THE TREVOR REESE MEMORIAL LECTURE

2017

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Associate Professor, University of Tasmania
Heart, Power, Treaty, Truth: Affective, Political Performances in (Post) Reconciliation Australia

Menzies Centre for Australian Studies
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SERIES EDITOR: Ian Henderson
The Menzies Centre in brief

The Menzies Centre for Australian Studies was established at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, in 1982. Initially known as the Australian Studies Centre, it assumed its present name in 1988. In 1999 the Centre became part of King’s College London, and was endowed by the Australian Government. The Menzies Centre’s object is to promote Australian studies at British and European universities. In its broadest manifestation, the Centre is an Australian cultural base in London, providing a highly-regarded forum for the discussion of Australian issues. The Centre’s conferences, seminars and briefings attract a diverse audience and help to produce a more comprehensive, detailed and balanced perception of Australian politics, economics, life and culture than is popularly available. The Centre also administers scholarship and fellowship schemes which help cement intellectual links between Australia and Britain. Menzies Centre staff teach at BA and MA levels in Australian history, literature and film and supervise MPhils and PhDs. The Menzies Centre offers, as well, an Australian bridge into Europe, both western and eastern. It is closely involved with the Lincoln Britain-Australia Trust and the European Association for Studies of Australia and its staff lecture throughout Europe and offer informed advice on matters Australian to academics, the media, the business world and governments. The Menzies Centre constantly updates its informative website, which includes news about the Centre’s conferences, seminars and other activities, and about Australian studies in general.

The Trevor Reese Memorial Lecture is an annual event of the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies in association with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. The lecture is in honour of Dr Reese, a distinguished historian of the British Commonwealth and Australia and Reader at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, the Centre’s home from 1982 to 1999. He was author of Australia in the Twentieth Century, and first editor of the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History. The lecture is always given by a younger scholar in the disciplines of history or political science.

Associate Professor Penelope Edmonds is an ARC Future Fellow and Associate Professor, History and Classics, School of Humanities, University of Tasmania. Penny’s research and teaching interests include colonial/postcolonial histories, humanitarianism and human rights, Australian and Pacific-region transnational histories, performance, and museums. She is the co-editor of Australian Historical Studies journal. Her latest book Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation: Frontier Violence, Affective Performances, and Imaginative Refoundings (Palgrave, 2016) was recently shortlisted for the Ernest Scott Prize (2017).
Heart, Power, Treaty, Truth: Affective, Political Performances in (post) Reconciliation Australia

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The Reese Memorial Lecture was delivered on 4 October 2017 on the Strand Campus, King’s College London.

Many thanks to Dr Ian Henderson, Director of the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, Kings College, and to Dr Simon Sleight for their invitation to present the 2017 Trevor Reese Memorial lecture in Australian History this evening. I am greatly honoured to do so. I wish to warmly thank and acknowledge Hilary Reese and the family of the late Professor Trevor Reese, after whom this lecture is named.

I also wish to dedicate this lecture to my colleague and dear friend Associate Professor Tracey Banivanua Mar, of La Trobe University, Melbourne, who passed away in Australia this year.

Many of us have learned so much from Tracey’s critical insights. Brilliant, passionate and steadfast in her politics, Tracey has gifted us with activist, emancipatory scholarship of the highest calibre. She was a shining star of Australian, Pacific and Indigenous histories, and an intellectual leader to whom so many of us have looked.
I want to thank the Aboriginal artists whose work I show in the lecture this evening, which also features in my recent book. Although we are in London, I also acknowledge the peoples whose histories I speak of today: the Wirrayaraay people of what is now the New England region of New South Wales; the Mouheneenner people, the traditional owners and custodians of the land people of the Hobart region; and Tasmanian Aboriginal people more broadly. I wish to pay my respects to Aboriginal elders, past and present.

Given Professor Reese’s work on the Commonwealth and related countries, international relations and his awareness of Indigenous Australia, I hope that he would appreciate tonight’s discussion around the powerful political phenomenon – reconciliation – that springs out of the histories and colonial and constitutional relationships of so many commonwealth countries, or British settler societies, and which have powerful legacies today. As you will see, these are matters of colonialism and empire that continue to shape the present in multiple and challenging ways.

