed dialogue and inquiry.

The politics of visibility that this concept of ‘critical community’ speaks to are articulated in various ways by a number of the contributors whose work appears in these pages. Marcia Langton observes that ‘the easiest and most “natural” form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible’.²⁴ Yet the countermand to such invisibility has its risks; as Mick Dodson argues,

In making our self-representations public, we are aware that our different voices may be heard once again only in the language of the alien tongue. We are aware that we risk their appropriation and abuse, and the danger that a selection of our representations will be used once again to fix Aboriginality in absolute and inflexible terms . . . However, without our own voices, Aboriginality will continue to be a creation for and about us.²⁵

Such risks and their consequences are not to be taken lightly, and the politics of this kind of community have not always been uncomplicated or unvexed. In her groundbreaking critique of Aboriginal narratives, white academics and the politics of identity, first published in 1993, Jackie Huggins pointedly refers to the endemic silencing of Aboriginal debate and disagreement in public. She writes,

Some non-Aboriginal academic colleagues . . . suggested I make my comments in an ‘Aboriginal’ forum . . . What forums are these, then? When Blacks publicly analyse and criticise each other it is perceived as infighting. However, when non-Aboriginals do the same it is considered a healthy exercise in intellectual stimulation. Why is the area of intra-racial Aboriginal debate such a sacred site?²⁶

A partial response to Huggins’s question might be to point to the enduring imperative for Indigenous Australian intellectuals and writers to

negotiate the tensions between ‘representation’ and ‘representativeness’. As the British Black cultural studies critic Kobena Mercer observes,

Whereas politicians and other public figures are elected into positions from which they speak as ‘representatives’, this role has fallen on the shoulders of black artists [and intellectuals] not so much out of individual choice but as a consequence of the structures of racism that have historically marginalised their access to the means of cultural production . . . In such a political economy of racial representation where the part stands in for the whole, the visibility of a few token black public figures serves to legitimate, and reproduce, the invisibility, and lack of access to public discourse, of the community as a whole.²⁷

This collection of essays certainly makes no claims to ‘representativeness’ on behalf of the very broad and diverse range of Indigenous Australian cultural analysis and critique, a range that obviously exceeds the material presented here and that has continued to accelerate and multiply throughout the editorial and production stages of this volume. Taken as a whole, however, *Blacklines* has aimed to intervene in what is arguably a definitive moment in the history of Indigenous Australian critical writing, a moment concentrated around work produced during the 1990s. In gathering together work published primarily throughout the 1990s, rather than commissioning an entire collection of new essays, *Blacklines* is premised on bringing together voices and perspectives in conjunction with each other as a means of recontextualising such work explicitly as a critical mass. It also serves to acknowledge the extent to which Indigenous Australian critical writing, like critical writing in general, both informs and is informed by the situated knowledges and trajectories that impel its moment(s) of production.

In this regard, the essays that appear here can be contextualised in part by the racially-inflected vectors of late twentieth-century Australian politics. On the one hand, the decade of the 1990s, in which the historic High Court Mabo decision of 1992 decisively dismantled the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, witnessed more generally an increase in the popular uptake of and receptiveness to the idea (if not the material reality) of Indigenous Australian claims for land rights, a formally negotiated treaty or agreement, and recognition of past as well as present social and political injustices. On the other hand, the same period spawned the development, still current at the time of writing, of a disfiguringly regressive political climate, particularly since the election in 1996 of John Howard’s conservative Coalition government, re-elected again in 1998 and for a third term in 2001.²⁸ The rhetorics of public debate around Aboriginal rights and identities articulated with increasing confidence since that time have produced amongst disturbingly large sections of the non-Indigenous Australian populace—including its right-wing intellectual and policy elites—a renewed contempt for, and dis-

missal of, Indigenous Australian efforts to gain or maintain and advance self-determination, equality under the law, and cultural autonomy and proprietorship.

Thus the critical writing of a number of Indigenous Australians throughout the 1990s can be situated within the framework of an intensified engagement with, analysis of, and resistance to a set of key discursive 'truths' about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and communities that continue to circulate (largely within non-Aboriginal institutional and policy contexts) with increased momentum and impact. This is not to suggest that such work can or should be reduced, in a deterministic sense, to the level of mere reflection or reaction to the political shifts and currents of its time. It is, however, to argue that the essays gathered here intervene in a particular set of discursive trends that are inflected, in both predictable and surprising ways, by contemporary political energies as well as by historical legacies and formations.

