# Double Desire

# Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art

Edited and Introduced by

Ian McLean

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Double Desire:
Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art,
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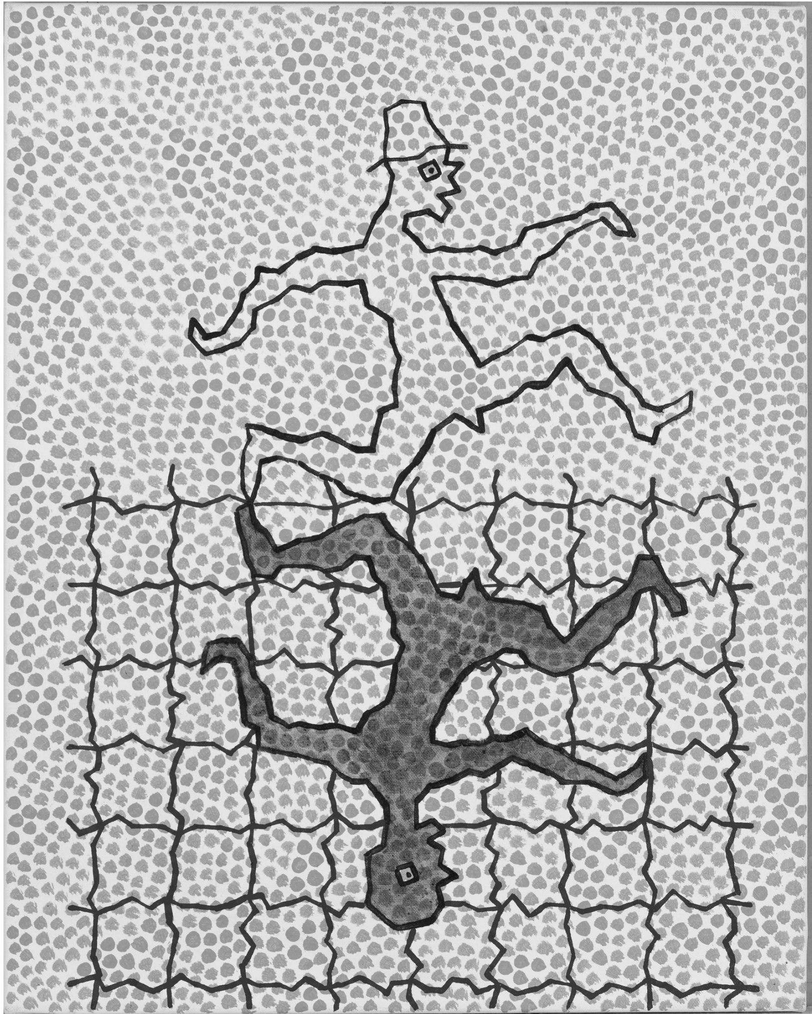

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the generous support of the University of Wollongong and my immediate masters, Professors Amanda Lawson and Sarah Miller, this book would not have been possible. I must also acknowledge the College Art Association, as the idea of the book and many of its essays came out of a session called “Engagements between Indigenous and Contemporary Art,” held on a cold February morning in New York at its annual conference in 2013. The idea for the book and the thinking that informed it is the direct result of two Australian Research Council projects in which I have been involved during the previous several years, as well as another project currently under development. I would particularly like to acknowledge my ongoing conversations with a group of colleagues associated with these projects and who have each contributed an essay: Darren Jorgensen, Nigel Lendon, Margo Neale and Una Rey. On a more general level I owe a debt to my conversations with an international group of scholars committed to the ideas informing this book, and with whom I have been meeting on an annual basis since May 2011 to discuss modernisms in Indigenous and African art. Its core includes Bill Anthes, Peter Brunt, Elizabeth Heartney, Sandra Klopper, Anitra Nettleton (who has contributed an essay), Ruth Phillips, Chika Okeke-Agulu, W. Jackson Rushing, Nicholas Thomas and Norman Vorano. Our convivial dialogue made me think about these issues in a more global fashion, and was instrumental in conceiving the session for the CAA.