To begin, in the settler nations such as Australia, how do we overcome the deep legacy of violence that has accompanied colonialism? This is a violence that sits disturbingly in our psyches and creates inequities in Australia that have ongoing structural consequences. These Commonwealth nations – for example, Australia, Canada and New Zealand – are the places where ‘settler colonisers come to stay’ and are therefore generally resistant to formal processes of decolonisation that many may be more familiar with, such as India, for example. In these settler nations – where issues of genocide; sovereignty; land, maritime, mining and cultural rights; ‘stolen’ or ‘lost’ generations; treaty calls and claims; and demands for legal redress and reparation are urgently contested – ‘reconciliation’ serves multiple social and political functions, and resides within a political language and paradigm that frames processes of redress. Yet settler societies, unlike other colonial societies, have not been transformed by the dramatic rupture of decolonisation and the move to a postcolonial state, but are instead marked by settler colonialism’s historical continuity. It is here in these settler nations that the alluring and utopian politics of reconciliation come into play.
On the 29th of May this year, just five months ago, at Uluru – or Ayers Rock, as some of you will know it – at the very heart of the nation the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’ was delivered by the First Nations National Constitutional Convention to the Australian nation. The Aboriginal writers of the statement placed matters of history and truth telling, Aboriginal sovereignty and power, and treaty or ‘Makarrata’ (the Yolgnu term for peace-making after a fight) at the very forefront of agreement-making and constitutional change. Indigenous Australians did not reject federal constitutional change outright (in fact, many desperately want it as do non-Indigenous Australians), but they did reject the minimalist proposition of simply changing a tiny few words in the Australian constitution to acknowledge them or removing two key race-based clauses. Rather, the ‘Statement from the Heart’ insisted upon a far-reaching and thoroughgoing agenda for the nation delivered ‘to the people of Australia’ from Indigenous Australia. (In October 2017, the Australian Government formally rejected the key recommendation of the Referendum Council for a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. See Postscript).

The statement from the heart of the country, Uluru, invoked a potent ‘politics of heart’, and what is of real interest to me this evening is that this political performance can be understood as part of a long lineage or repertoire of political and affective Indigenous/settler invocations for peace-building and agreement-making in settler colonies that have been shaped by violence and dispossession. These political performances of diplomacy and peace-building are an important part of a wider, global paradigm of reconciliation, redress and calls for transitional justice in the aftermath of war or trauma.

This is a very powerful image. As representatives of the Convention three Aboriginal leaders presented the ‘statement’ to the people of Australia: Megan Davis (Professor of Law, and a Cobble Cobble Aboriginal woman from QLD), Pat Anderson (Order of Australia, and Chair of the Lowitja Institute, Australia’s national institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, and an Alyawarre woman from the Northern Territory), and Noel Pearson (Aboriginal lawyer, academic, land rights activist and founder of the Cape York Institute, and member of the Bagaarrmugu clan and the Guggu Yalanji peoples). Pat Anderson holds a ‘wira’ or ‘coolamon’: this is a woman’s wooden water or food carrier, or
baby carrier, in which the statement is held. She also holds a woman’s digging stick, which is a significant and symbolic tool. Noel Pearson carries a shield. The images tell us this is both a message and a cultural gift, a political statement of power to Australians. The Federal endorsement of the Convention, the months of state talks all around the country in the form of twelve dialogues, and the intense media coverage that led up to the event meant that it was both a political and mediatized performance, an event of national significance speaking to the urgent and unresolved issues of the nation.

Let’s take a look at the Uluru statement made in May:
The Convention asserts that Aboriginal people were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, ‘according to the common law’ and from ‘time immemorial’. This sovereignty ‘has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown’. They invoke the wounds of colonialism and invasion, noting the high levels of Indigenous incarceration, and they declared ‘the torment of our powerlessness’. The Convention then calls for a range of items. First, for ‘constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country’, noting, ‘When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.’ They call for ‘the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution’. And they call for a ‘Makarrata Commission’. As they say, ‘Makarrata [or treaty] is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle.’ They note, ‘It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination ... We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.’ Finally, they invite the people of Australia to join this agreement-making initiative: ‘We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.’

What is of interest is the deliberate absence of the term ‘Reconciliation’ in the statement. This is understandable since Australia’s formal ‘Reconciliation’ movement – a three-decades long movement begun by the Australian federal government in 1991 – has been so sorely wanting. Australia’s reconciliation movement has been without a treaty, without a truth
commission and without reparation or serious land rights. We are now a climate that many have come to describe as ‘post’ reconciliation. Indeed, for some people, Reconciliation – filled with so much disappointment and broken hope – has become a dirty word.

So, in using the term ‘Makarrata’ – the Yolngu term for ‘agreement after a fight’ – the Convention deployed Indigenous diplomatic protocols of agreement-making, thus setting the political agenda. That is, this action was an Indigenous-led performance of diplomacy. As Megan Davis wrote recently, ‘Makarrata is a peacemaking event, it is a process to bring about reconciliation, it is a quest for peace and harmony. Our people are getting old. Too many bark petitions, too many statements. This is bad faith. The reconciliation process has stalled because it failed to do what reconciliation should do: talk about the truth.’

