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Chris Healy
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Introduction: From the Ruins of Colonialism

Sydney, Invasion Day, 1988.
11.30 leave Paula's for the train to the city.

'No fares today' reads the placard at the station. One of many signs announcing: 'Today is outside of real time—a day of historic/al entertainment'. The train is packed. Only five Anglos other than me in the carriage—I hear Vietnamese, Khmer, Arabic, Italian and Greek. Where are we going? The foreshore will already be impossible. Why are we going? Spectators in/of/for the spectacle.

Kids sit on the carriage floor playing hand-held computer games—'King Kong' or mini-Nintendo—Gibson's cyberspace in their hands, their quick minds already jacked in.

As a collection of British colonies and then a nation, Australia came into existence as a product of both colonialism and modernity; proud of its fancied youth and eager for the fruits of civilisation, enamoured with progress yet yearning for tradition. Historical accounts of Australia have equally been products of colonialism and modernity. More often than not, the mission of history has been to remember the triumph of colonising a continent and forming a modern nation state with destiny on its side. While the historical legacies of colonialism and modernity remain palpable, many of the dreams of colonialism and modernity lie in ruins. This is a book from these 'ruins' in the sense that it discusses both the colonial past of former colonies and the colonising of indigenous people in Australia. But ruins are never simply gone or in the past; ruins are enduring traces; spaces of romantic fancies and forgetfulness where social memories imagine the persistence of time in records of destruction. Thus this book is about the past in the present, it is written from within contemporary cultures of history. It moves from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal accounts of Captain Cook, jumps to the installation of history in museums and school curricula, glides through the historiography of archetypal historical events. This is a book with strong hopes for history and social memory. My interest is not in hammering home the

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Sydney, Invasion Day 1988 4, by Andrew Bock
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constructedness of history, nor in the important task of diversifying and proliferating accounts of neglected historical actors but in thinking historically about existing social memory. It is a gesture towards learning to inhabit landscapes of memory which are, in part, landscapes littered with ruins; some archaic and others nightmarish, some quaint simulations and others desperate echoes. I imagine such a landscape of memories not as homeless place for lost souls but a ground from which new flights of historical imagination might depart and to which they might return, differently.

I began this work during 1988, a year replete with history, dedicated to marking 200 years from the moment of permanent white settlement on the east coast of the Australian continent. As a project in the present, the Bicentenary was much more than a historical celebration and it was certainly not a just historical commemoration. For many it was a year of mourning, yet another memorial to a white invasion. For those with a passion for the past, the focus of the year provided them with an opportunity to indulge themselves. Publishers presented a slew of bicentennial specials: *Australia: Beyond the Dreamtime*, *The Australian Way*, *The Official Bicentennial Diary*, *A Bicentennial Keepsake Log*, *A People's History of Australia since 1788*, *Australia: The Creation of a Nation*, *The Penguin Bicentennial History of Australia: The Story of Two Hundred Years*, and many more. Beyond the bookshops 'the past' took other forms in exhibitions, films, television specials, local and national

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commemorative events, mass and media extravaganzas, stamp issues, and protests: a historical white noise was about in the land. Yet, despite efforts to unify the themes of the Bicentenary, it was a year in which many languages and dialects of history were spoken.

The officially sanctioned vision of history gave pride of place and star billing to the First Fleet as the moment of genesis. An Australia Day spectacular was both electronically dispersed across the continent and focused on the waters of Sydney Harbour where a re-enactment of a journey from Plymouth to New South Wales was concluded. This time the ships came through the Heads under diesel power, sporting head-sails advertising Australia Post and Coca-Cola. More widely, the tale of convict ships in 1788 was repeated again and again until it became a metonymic formula: our history began as a journey, our history is that journey. The First Fleet was used as an unlikely Pilgrim's Progress to hold together and enunciate an ancient tradition of exodus and a modern obsession with progress. This was not surprising. As an arbitrary and fragile marker, the legitimacy of 1988 depended on a temporal anchor, it necessarily implied the historical importance of the First Fleet. Yet I was puzzled because the first bicentenary that I remember had occurred eighteen years earlier. In 1970 Captain James Cook had been nominated as the 'father' of Australia and my education had certainly framed Cook as the man who initiated Australian history with his discoveries. In 1988 the visage of Cook sparkled from the new polymer $10 note and a few pieces of alleged Cook relics festooned the Australian Bicentennial Exhibition, but generally Cook was absent. He seemed a cultural icon whose Australian bicentenary had been forgotten, a historical figure whose eighteenth-century map-making traces were obliterated by the simulations of 1788.[1]

On the bridge at Central.