My greatest thanks go to the authors of the essays. Without them the book would not have seen the light of day. They have been an inspiring, enthusiastic and committed mob, which in part reflects the energy in the field of Indigenous art from which we all draw. It may have a small presence in the artworld but this field comprises a “great and bright and fiery troop,” to quote from “Deliverance Through Art” by the little known Australian poet, activist and Wobbly, Lesbia Harford (1891-1927). I thank my wife Erica Izett for this obscure reference. She is my most enthusiastic and constant interlocutor.

Gordon Bennett’s “psychodramas,” as he sometimes called his art, grabbed my attention when I first came across them in 1989. Refusing to play the identity politics of colonialism, which keeps everyone in their assigned places, he declared in 1994: “Aboriginality is no life-raft for me.”

Bailing out of the system, he found himself in what he called “a very interesting position … In a conceptual sense I was liberated from the binary prison of self and other; the wall had collapsed, but where was I?” For Gordon, answering this question was his life’s quest, which he embarked “by adopting a strategy of intervention and disturbance” that took him directly into the thick of transculturation, that vortex of mixed hybrid postcolonial relations. Few artists cut to its quick as he did. He inspired a generation of urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in Australia and overseas, and he also changed the way art history is done here. I first met Gordon in 1993, and from that point we worked closely together. I always found uncanny parallels between my aspirations as a scholar and his thinking as an artist, as if Gordon had always been there before me. “If I were to choose a single word to describe my underlying drive,” he wrote, “it would be freedom … Freedom is never assured by the laws and institutions that are intended to guarantee it. To be free is to be able to question the way power is exercised, disputing claims to domination. Such questioning involves our ethos, our ways of being, or becoming who we are. To be free we must be able to question the ways our own history defines us.” These ideas echo throughout this book. Gordon died suddenly during the final stages of its preparation, on June 3, 2014, a week after his work featured in the 2014 Berlin Biennale, as it had in *Documenta 13* two years earlier. To you, my loyal and generous friend, this book is dedicated.

# INTRODUCTION


# IAN MCLEAN


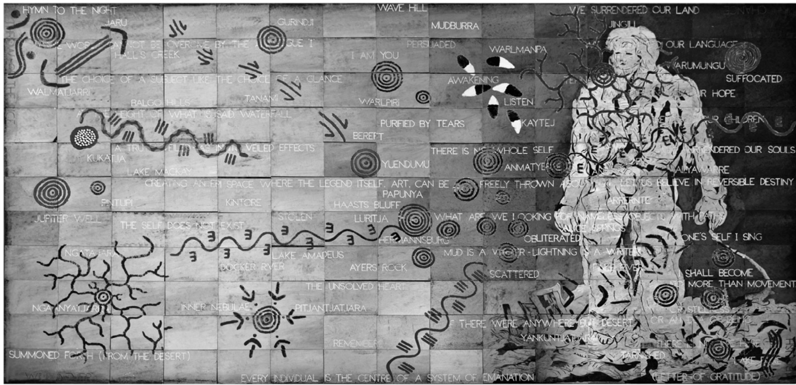


Fig. 0.1. Michael Nelson Jagamara and Imants Tillers, *Hymn to the Night*, 2011-2012, synthetic polymer on 165 canvasboards (Nos. 89763-89927), 277 x 532 cm, private collection. Courtesy of the artists and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

This book is the outcome of a session that addressed issues of Indigenous contemporary art at the 2013 College Art Association (CAA) conference in New York.[1] If Indigenous art was once considered a highly localised pre-national expression, its contemporary formations have a very global and post-national perspective. This globalism is evident in the geographic range of essays in this book, which cover art in Africa, Australia, Canada, Mexico and the United States, with scholars drawn from a similar range of countries, with the notable absence of Europe.