As a consequence, each of these essays invites, in varying registers, particular attentiveness to the ways in which Indigenous Australian critics have been concerned to test the limits and explore the possibilities of contemporary cultural theory and practice in relation to such issues. They bring their own specific critical understandings of agency, subjectivity, difference and representation to bear in scrutinising the intersection of a range of prevailing 'knowledges' about Indigenous Australians, and the theoretical and lived implications of those knowledges. In so doing, they both offer new approaches to persistent and seemingly intractable problems, and also enact what Mick Dodson sees as the 'twin projects' of Indigenous intellectual activism. At one level, he writes,

we must understand the motivation behind the historical constructions of Aboriginality, and understand why they have had such a grip over colonising populations; simultaneously, we must continuously subvert the hegemony over our own representations, and allow our visions to create the world of meaning in which we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to non-Indigenous peoples.²⁹

One of the guiding principles of *Blacklines* is that critical interventions may be, but are not always, theoretical interventions in the current academic sense of the phrase. As Ian Anderson remarks, the work that appears in this anthology

is not just being generated from within the 'academy'—although it does address academic representations of Aboriginality. It draws together a broad range of critical writers, and has emerged as a series of interventions in cultural debate by Aboriginal writers who could be more usefully seen as 'public intellectuals' rather than 'discipline-bound' academics.³⁰

If 'politics is knowledge in action'³¹ then the essays in *Blacklines* are key instances of the expanded senses in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectuals focus their critical gaze across a broad spectrum of political and cultural preoccupations. That spectrum includes the vexed, and vexing, task of defining modes of 'Aboriginality' from within particular Indigenous theoretical and cultural locations; the role of colonial and neo-colonial knowledges in formulating contemporary perspectives on Indigenous history and culture; the function of visual and textual representations in (re)constructing local and national discourses of Indigenous knowledge and heritage; the significance of education and language policies in challenging dominant paradigms of the Australian 'native' bequeathed by the imperatives of Empire; and the stakes involved in the history and politics of land management, land rights, 'wilderness' and tourism development in various local, regional and national contexts.

Blacklines is organised into three parts. Each part is introduced by an essay written by one of the volume's contributors that frames and comments on the selections within it. Part I is introduced by Ian Anderson in his essay, 'The Aboriginal critique of colonial knowing'. Each of the essays in Part I considers aspects of Indigenous Australian identity, tradition, culture, history and modernity, with a particular emphasis on how past and present constructions of Aboriginality have been mediated by recent challenges to the foundations of how Australians and others have come to 'know'—or not—the discursive terrain of the Aboriginal-as-subject.

Mick Dodson's 'The end in the beginning: re(de)finding Aboriginality', originally delivered as the W. C. Wentworth Lecture in 1993, offers a powerful scholarly critique of the politics and pitfalls of defining 'Aboriginality'. Rejecting essentialist models of identity and calling for engagement with Indigenous subjectivities that 'throw away the mirror' of (neo)colonial ideologies, Dodson explores the 'resources that will allow Indigenous peoples of the future to exercise our right to define and create ourselves and our lives, to write and sing and paint and tell ourselves, from the past into the future'. In an elegant contribution to revisionist historiography, 'Black bit, white bit', Ian Anderson analyses and contests the effects that anthropological discourses, particularly those of racial hybridity harnessed to assimilationist imperatives, have had on the critical project of developing Indigenous 'identities which are both coherent and sustaining'.

In 'Always was always will be'—a very well-known essay that has transformed the terms of non-Indigenous critical engagement with Aboriginal texts—Jackie Huggins responds to the Australian historian Bain Attwood's 'deconstruction of Aboriginality' in his analysis of Sally Morgan's *My Place*, and articulates the discontents and dilemmas that Morgan's work has

posed for Huggins herself as an Aboriginal feminist, historian and activist. Philip Morrissey, in his theoretically acute discussion of ‘Aboriginality and corporatism’, scrutinises the dangers posed by conceptions of Aboriginality that rely on ‘corporatist’ models of identity, and proposes a ‘reconstructive poetics’ of Aboriginality that can make possible ‘forms of identity that distinguish between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal with the requirement of minimal “othering”’.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s contribution, ‘Tiddas talkin’ up to the white woman’, presents a comprehensive archaeology and confronting analysis of a lengthy public dispute between black and white Australian feminists in the 1990s. In her discussion of the theoretical implications of this exchange and its aftermath, Moreton-Robinson asserts that ‘the Huggins–Bell debate’, as it has come to be known, ‘speaks to central issues within feminism about irreducible differences, incommensurabilities and white race privilege’, and suggests that the historical construction of the subject position of ‘white woman’ has been deployed by some white feminists to doubly disable Aboriginal critique based on exclusionary versions of both the ‘authentic’ and the ‘academic’.