The march comes in from Redfern. Wave upon wave—black faces, black bodies. Northern Territory people first, painted in ochre and dancing, then Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the rest. Colonisation in reverse, but why the categories of the States?

Gubs greet the show as if we were all bro and sis. The feel is togetherness, dignity, excitement at possibilities.

Hyde Park.

Speeches, dancing, talking, prayers, speaking, watching. People—Damien, Rigmor, Judy, Lyne, David, Julia, Michael, Kevin, Peter, Julie, Fiona, Jeffrey. People …

The bicentennial celebrations and nagging questions about Cook were my starting points. I began by asking questions about the kinds of

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relationships which individuals and groups had constructed between past and present. I was interested in how historical sensibilities had changed over time, how particular visions of history held central and contested places in Australian cultural systems. I thought historiographically about history as re-interpreting, re-membering, re-arranging, and transforming apprehensions of the past. When historians have approached such questions, they have tended, like Hayden White,[2] to look first to the writings of historians in order to understand the senses of history in the past. Historians have certainly been important operators in the work of remembering but they have rarely been the sole, and only sometimes the most important, speculators on public and popular understandings of the past. Spectacles of history like 1988 draw varied responses from those with professional investments in the past. Confronted by such a diverse mass of cultural representations of history, some historians respond with donnish disdain for the beguiling tinsel and the chimera. Others may be eager to leave the archive and join the pursuit of history in the present. But in general historians are apt to make far too much or far too little of explicitly historical commemorations and celebrations like those of the Bicentenary.

It was with these doubts and questions in mind that I began to think of history as both too narrow and too formal to describe what fascinated me about making 'the past' meaningful. Perhaps historical imagination, historical consciousness, popular memory or social memory were more appropriate terms. Public historical demonstrations such as the Bicentenary might be regarded as momentary flashes of historical memory, episodic disruptions that bring their own pleasures, but which are surely followed by a return to ordinary time after the entertainment is concluded. Clearly, the residue that explicitly historical ceremonies leave behind will vary greatly from event to event and from time to time. One historical figure may be inducted as a marble artefact into the company of a pantheon with great fanfare, only to become yesterday's hero recognised solely by antiquarians. A historical event may be actively remembered and regularly invoked in a particular community without sustaining any palpable presence in the public sphere. In other words, it is always difficult to be sure if commemorations, or the many other ways in which we speak of history, are about revealing or disguising. This problem is particularly pressing if we think of cultures of history in terms of historical consciousness. If we think of historical consciousness must we then assume a historical unconsciousness and seek to untangle the complex relationships between the two through historical jokes and slips, transference and dreaming, repression and neurosis? One alternative, which I explore in this book, is that commemorations, like museum displays, statuary, historic houses, history books, films, image-making, graveside

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orations and the myriad ways in which relationships between past and present are performed, can be thought of as constituting the field of social memory. In this scheme, social memory is made up of relatively discrete instances in a network of performances: enunciations in historical writing, speaking, (re)enactment, (re)presentation and so on; the surfaces of historical discourses; the renderings of memory practices. Most of us do not walk around endlessly expressing our being-in-history yet we are all memory workers, recalling and forgetting, selecting, ordering and erasing memories.[3] Displacing history onto the larger field of memory has advantages beyond merely historicising the historiographic operation. It refers us to the diverse capacities, techniques and institutional forms of memory, to relationships between history and memory which are not necessarily organic or inevitable. However, this book is not an attempt to grasp the entirety of social memory in Australia nor is it an effort to 'speak' for national history, a notion which is itself one of the products of historical imagination. It is more an effort at mapping some of social memory's 'infinity of traces',[4] an exploration of the structures and disruptions which have produced historical sensibilities. I am more concerned to ask of social memory: '… how it functions; what representations it designates, what elements it cuts out and removes, how it analyses and composes, what play of substitutions enables it to accomplish its role of representation?'[5] My focus is on those moments when social memory has been acted out, performed, or demonstrated; in-between moments when we cease to live in time and space in order to reflect on, or be trained in, or entertained by something of our historicity, our being-in-history.