Indigenous cultures are the oldest in the world but their study is relatively peripheral to the discipline of art history. This is also the case with Indigenous contemporary art, not because it is new (it has been

[1] The session, called "Engagements between Indigenous and Contemporary Art," occurred on the morning of February 15, 2013.

around for about thirty years) but because only in a few tributary artworlds—Australia, Canada and New Zealand—has it made a strong impression. Elsewhere it tends to be well isolated from the discourse of contemporary art. For example, in 1998 Art Cologne (which advertises itself as "the world's oldest *art fair* for modern and contemporary art") excluded Australian Indigenous and African art on the grounds that they were not modern or contemporary art.[2] While such *Westernism*—the insistence that modern subjectivities can only emerge from a Western mode of being—is now a spent force,[3] it has not been the boon for Indigenous art that it has been for other non-Western art. This is largely due to the perceived cultural fundamentalism of indigenism, which seems at odds with the transcultural tenor of our times and modernity more generally.

The troubling relationship between the ideas of indigenism and modernity is particularly evident in Africa, where the modern ideology of postcolonial nation states has had to struggle free from the legacy of colonialism that is embedded in words such as native and indigenous. This history bears on Victoria L. Rovine's and Anitra Nettleton's examinations of the critical reception of contemporary African art that specifically addresses rather than forecloses the postcolonial legacies of indigenous traditions within transcultural contexts. However, the history in former settler colonies of both indigenous art and the idea of indigenism has been very different to that of Africa, where the impact of imperialism occurred later and took another form. This is reflected in those essays that investigate how the notion of indigenousness functions in the former settler colonies of Australia and North America, which are now leading First World nation states. As Margo Neale and David Garneau argue in their essays, transculturation is radically reconfiguring the aesthetic, critical and museological categories that formerly delimited Indigenous and contemporary art in these countries, especially Australia and Canada.

The essays in this book demonstrate that Indigenous contemporary art is wide ranging in its interactions with the contemporary world. The Australian authors mainly investigate intercultural experiences in "remote" Australia, where the contemporary artworld has an ambiguous presence.

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[2] See McDonald, "Faint Heart Never Won Fair Deal," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 November 1998. In 1997 Art Basel had applied a similar ban—see Throsby, "But is it Art?," *Art Monthly Australia*, 105 (November), 32 (1997)—as had Art Cologne in 1994 (though it eventually relented).

[3] Okwui Enwezor introduced the term "Westernism": Enwezor, "The Black Box," *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 46.

Darren Jorgensen and Henry F. Skerritt analyse the idiosyncratic ways in which two individual indigenous artists represented the modernity of frontier life, more or less oblivious to the discourse of Western art. Taking a different tack, Nigel Lendon and Quentin Sprague consider examples in which indigenous artists seemingly pre-empt certain defining features of Western contemporary art. Christine Conley, Lisa Roberts Seppi and Larry M. Taylor tend to the ambivalent discrepancies that shape Native American experiences with the contemporary artworld. Choosing his words carefully, Taylor describes it as "a dual vantage point" that "at once engages" Western art movements "and stands at a remove."

Whatever their perspectives, the authors share a concern to identify and track the *agency* of indigenous artists in their exchanges with the contemporary world. In his essay Lendon introduces the term "relational agency" to describe the politics of these exchanges. Taking the idea from Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of "relational aesthetics,"[4] Lendon means to shift notions of agency from their conventional locus in individuated action to that of social relations. This relational agency of indigenous artists is either the framing background or the explicit subject of most essays in the book. Pushing the other way, Maya Haviland and Una Rey examine the complexities of collaborations for non-indigenous players who engage with indigenous art and artists. Such is the nature of relational agency and transculturation: it cuts every way, blurring the defining boundaries of Indigenous contemporary art.