Marcia Langton introduces Part II in her essay, ‘Culture wars’. The essays in this section investigate the cultural politics of representing Indigeneity through visual art, exhibition and film, and interrogate the institutional contexts that inform these areas. Each is concerned with exploring modes of engagement, adaptation, negotiation and opposition in Indigenous Australian cultural practice across the arts; all deal in some form with the dynamics of power, privilege and constraint in contemporary cultural and arts-based settings.

Both the late Lin Onus, as an arts practitioner, and Hetti Perkins, as an arts curator and historian, explore critically what Lin Onus saw as the ‘dilemma confronting numerous Aboriginal artists’ whose work—and identities—are frequently interpellated as ‘urban’ or ‘traditional’. In his seminal essay ‘Language and lasers’, Onus asserts that such binary distinctions render Aboriginal art ‘static’ as part of a broader ‘orthodox imperialist tradition’ in European apprehensions of non-Western art forms, and calls for speculative consideration of how new technologies and cultural continuities might intersect for Aboriginal artists in the twenty-first century. In her nuanced critique, ‘Seeing and seaming: contemporary Aboriginal art’, Perkins shows how earlier anthropological discourses have embedded ‘determinist perceptions of authenticity’ in contemporary art critical practice, particularly in relation to Indigenous desert art and despite the ways in which various artists have ‘continually tested the elasticity of the protocol of art production within these regions’. She then shifts her critical gaze

toward the politics of intercultural appropriation and the ‘hidden undercurrent of dialogue between artists and cultures’ that has been problematically ‘polarised by centre/periphery models’.

Margo Neale, in ‘The presentation and interpretation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art: the Yiribana Gallery in focus’, offers a searching and candid analysis of the possibilities and risks encountered in conceptualising Yiribana as a space committed to showcasing ‘an uneven and diverse collection’ of Indigenous Australian art in ways that ‘transcend previous boundaries’ between old and new, traditional and contemporary, innovation and persistence, confounding ‘traditionalist expectations’ in the process. And in a now-classic essay, ‘Aboriginal art and film: the politics of representation’, Marcia Langton argues that in debates focusing anxiously on ‘the commodification of Aboriginal art in the global art market, centred around concern about exploitation of the exotic’, too little attention has been given ‘to the motivations for the production of the art’. Langton’s analysis of why this should be so raises difficult questions about the ways in which Aboriginal art has been valorised by the international markets and discourses in which it circulates, particularly in comparison to the under-nourished, under-funded, and under-theorised area of Indigenous film and video production. In both arenas, she suggests, ‘Without a body of self-representative work there can be no self-critical assessment made and no meaningful discourse on Aboriginal aesthetics by Aborigines themselves’.

The final part of *Blacklines* is introduced by Aileen Moreton-Robinson in her essay, ‘Resistance, recovery and revitalisation’. The essays in Part III take up issues surrounding Indigenous subjectivities and knowledges as these are made concrete across a variety of localised and politicised settings. Contributors to this section cover territory including land management, language maintenance, literary production, heritage and tourism, and the colonial aftermath of education policy, and bring issues of praxis and strategic perspectives to the forefront. The essays here share a common focus on the contested politics of who defines ‘authentic’ and meaningful Indigenous identities and practices, how and to what ends. They emphasise not only resistance to surviving economies of colonial knowledge, but the recovery and revitalisation of newly adapted forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture in contemporary contexts.

In ‘Better’, Martin Nakata critically contests formations of Indigenous identity specifically in relation to Torres Strait Islanders. Employing both scholarly analysis and personal narrative to great effect, Nakata takes issue with a range of historical constructions of Islanders by a fleet of Western ‘experts’ and the impact of these on more recent ‘educational institutions, policies, research, pedagogies and curricula’ in the Torres Strait Islander context. He suggests that prevailing educational policies have been overwhelmingly centred on designating contemporary Islanders as (merely and

profoundly) the survivors of a 'lost' culture. This configuration, Nakata argues, masks a damaging colonial history of cultural theft and suppression, misrepresents Islanders as ineffective and naïve, and locates Western educationalists as the heroic 'discoverers' and recuperators of Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge, pitting 'savage' against 'salvage'.