La Perouse, later.

A huge Aboriginal camp behind … and the sun setting brightly over Botany Bay—ships, refineries, chemical storage dumps, breakwaters and jets—my curses on the waters?

Catherine, Matthew and I argue about white appropriations of black spirituality—the impossibility, the denial, the desire. We wallow in the palpable truths of slogans made real—White Australia has a black history … they have survived … But what do we do with that?

Much of this book turns around the ways in which social memory in Australia, as in other settler societies, is a product of colonialism. This is true in the simple sense that the most powerful public historical narratives of Australian social memory date from the colonial period, prior to Australia becoming a nation in 1901. The historical monuments bequeathed by twentieth-century Australia are not nearly so solid or taken for granted as those of the nineteenth century. In part because they are within the reach of lived experience, these monuments are more

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fractured, subject to challenge, reinterpretation and even the refusal of popular memory. As a consequence the social memories of nominally postcolonial Australia are split between relatively privatised memory and media memories. That Australian social memory is a product of colonialism is also true in the sense that histories of colonising are ubiquitous—histories of discovering, exploring, pioneering, founding institutions and struggling in a new land—as are histories generated by colonial relations—histories of nation-building, national character and fighting wars. Poised as Australia is on the cusp of what may be millenarian transformations, my suggestion is that such colonial social memories constitute a world both in ruins and of ruins, a world of ruination and a historical dream which has been ruined.

The occupation of this country by European and other non-Aboriginal people has occurred under the signs of modernity: signs of development, of progress, of advancement, of 'uninterrupted disturbances of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation'. Yet when non-Aboriginal Australians looked for history in Australia, they did not see a historical landscape. As the famous complaint went, Australia lacked castles or ruins. Both despite and because of the confrontations between settlers and Aboriginal people, many non-Aboriginal Australians understood themselves as making history on a continent 'without history'. Yet at the same time, European Australians have been obsessed with their historicity. 'Non-modern Aborigines' have been outside of history while 'modern Australia' has been history itself in defiance of the attenuated relationships between 'tradition' and 'the present' for peoples displaced from where they could articulate deep roots in an 'immemorial past'.[6] European Australians have shared a peculiar version of that modern predicament of being both obsessed with and oblivious to the past as they rush, backwards, into the future.[7] In the midst of these perturbations, non-Aboriginal Australians have looked to the past both with assurance and anxiety, with a desire to legitimate the present and a sense that the present is a dangerous and frightening place. The belief that 'we' stand at the summit of history has been taken as a self-evident truth. The past has also appeared as a marker of loss (a golden age that is no more), or as a point of derisory comparison (history has passed us by), or as a trace of unease (what was Australian history?). History has been remembered as part of the problem and part of the solution. Many of the fantasies of colonialism are now literally in ruins tempered by new kinds of rights and new forms of constraint. This is not to say that we are living at the end of history or any such comfort. However, it does pose a question: what becomes of colonial social memories when the world of their making lies in ruins? To simply reiterate the stories of colonial Australia without confronting this question is a colonial dreaming that produces only

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homesickness. The alternative I suggest here is of social memory as a remembering of ruination which is part of our being-in-history: a refusal to accept that 'the past has been settled even more effectively than the country'[8] and a gesture towards belonging in the ruins of colonialism.