## The Transcultural Turn in Contemporary Art

While the topic of Indigenous contemporary art is peripheral to the CAA's main agenda, contemporary art and transculturation are not, even though each arrived in the artworld in the 1980s in the same package. Fernando Ortiz, who first coined the term "transculturation" in his 1940 classic text, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, envisaged it as a distinctly colonial cosmopolitanism in which "the vast blend of races and cultures overshadows in importance every other historical phenomenon."[5] Focusing on the crossings of Cuban Afro-Spanish culture, Ortiz proposed the neologism "*transculturation*" as a better description of intercultural processes in colonial cultures than the anthropological term "acculturation," which emphasises the one-way imposition of the coloniser's culture. In *Imperial Eyes* (1992) Mary Louise Pratt applied Ortiz's thesis to colonial

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[4] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Le Prenes Du Reel, 2002).

[5] Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 98–99.

travel writing. She concluded that inside imperialism's rigid centre/periphery ideology—inside because it is an ambivalent product of colonial desire—is a dissembling "contact-zone" that, despite its "radically asymmetrical relations of power," has numerous "interactive, improvisational dimensions." The colonised might not "control what emanates from the dominant culture," but they can fashion it to their own purposes. Similarly, colonisers are shaped by what they encounter: "While the imperial centre tends to understand itself as determining the periphery … it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis."[6]

Pratt's book, along with postcolonial criticism more generally, was timely because a more imperious and less deconstructed "imperial eye" was exactly the accusation that most critics levelled at the unexpected appearance in contemporary art venues during the 1980s of not just Australian Aboriginal art—as it was called then—but also its artists. It characterised critical reaction to the 1983 Paris Autumn Festival, *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (New York, 1988) and *Magicians of the Earth* (Paris, 1989). Each included site-specific installations that required the active participation of Aboriginal artists, as well as other examples of Aboriginal art. Curators were lambasted for decontextualising Aboriginal art by framing it as contemporary art and, like earlier colonial expositions, putting Aboriginal people on display. However, like most artists given the opportunity to participate in such events, the artists refused the paternalism of such criticism and were pleased for the opportunity to open communication with the wider world.[7]

In the 1970s indigenous art struck a chord with certain sections of the artworld interested in the potential of cross-cultural dialogue to challenge Westernised assumptions of institutional modernism. An example was the 1979 *Sydney Biennale*, the first Biennale to include Aboriginal art. It featured an installation by German artist Nikolaus Lang, which, said the Biennale's Artistic Director Nick Waterlow, "combined Aboriginal ochres from South Australia with European pigments —literally a bringing together of two cultures, a real dialogue."[8] The actual dialogue may have seemed slight but Lang's desire for cross-cultural experiences was genuine.[9] Aboriginal artists also felt this desire, as they longed to escape the prison-house of primitivism into the open fields of the contemporary.

[6] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.
[7] Kean, "Aboriginal artists in New York," *Art & Australia*, 26 (4, Winter) (1989).
[8] Waterlow, "1979 European Dialogue," in *Biennale of Sydney 2000*, ed. McDonald (Sydney: The Biennale of Sydney Ltd, 2000), 169.
[9] For a discussion of these aspects of the Biennale, see Butler, "Multiple Views," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 4 (1) (2003), 19.

Lang returned to Australia in the latter half of the 1980s to engage more directly with its indigenous history and culture, including collaborating with the Ngarinyin artist David Mowaljarli over a six-month period.[10] Around this time a threshold was crossed. Whether it was an aestheticised celebration of difference, exemplified in Jean-Hubert Martin's *Magicians of the Earth* (1989), or a postcolonial critique of Western artworld hegemony, exemplified in Rasheed Araeen's *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (1989) and the 1989 *Havana Biennial*, a clearing was cut through which non-Western artists infiltrated the mainstream contemporary artworld, giving its newfound globalism a distinct postcolonial character. Exceeding the assumptions of Westernism, these transcultural practices eventually brought into question the very idea of a "mainstream," which was the dominant metaphor of twentieth-century contemporary art.