In "'Nothing has changed": the making and unmaking of Koori culture', Tony Birch meticulously examines the contradictory impulses and drives behind the political saga of trying to restore the Indigenous-language name for an internationally-touted tourist destination in south-west Victoria, the (currently named) Grampians (Gariwerd) mountain range. Birch delineates how local negotiations around this issue speak to a 'form of radical conservatism' on the part of non-Indigenous Australians in which 'history is not unknown, but repressed' in favour of 'monuments to murderers'. The relationship between language, history, cultural maintenance and knowledge formation is explored from a different perspective by Jeanie Bell in her Boyer Lecture-based essay on 'Australia's Indigenous languages'. Bell contextualises the social, spiritual and heritage significance of Indigenous language survival and revival with reference to the history of Murri languages in south-eastern Queensland. In addition to the importance of language maintenance as part of a broader program of cultural revitalisation within Indigenous communities, she argues that Indigenous languages are not significant only for Indigenous Australians: Australian English is characterised by a great many words for 'places, concepts, relationships, plants and animals' unavailable in the language of the metropolitan centre, and the 'contribution would be even greater if our own languages were fostered and kept strong'.

The politics of 'lost and found' are critiqued from another angle by Fabienne Bayet-Charlton in 'Overturning the doctrine: Indigenous people and wilderness—being Aboriginal in the environmental movement'. In her informative scrutiny of historical tensions between the discourses of 'black' and 'green' ideologies, Bayet-Charlton argues that the drive of some conservationists to discursively locate a 'pristine' wilderness in the context of Australian land requires that they disavow the presence of Indigenous people from that landscape in what is essentially an extension of the doctrine of *terra nullius*. While emphasising the heterogeneity characterising both 'Aboriginal viewpoints' and 'green ideology', Bayet-Charlton suggests that many conservationists have yet to come to terms with Indigenous rights and entitlements to land and its management, and 'will have to address native title and the dispossessing doctrine of wilderness if they are to find common ground between cultural self-determination and ecological sustainability'.

Central to Bayet-Charlton's critique is the extent to which notions of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' Aboriginality are mobilised in the service of arguments about Indigenous claims in relation to land and identity. From a

different disciplinary base, Sonja Kurtzer queries the meanings of 'authenticity' in her essay, 'Wandering Girl: who defines "authenticity" in Aboriginal literature?' Kurtzer interrogates the uses to which constructs of authenticity have been put, suggesting that the drive to 'authentic' representation is constrained, for some Indigenous writers, by the influence of hegemonic formations of Aboriginality and the need to minimise threats to those formations. She focuses on the intersecting dynamics of audience, genre, canon formation and identity politics in analysing Indigenous Australian literary representation, and comments on the ways in which 'the issue of "authenticity" is being debated in indigenous communities' with regard to separation from and loss of families and communities.

Blacklines is the first book to bring together the work of Indigenous Australian intellectuals as a critical mass. In this sense, it is a point of departure, but emphatically not a terminus, for present and future engagements with some of the provocative and important work being produced by contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and thinkers. The essays collected in *Blacklines* now make it impossible, even as a rhetorical exercise, to pose the question: 'Where are the Aboriginal intellectuals?' They frustrate, too, the aims of those 'white intellectuals', as Andrew Lattas puts it, who persist in their desire to 'police the cultural practices through which Aborigines produce themselves'.³² The essays collected here certainly make it impossible for non-Indigenous academics and commentators to continue to profess ignorance of, or lack of access to, the critical dialogues and imperatives of Indigenous intellectuals across many sites and strands of inquiry.

Michel Foucault has suggested that the critical task of the public intellectual is now not to operate "'somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the truth of the collectivity; rather,' he says, 'it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform [the intellectual] into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness" and "discourse"'.³³ Intellectually extending, politically provoking, culturally enlivening, the work that appears in *Blacklines* delineates the sustained ways in which that transformative struggle is now being waged by contemporary Indigenous Australian critique. From my own vantage point as a non-Indigenous academic and citizen, we disengage from such critique at our peril. The essays here each speak to issues of continuing urgency and dialogue as defined by Indigenous Australians themselves. All represent turning points—intellectual, conceptual, polemical, theoretical—in how Indigenous Australians have intervened in key debates surrounding contemporary formations of race, nation, culture, politics and modernity.