> History as the Law, inscribed on tablets of stone, contrasts and combines with history as a sustaining Otherness. History as a science is interfused and interwoven with history as myth. There is a real interest in exploring the texture of this interrelation, which is so much more intricate when its threads are not torn sharply apart.[9]

The book consists of three sections entitled In the Beginning, Installing Memory and In the Event. Each section consists of two chapters which work through particular problems of social memory, and, in the process, produce a speculative map of social memory. In the Beginning examines the 'foundations' of social memory by taking the name of James Cook as a name common to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal historical culture in Australia. Cook's 1770 landfalls in Australia might have been remembered as one rendezvous in a long tradition of encounters between indigenous peoples and outsiders across the Pacific but this has not been the case. For many non-Aboriginal people Cook has been a figure deserving of special attention as the man who admitted Australia into the universal history of a world encompassed by Europe. Chapter one traces the various ways in which Cook was constituted in non-Aboriginal social memory during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a name which connected Australia to Europe and marked a separate beginning; as an exalted hero, a pedestrian exemplar, a figure of domestic security and much else besides. In a juxtaposition, chapter two examines a number of Aboriginal histories of Cook. I describe them as histories rather than myth, narrative or legend so as not to obscure the value of these performances of social memory. In many of these histories, Cooks (and there are a number of Cooks) are, not surprisingly, figures of discontinuity. In contrast to non-Aboriginal histories, I suggest that Aboriginal histories of Cook deploy a much less ossified sense of social memory. These histories are concerned with the place of history-making, with the ethical dilemmas bequeathed by the past. These histories seem closer to the spirit of social memory in caring about the importance of being able to live with, rather than simply accumulate knowledge about, the past in the present. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories of Cook produce very different 'beginnings' for history. Here they provide a way of evaluating the epistemological conventions which govern social memories.

In part two, Installing Memory, I consider museums and schools as institutions which have given practical form to historical imagination. Here

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my concern is with the exercise of power in public and popular institutions which traffic in social memory. Chapter three focuses on Australian colonial museums. These museums have often been regarded as deficient in comparison with their European counterparts because they collected and exhibited so little historical material. My suggestion is that these museums were very active in hoarding paper and 'collecting Aborigines' in ways which demonstrate very active efforts to form memories of nation and 'race'. I then turn to the more marginal social memories which can be identified in local historical museums. Chapter four performs a similar procedure on the teaching of history in elementary schools. When compulsory school was introduced in the eastern colonies of Australia in the late-nineteenth century it was not history but geography which provided the framework for training students to apprehend their world. As education systems were professionalised and became more 'child-centred', Australian history became a major component of new curricula designed to foster citizenship, patriotism and character. By way of contrast, I examine an archive of local histories produced by school children and their teachers in the 1920s. These histories draw little from disciplined syllabuses of the school but instead are grounded in knowledge of local clues and traces on the land and in storytelling.

Finally, part three, In the event, examines two nineteenth-century historical events: a battle fought between gold miners and British troops at Eureka in 1854 and the rescue of Eliza Fraser in 1836—a white woman who was supposed to have been 'captured by Aborigines'. These may have been chance events in their occurrence but there has been little left to chance in their having been retold so often, nor is it by chance that I discuss them here. These two events are archetypal: one profoundly masculinist and nationalist; the other a patriarchal account of the feminine, obsessed with 'race' and the tenuous nature of white occupation. By turning to these events and their historical recitation in books and newspapers, poetry and painting, film and works of fiction, I aim to follow the ways in which events—those foundations of history as it really happened—have a tendency to exceed the limits of their time and structure. By returning to these events I consider the prospects of generating new histories from old events.

I began this study with a sense that perhaps historical imagination had become an atrophied form in the late-twentieth century. I worried whether those like Fredric Jameson might be right, that historicity itself had been eroded, that 'Our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past'.[10] At the same time it seemed that professional historians maintained a powerful presence in the universities, and that the public sphere was literally overflowing with histories, many of them a result of space being made for new or excluded