## What is Indigenous Contemporary Art?

The "contemporary" to which we (in this book) refer is not life's existential flow, its eternal *durée*—what Susan Vogel dubbed the "elastic continuum" of unfolding time[11]—but the ideology of "contemporary art."[12] Thus we are interested in an invented category rather than the given contemporaneity of art. No matter how recent or how transcultural its formation, it is not contemporary art until the artworld claims it as such. Hence, the invention of Indigenous contemporary art requires influential artworld players. This is a persistent theme of many essays in this book, which trace the subtle dialectics between (mainly) Indigenous art production and Western artworld discourse.

Unless this political dimension of Indigenous contemporary art is recognised, we are likely to end up with commonsense cultural definitions such as that proposed by Stevan Harrell and Lin Yu-Shih in 2006: Indigenous contemporary art is made by "people who live and work in an environment that is at least partly shaped by the culture and community of the tribe," but "departs significantly from the conventions of the tribe's previous art, and consciously embodies the individual artist's radical

[10] See Lang, *Nunga und Goonya* (München: Kunstraum München, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1991); Bell, *Storymen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 95; Radok, "Focus," *Artlink*, 21 (2) (2001).
[11] Vogel, *Africa Explores* (New York: The Centre for African Art, 1991), 32.
[12] See Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

creativity."[13] The definition rules out "traditional" styles and art that doesn't have anything "to do with tribal existence or identity." However their example— "a Maori artist commissioned to do a sculpture of a rugby player"[14] —can be Indigenous contemporary art if the discourse of contemporary art says so.

Nevertheless, Harrell and Yu-Shih's definition stands in the sense that cultural understandings continue to over-determine the meaning of indigenous art, making it an exclusive club. Not long ago this was also the case with Western art. As many artists of Third World origin living in the First World discovered in the 1960s and '70s, becoming a modernist was virtually impossible without the right birth certificate (i.e. racial lineage), even if one had the right citizenship.[15] If globalisation has since undermined the cultural exclusiveness of being both a modernist and a Western artist, this is not the case with indigenous artists, who still need to prove their ethnicity.

While each nation state has its own regulations and definitions of indigenousness, today "indigenous" is generally the name given to a diverse category of peoples supposedly "left behind" by modernity and still living "tribal" lives.[16] Inhabiting every continent and living in all climatic zones, indigenous people comprise about five percent of the world's population (about 370 million people), are ethnically diverse (speaking nearly sixty percent of the world's languages), and dwell in every type of economy and habitus known to humankind. This needs to be kept in mind when considering Indigenous contemporary art, as it does not refer to art being made today by these 370 million officially classified indigenes. Indigenous contemporary art is a much narrower taxonomy. Largely confined to a small fraction (about two percent) of the world's indigenous population, its artists mainly inhabit four First World nations: Australia (500,000 indigenes), Canada (1,173,000 indigenes), New Zealand (731,000 indigenes) and the USA (4,900,000 indigenes).[17] Only in the first

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[13] Harrell and Yu-Shih, "Aesthetics and Politics in Taiwan's Aboriginal Contemporary Arts," *NATSA Annual Conference*, University of California, Santa Cruz. http://faculty.washington.edu/stevehar/NATSA%20aboriginal%20arts.pdf (Accessed March 18, 2014), 6.

[14] Ibid., 7.

[15] See Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story* (London: Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, 1989).

[16] Mikkelsen (ed.), *The Indigenous World 2013* (Copenhagen: The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), 2013).

[17] These figures are from the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. http://www.iwgia.org/ (Accessed February 5, 2014).

three, all of which are former settler colonies of the British Empire, does Indigenous contemporary art have a significant presence in the nation's main artworld discourse. With a few exceptions, such as Taiwan and Arctic Europe, which have emerging Indigenous contemporary art scenes, the other ninety-eight percent of the world's indigenous population make art categorised as folk or tribal. It is not that Asia (260 million indigenes), Africa (fifty million indigenes) and Latin America (forty million indigenes) don't have contemporary art scenes or indigenous artists practicing in them; rather, in these artworlds Indigenous contemporary art is an absent category, as indeed it was elsewhere until recently.

