Chris Healy. *Forgetting Aborigines.*
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The topic of Chris Healy's book *Forgetting Aborigines* is not new. Probably the best known critique of white Australia's treatment of indigenous Australians is W E H Stanner's 1968 Boyer Lecture *After the Dreaming* in which he coined the term the "Great Australian Silence." Stanner refers not only to the physical treatment of indigenous Australians but also to the way they had been excluded from modern Australian history. He argues that the changes that had occurred in the 1930s had been confined to a small group and that the referendum of 1967 had similarly had little impact.

In 1987 Bob Reece, then professor of Australian Studies at University College, Dublin, argued in his paper "Inventing Aborigines" that the term "Aborigines" was "both an invention and a product of European colonisation of Australia" (14). He argues that this invention of a term which homogenised a diverse group of peoples in part allowed Europeans to dispossess and institutionalise them. Furthermore, although they were collectively "Aborigines" they had no legal rights as a collective. Bain Attwood also contends in his 1989 book *The Making of the Aborigines* that the term "Aborigines" is a product of colonisation. While Stanner considered that indigenous Australians were excluded from history, Reece believed that their inclusion in history became part of the invention – in much the same way that Healy argues that Aboriginal culture serves white Australian needs.

Forty years after Stanner Healy is arguing that we should forget "Aborigines" along similar lines to Reece, suggesting that "Aborigines" are "anachronisms belonging to the past" (214). But while the word "Aborigines" and the Aborigines as a people, in the way that they were remembered by our colonial forebears, are anachronisms, the need to remember the past that produced such terms and cultural artefacts is essential. At the

same time it is essential that we forget both the outmoded ideas of indigenous Australians as primitives and the term "Aborigines" which is, as Reece and Attwood argue, a product of colonisation. As Healy points out indigenous Australians have been a persistent part of Australian culture, but only in the colonially constructed sense of being "Aborigines." The genuine past of the modern indigenous Australian is still largely unknown to most non-indigenous Australians. *Forgetting Aborigines* is pointedly ambiguous not least because it also implies the importance of remembrance. What Healy is suggesting is of course not that we forget indigenous Australians but that we recognise the term "Aborigines" as a colonial construction and acknowledge the damage it has done. The term is inaccurate because it binds indigenous people into an artificial group anchored in past ideas of them as "primitive." We are encouraged to reflect on the simultaneous presence of indigenous Australians in Australian culture, and their exclusion from the national story because they are forever pre-modern. "There'll be no end to these patterns [of remembering and forgetting] unless we begin to remember our forgetting" (35).

Forgetting Aborigines picks up on the way that "Aborigines" continue to serve non-indigenous needs and examines the ways that "Aborigines" are remembered, and forgotten, in Australia. He begins in the 1960s and considers television, art, heritage, the museum and tourism in the context of the politics and social landmarks in indigenous affairs. It is disappointing that he does not consider dance, drama or literature; surely also a large part of Australia's remembering and forgetting of indigenous Australians. He poses the question of how we are to remember through colonial artefacts that are often patronising or define indigenous Australians as primitives.

The book follows Australian culture and history from the 1960s and the two referendums through to Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations this year. Alongside each of the political and social landmarks for indigenous Australians Healy examines an aspect of Australian culture. He traces the rise and fall of Aboriginal people in the public consciousness and the link between these cycles of remembering and forgetting and political cycles. The 1960s were a time of significant political change for indigenous Australians but the emphasis of programmes such as *Alcheringa*, which was shown on ABC television in 1962, was a continuation of the idea that the Aborigines were a dying race and that their way of life had to be captured on film before it was gone forever. Healy argues that the film *Bush Mechanics* (1998) and *Bush Mechanics: The series* (2001) shown on Warlpiri television are structured in the same way as *Alcheringa* and that indigenous presence on television in the 1960s was much more prevalent

than it is today, an indication perhaps that nothing much has changed.

In the chapter on Aboriginal art, old and new, Healy argues that early "Abo" art is inseparable from the rise of contemporary indigenous art but that "Abo" art has been "forgotten, disavowed and repressed." This "Abo" art was Aboriginal kitsch produced by non-indigenous people at a time when the state controlled and dominated the lives of indigenous Australians. Healy argues against the conventional view of Aboriginal art having developed from the Yirrkala Church Panels and the Yirrkala Bark Petition of the 1960s, through the 1970s and the Papunya artists to the 1980s exhibition *Dreamings: The art of Aboriginal Australia* exhibition in New York, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Adelaide, followed in 2000 by *Papunya Tula: Genesis and genius*. The success of genuine Aboriginal art has helped Australia to forget the recent past in which kitsch was produced by non-indigenous Australians which paved the way for aboriginal art.