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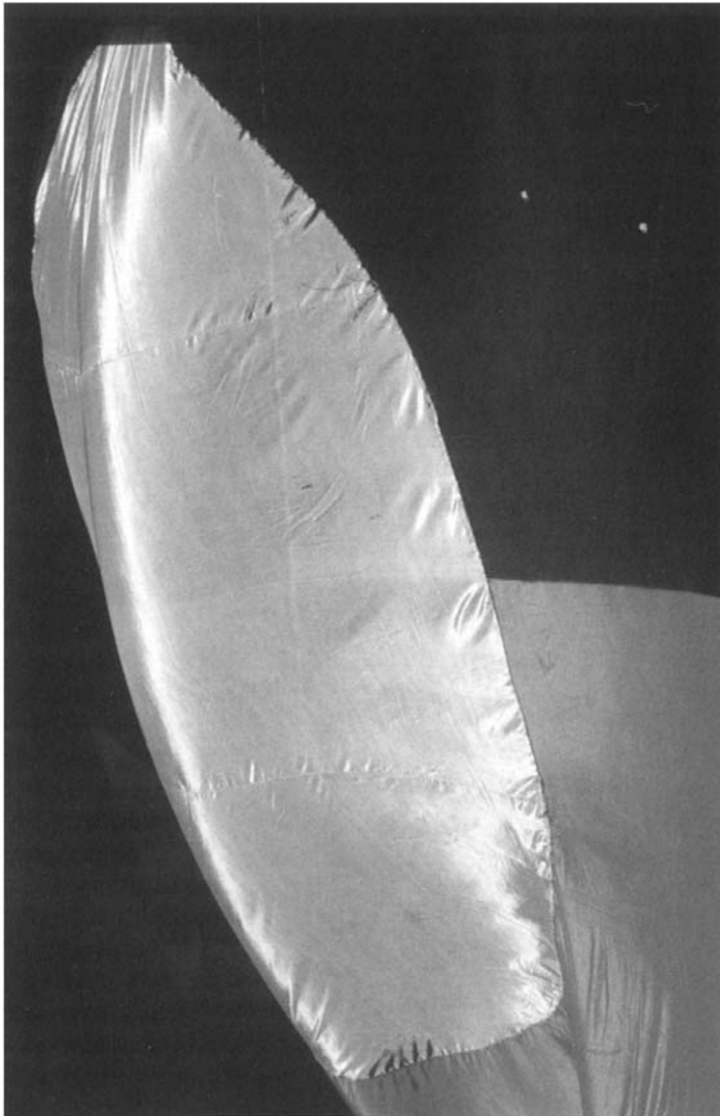

Sydney, Invasion Day 1988 7, by Andrew Bock
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stories. In the end, neither dire warnings nor comfortable professionalism nor contented pluralism seem appropriate responses to the predicaments of social memory. In this book I have considered why only some histories are available to social memory. I have tried to suggest how, so often, 'new histories' are already 'there' in historical imagination, familiar even before they appear. I have explored some of the shadows, shapes and possibilities of 'impossible' histories with different senses of historical time and place, different modes of historical connectedness, different patterns of remembering and forgetting. In the end, the prospects for social memory will depend on historical responses to these other possible histories.

Kurnell, later.

We wanted to go, so we took the invitation seriously. The Territory mob announced they were going to spend the night finishing the business started by Captain Cook. They made four camps around a small grass amphitheatre. We sat by fires on the beach. Joshua talked for hours about cattle work and country music.

Yunupingu spoke. Said it was about talking to the people who lived and died here. 'It is boring', he said. 'It is boring but important business. You will not understand, but that doesn't matter.' Another invitation.

The groups dance, sing, laugh, compete, rest a little and then begin again. The sounds of the ceremonies, the languages, and the dances are incomprehensible. Music with sticks, didgeridoo and boomerang. Music and words older than time I can ever grasp. All I can catch literally are the animal dances.

Most whites leave with the camera crew around midnight. We stay. The last fireworks disappear with the city. The music makes this another place, a place of others, not me, a time of others.

Everything becomes very quiet, still and slow in the time before dawn. Then there is urgency—get up, tea and warmth. The songs pick up a new pace—'singing in the sun' says someone.

We follow behind as the groups come together and slowly, slowly dance towards the flagpole. Silence for the dead. Then people speak of history and tell stories of mourning, anger and pain. The flag of Captain Cook is hauled down. The Other's flag is raised slowly, an inch at a time. At the top of the flag-pole a breath of wind opens the cloth, bright in the very first rays of a new sun.

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