The ethnic exclusiveness of being indigenous has not constrained Indigenous contemporary artists, who not only work across all genres, from ceremonial, to folk, tourist and high art, but are also wide-ranging in their uses of medium, form and content. In short, notions of ethnicity do not delimit Indigenous art. There are artists who neither directly address nor claim their indigenousness, and others whose practice is wholly conducted in terms of it. Some associate their indigenousness with animistic beliefs; others emphasise its political context. Some scorn shamanism and animism as New Age "romanticized" ideas and "a white construction";[18] others go even further, dismissing the idea of "Aboriginal art" as an essentialist category, a "white thing"[19] that demands deconstruction (fig. 1.1). Some think it is impossible for an Indigenous artist to escape being indigenous; others insist that they are cosmopolitan transnational agents with no horizons except the contemporary world. Objecting to being "bunched together with other artists … looking for their identities," Tracey Moffatt proclaimed, in 1992: "The reason why I have been successful is that I have avoided allowing myself to be ghettoized as a BLACK ARTIST."[20] On the other hand, Jimmie Durham, the Indigenous artist who has most successfully made a career in the European contemporary artworld, deals with his indigenousness in what seems a casual carefree way: "I don't want to consciously put things in my work that are from my background. But I don't want to consciously take them out either. I just want to be an intellectual; and I happen to be a

[18] Ah Kee in Moore, "Black Eye = Black Viewpoint: A Conversation with ProppaNow," *Machine*, 1 (4) (2006), 3.
[19] Bell, "Bell's Theorem," in *Richard Bell*, ed. Leonard (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 2007).
[20] Moffatt, "Fax Conversation between Tracey Moffatt and Claire Williamson," *Eyeline*, 18 (Autumn) (1992).

Cherokee. But it doesn't mean that you are a different kind of intellectual."[21]

## Inventing Indigenous Contemporary Art

In the third quarter of the twentieth century a few individual non-Western artists, including indigenous ones—such as Albert Namatjira and George Morrison—caught the eye of the mainstream. However, collectively indigenous art remained trapped in an ethnic dimension. Such frustration was behind the formation in 1972 of the art collective called "Group of Seven"—an ironic allusion to the famous art movement of white Canadian modernists. The next year the "Indian Group of Seven" (as they were known) formed an association called "Professional Native Indian Artists," which they legally incorporated with the aim of promoting Indigenous art on aesthetic rather than ethnic grounds. Without success, the corporation disbanded in 1975.[22] They failed because the ethnic signifiers of "Indian" could not match the universal signifiers of the aesthetic regime by which Westernism claims its authority.

Another indigenous art collective that formed at this time but in quite different circumstances succeeded where the "Indian Group of Seven" failed. Papunya Tula Pty Ltd—the instigator of Western Desert art in Australia—operates to this day as the most successful indigenous art company in the world. Its initial success was due to influential artworld allies. Imants Tillers—who would later collaborate with the Papunya Tula artist Michael Nelson Jagamara (fig. 0.1)—and his postmodernist allies, considered Western Desert painting a form of conceptual art. Another faction looked past such painting to the ceremonial ground designs upon which they were based, which seemed to resonate with postminimalist installations of Land artists such as Richard Long. With this in mind, William Wright, Director of the *Sydney Biennale* in 1982, invited a contingent of Warlpiri men to make a ground painting in the midst of the contemporary Western art on show. It impressed two visiting French curators, Suzanne Pagé and Jean-Hubert Martin. Pagé invited the Warlpiri men to the Paris Autumn Festival the following year, and Martin began to form a grand vision that culminated in *Magicians of the Earth*. Tellingly, Tillers withdrew from the Paris Festival because he believed the ground