Healy places the 1988 bicentenary celebrations as a turning point for Aboriginality and heritage. He uses the term "Aboriginality" to describe an intercultural space in which indigenous and non-indigenous people engage with one another. The bicentenary celebrations of 1988 saw a need for change but what to replace the "myths" with was unclear. The boycott of the bicentenary by indigenous Australians brought to the fore some of the tensions in Australia and highlighted the fact that indigenous Australians were outside of history. 1988 led the way for the Mabo and Wik cases and the *Bringing them Home Report* and also the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation.

Healy argues that Australian museums seem to be doing the work of remembering for us, where memory is in the form of cultural artefacts rather than individual memory. Healy uses breastplates as both belonging to colonial history and also indicative of the collecting and memorial process, to show that there are two sides to this remembering. Often given to "the last of the tribe" in a sense they celebrate genocide. But museums now include spaces for indigenous people and the breastplates have also become a symbol of indigenous Australians' endurance and survival. While museums are traditionally places that evoke the past, Healy argues that the Koori Voices exhibition at the Melbourne Museum is a "form of living memory" looking both backwards and forwards.

Finally Healy looks at tourism and specifically at the Lurujarri Heritage Trail between Minyirr and Minarriny on the north coast of Broome. This venture is a mixture of white and indigenous exploitation of indigenous culture and the environment but may be one area where indigenous and non-indigenous Australians can engage and a way for indigenous Australians to maintain a connection to the land. What became clear reading Healy's

book is that exploitation of Aboriginal culture, while largely by white Australia, is not exclusive to white Australia. Indigenous Australians themselves are learning to exploit their culture, particularly in terms of art and tourism.

Each time Australians remember indigenous Australians it is as though for the first time and each time this remembering takes the form of recording a dying race and a fading culture. Indigenous Australians have been a persistent presence in Australian public culture but this presence could now be considered either disrespectful or condescending and functioning as a service to "white" Australian needs. Rarely does the remembering take the form of being included in Australia's history. "Aborigines" are seen as primitives and to guarantee that primitive status it is necessary to see them as a distinctive group, which the term "Aborigine" supports. The view of "Aborigines" as primitive means that they are outside of history without any possibility of progression tinto the modern world and it totally ignores the modern indigenous Australian. Healy demonstrates that Aboriginality is always present and highlights the issue of how indigenous and non-indigenous Australians need to picture an Australian story that includes us all.

It is uncertain how this process of forgetting is likely to work. As Healy points out in his coda about Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations, there is a very real desire to forget because remembering makes us feel bad. Rudd, like many others before him, talks about new beginnings and looking to the future. For Healy the key is to look to a better future, whatever that may mean, without the need to forget the past. He argues that it "is not just a question of 'adding' a black component to Australian history but of indigenous history transforming the category of Australian history itself" (114).

One of the most refreshing aspects of Healy's book is that while he advocates the forgetting of "Aborigines" he asks that we remember our periodical forgetting, but most importantly he advocates remembering those aspects of the past that too often we want to forget, such as "Abo" art, breast plates and Jacky Jacky. To forget these is to forget the past:

> Aboriginality is always there for settler and indigenous Australians. It haunts both those who are prepared to disinter unpalatable memories and those enamoured with amnesia, repression or denial. But "Aborigines" we can forget. In their place we might imagine friends, neighbours and strangers who live near and far; citizens marked by difference and sameness; people of varying predicaments, capacities and desires; people how, like all of us, live with the possibilities and constraints of being in history (220).

Unfortunately this “round of remembering” reinforces the “them and us” mentality and of there being a distinct group of “indigenous-Australians” who have discrete problems, albeit as a result of colonisation, but nevertheless problems that are “theirs” that “they” need to fix in order that they can live as white Australians. Those who support this view also support the idea that there is a single Australian identity that all Australians need to conform to. What Healy suggests is that we view Australia as a single place in which communities as diverse as Fitzroy and Fitzroy Crossing are both legitimate and both important to Australian culture; that we celebrate our cultural variety. The book is a timely reminder, in the midst of yet another moment of remembering, that we need to forget.

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