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Becoming Other-wise: Remembering Intercorporeal Indigeneity *Down Under*

Feeling white certainties

Australia is a country that takes the problem of its ‘others’ very seriously. That is, in the global discourse of Australia as a nation, Australia performs its relationship to otherness in serious ways.¹ Perhaps even more specifically, it could be said that Australia performs itself as a nation that is deeply concerned with otherness as a problem, and it does this as a way of creating an image of its self-composure. In shoring up its borders, literally and metaphorically, through languages that claim meanings about its others (and that therefore bring those others into being, often as immaterial others whose bodies do not matter), Australia produces a global sense of its own self-certainty. Australia produces itself as a nation that is strong and that can stand alongside other nations who also other their others. In this way, Australia is at its core aspirational, unsettled with its Antipodean sense of distant, ‘down-underness’, working hard to push that to the side so that it might perform itself as one of the same.

In this chapter I investigate how Australia creates Indigenous otherness as a means to enforce its mythology of nationhood, a mythology that has been practically maintained by various historical practices of colonisation, immigration, assimilation and multiculturalism, and also carried by the material effects of those policy discourses. More specifically, I am interested in how the idea of Indigenous memory is intertwined with a national sense, and *sensing*, of the nation as a landscape of cultural memory. Here, I examine how the Indigenous subject is positioned as a figure of memory, one
who performs a ‘deep’ knowledge of the ancient past and who, in doing so, erases the trauma of colonial history. My argument emphasises the affective dimensions of what Chris Healy has called the ‘contact zone’ of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in the making of national discourses of ‘Aboriginality’. For Healy, the term Aboriginality marks how the ‘cultural and textual construction of things “Aboriginal”’ occurs as an intercultural activity.² As Stephen Muecke points out, the promise of a relational viewpoint of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia means attending to ‘discursive formations – linguistic and non-linguistic practices, institutional relations’ such that one might discover those ‘places where one’s discourse is only made possible by its relation to the Other.’³ I argue that the affective landscape created by and through the Indigenous figure functions to shore up aspects of Australian belonging by enacting what Sara Ahmed calls ‘non-performativity’ in the name of cultural memory. I further suggest that it is in moments that arrest, decompose or un-perform this kind of non-performativity that a different set of affective meanings, and memories about those meanings, reveal themselves.

In my discussion, I move from the affective repertoire of Holocaust recollection discussed in Chapter 1 to the ethno-touristic setting of Australia’s Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park. I offer an inversion of how the manipulation of what I identified in Chapter 1 as the Holocaust affect, and more broadly as the memory affect, works. Founded over 20 years ago, Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park bills itself as Australia’s largest Indigenous cultural park, and is listed in the Guinness Book of Records for producing the country’s longest-running stage show. The park offers interactive day and night tours, state-of-the-art audiovisual technologies and professionally choreographed dance performances. In its reconstruction of the corroboree alongside its portrayal of the Dreamtime, I argue that affect is used to evade and replace the traumas of colonial Australia with a popularised form of ancient cultural memory. Furthermore, I argue that at Tjapukai ‘Aboriginality’ is performed as sign and object of a national memory culture which positions the Indigenous memory of the deep past as a metonym for the job of the nation remembering itself. In this, the remembering Indigenous figure is scripted into a national memory repertoire, which sees Indigenous subjectivity as the symbol of a continuous act of timeless recall. I further suggest that this image of