[21] Durham, 1996, quoted in Huberman, "Stone as Stone," *Afterall*, 30 (Summer) (2013).
[22] See *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc* (Regina: Mackenzie Art Gallery, 2013).

painting introduced a primitivising dimension that detracted from the conceptualism of Aboriginal contemporary art.[23] *Magicians of the Earth* would later be criticised on exactly these terms.[24]

Despite their differences, each of these artworld approaches challenged the logic of Westernism. In this context the expression "contemporary Aboriginal art," which appeared in the early 1980s, was a deliberate strategy to displace the metaphors of primitivism and ethnography that had hitherto plagued Aboriginal art. The full significance of this strategy became apparent in the new century when the notion of "the contemporary" emerged as a new theoretical discourse.[25] This is also when the term "indigenous" became a *keyword* in cultural discourse—in Raymond Williams's sense of being part of the basic "vocabulary" that shapes its thinking.[26] While "indigenous" is not a keyword in either the first (1976) or second (1983) editions of Williams' seminal classic *Keywords*—though its corollary "native" is—it does appear in Bennett, Grossberg and Morris's 2005 revised edition, *New Keywords*. Its newfound status was due to it becoming "a postcolonial identity tag … after political movements initiated by indigenous peoples spread around the world"[27] in the 1980s and 1990s. Tracing the word's emergence in the anti-colonial struggles and cultural relativism that took root from the mid-twentieth century, and particularly in the human rights discourse of the United Nations, Stephen Muecke (who penned the entry) wrote:

> Communities of indigenous peoples define themselves through strong identification with place. This contrasts with identities which change through history and identify with their history-making capacity. Thus the word indigenous emerged as "history-making" European empires labeled colonially subjugated peoples as Natives, Indians, or Aborigines, with a mixture of some admiration for their erstwhile sovereignty and considerably more disdain for their seeming lack of modernity.

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[23] Tillers later regretted this decision, believing that it was an ineffective way to make his point. Conversation with the author, November 19, 2013.

[24] For example: Araeen, "Our Bauhaus Other's Mudhouse," in *Making Art Global (Part 2)*, ed. Steeds (London: Afterall Books, 2013).

[25] See Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011).

[26] Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 6–7.

[27] Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, *New Keywords* (Maiden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 180.

Muecke (like Williams) was not addressing artworld keywords. However, in locking the term firmly into a discourse of 1970s and '80s activist identity politics he missed that its later artworld use challenged how both contemporary and Aboriginal art had hitherto been thought. David Garneau makes this point when he argues in his essay that "Indigenous art"—as opposed to "Aboriginal art" or "Native American art"—addresses the transnational global condition of contemporary art. *Indigenous* artists, he says, are those "jet-setting, art magazine reading," university-trained artists who actively engage with the discourse of the artworld, as opposed to the *Aboriginal* artist whose horizon remains his or her community and its traditions. In a similar spirit, I have argued for the expression "Indigenous contemporary art" rather than "contemporary Indigenous art": the point being that the referent is a type of contemporary art, rather than simply Indigenous art made today in the elastic continuum of life.[28] This argument however hasn't taken root. While globalism has catapulted Third World art, especially that of its diaspora in the West, into First World contemporary art museums, this is not the case with Indigenous contemporary art. It still awaits its invention.

## Conclusion: An Indeterminate Discourse

Given the indeterminacy of Indigenous contemporary art, as editor I have refrained from corralling the different ways in which this book's authors use the term "indigenous," even to the point of whether it should be capitalised or not. Usually it is in lower case, though in Australia and Canada it tends to be capitalised, where it follows the example of its the precursor term "Aboriginal." signifying that it is a proper name denoting a specific ethnic group (e.g. Indigenous Australians) within the multicultural nation state. In my essays I have capitalised the term when I think it refers to a proper name (such as Indigenous contemporary art), but left it in lower case when it seems to have a more general signification (as in indigenous people). However, it is a slippery signifier and at times I am undecided which way to go.

This indecision reflects the different biological, ethnic and legal (or political) significations of the term. Its etymology ("sprung from the land") justifies its *biological* meaning in everyday uncapitalised usage, where it generally refers to either an individual's birthplace or a cultural

[28] See McLean, "How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art," in *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* , ed. McLean (Brisbane and Sydney: IMA and Power Publications, 2001).

artefact—e.g. a language, dance, song or cuisine—that has its origins in a particular place. For example, haggis is indigenous to Scotland, foie gras to France and damper to Australia, but none bear any relation to Indigenous cultures. Here 'indigenous' means 'native,' except in North America where Native is a proper legally circumscribed name that denotes a subjugated people. As a *legal* category in the politics of the nation state, the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Native' have no bearing on one's cultural practices or place of birth.

In a strict biological sense, humans, like coffee and bananas, are indigenous or native to one place, East Africa. When migrating humans settled the world from their East African homeland, they carried aspects of their identity with them and made the rest up along the way. Unpacking the relationships between these universal and contingent aspects of being is not helped by the conflation of indigenousness with *ethnicity*, which collapses cultural practices into a fixed system of inherited traits. According to Hardt and Negri, such collapse is a symptom of the passage to global modernity, which they argue morphs biological paradigms into cultural ones, reconfiguring biological racism as "cultural racism."[29] Such culturalism says Stuart Hall, ignores the fact that "all cultures are … permeable to cross-cultural influences."[30] And according to Arif Dirlik, it reduces the dynamism and historical contingencies of cultural formations to essentialist timeless generalisations.[31]

Delimiting indigenousness to ethnic signifiers is a tactic of both the nation state and its enemies. On the one hand, state multiculturalism uses ethnic signifiers to delimit indigenousness—to keep it safely in its place—and on the other hand, activists use the same signifiers "in the reassertion of native cultures and knowledge systems" as a "means to combat the 'colonization of the mind' that survives past formal political decolonization."[32] Ethnic signifiers are also increasingly used in struggles against nation states and Western hegemony more broadly, evident in "the revival of cultural fundamentalisms around the globe … as new claims to ethnic and cultural identity produce demands for new sovereignties."[33] Effectively political questions are displaced into "the realm of culture."

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[29] Hard and Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 192.
[30] Hall, "Creolisation, Diaspora and Hybridity in the Context of Globalisation," in *Créolité and Creolisation: Documenta 11_Platform3*, ed. Basualdo (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 191.
[31] Dirlik, "Global Modernity?," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 6(3) (2003), 287, 288.
[32] Ibid., 283.
[33] Ibid, 280.

Thus, argues Dirlik, “what needs urgent attention presently is the political meaning of culturalist claims on epistemology.”[34]

Part One of this book addresses these issues at a theoretical level by unpacking the terminology that names Indigenous art, and analysing the challenges that theories of contemporary art pose to it. The thirteen essays that follow elaborate upon different aspects of transcultural relations in Indigenous contemporary art. Part Two comprises five essays that examine collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous agents. Part Three consists of various case studies in Australia and North America of individual Indigenous artists engaging with the contemporary world. Part 4 focuses on the curatorial, institutional and critical discourse of Indigenous and African contemporary art.

These essays cannot hope to provide a comprehensive picture of Indigenous contemporary art, even if such a picture exists. Rather, it is better to consider each as a fragment of an emerging or imagined entity called Indigenous contemporary art that is yet to come into focus or find its place in contemporary artworld discourse. Some essays can be placed in close relation to others like adjacent pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, while others seem to be different parts of the picture. Many pieces are missing but hopefully enough key ideas are in place for the reader to get a sense of what Indigenous contemporary art means in our time.

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[34] Ibid., 286.