In this ‘Statement from the heart’, the longstanding symbol of ‘heart’ can mean hope and ‘bone fides’, conscience, or acting in good faith. Heart may also be the courage to remember, honour and forgive in order to reconcile – but it is not without demands. It is difficult and risky work, and it is about truth-telling from the heart. This powerful statement from the heart, offered in ‘good faith’, is not merely symbolic. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want structural and legal reform, as do many non-Indigenous Australians, a key aspect of what is termed ‘transnational justice’. But reconciliation and recognition are linked: indeed, recognition is often listed as one ‘plank’ in the process of reconciliation for the nation, as we will see.

Now, of course, there is extensive debate about the detail of these proposals, and it is not my aim in this evening’s lecture to address or solve all the details and points of constitutional law around the Uluru statement. But what interests me is that the Uluru event is, in the broadest terms, another Australian peacemaking or reconciliation performance, and it is Indigenous-led. It shares many aspects of reconciliation-and-redress processes spanning the globe, although the members of the Convention would explicitly reject Australia’s settler-state version of formal ‘Reconciliation’.
Too often, reconciliation is left as a matter for legal scholars or sociologists. But as a Humanities scholar interested in colonial histories and histories of emotion, performance and politics, I wanted ask human questions: How do we Australians, as individuals and as groups, come to terms with that which is seemingly unresolvable: a foundational violence which persists, elemental and deeply disturbing, in our national and individual psyches? And how are these tensions expressed in public ‘reconciliatory’ settler cultures? What are the specific emotional economies or specific repertoires that emerge around reconciliation in settler nations? For historians, in what ways do these ceremonies call on and re-mobilise the violent past? And, importantly, what might a performed, emancipatory politics and new postcolonial sociality look like?

It is this risky business of political performance of peacemaking, peace-building, truth-telling and the politics of heart within the paradigm of ‘reconciliation’ to which I wish to turn in this paper. This is the theme of my recent book, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation: Frontier Violence, Affective Performances, and Imaginative Refoundings*, in which I sought to trace the performative life of reconciliation and its ‘discontents’, as I termed it, in settler societies. The book explores the refoundings of the settler state and reimaginings of its alternatives, as well as the way the past is creatively mobilised and reworked in the name of social transformation within a new global paradigm of reconciliation and the so-called ‘age of apology’.

Here, I’m not simply arguing either for or against reconciliation, but rather, I suggest that we must examine it as a vitally potent and creative phenomenon in our society. Across the globe, liberal democratic settler nations, generally resistant to formal processes of decolonisation, have been compelled to make new and urgent political compacts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to address the legacy of violent pasts, stabilise the present and imagine new national futures, especially in what has been termed the ‘Age of Apology’ or the age of redress. In former colonies of British settlement – such as Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand, South Africa and the United States of America – where first or Indigenous peoples and settlers grapple with the pernicious and ongoing effects of colonisation, ‘reconciliation’ has become a political catch cry, and public projects for
transformative change have been inaugurated in its name. Here, the utopian politics of reconciliation emerge most powerfully in the realm of public performance and are greatly bound up in a culture and economy of affect, expressing the desire for virtuous compact, unity and redemption under the sign of nation. These affective performances take us into the space of the imaginary as we seek to create mythic covenants, but they also call on the violent past. And like all utopian forms, the politics of reconciliation in settler societies, which demand consensus and often Indigenous volition, can be rejected.16

Now on the one hand, in my book, I wanted to honour these affective reconciliation ceremonies, for while they may always possess levels of controversy, these are genuine moves towards positive resistance and peace-building, and the emotional experiences of such reconciliation performances should not be underestimated. Many of us, both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples, have put our hearts and souls into these performances and find them powerful and moving, even utopic. Yet, as we know, ‘reconciliation’ is a very slippery and omnibus term. It can range in meaning from the deeply symbolic to the legal and the structural, and it is therefore hugely complex and deeply ambivalent. On one hand, reconciliation is enormously utopic. That is, in Australia, many people – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – long for an affective, and even mythic cross-cultural refounding, a refounding of the nation, if you like, filled with justice, redemption and good feeling as we search for some kind of way to deal with the past and its legacies. Yet, on the other hand, top-down symbolic reconciliation activities (especially when brokered by the settler state as a political stabilisation strategy) can in fact become coercive and a repressive. They can pull people into the false promise of a heavy consensus politics, which, in Australia, can never stand in for recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, reparation, land rights and treaty. These tensions, as you’ll see, are expressed most powerfully in public performances.

So tonight, I will explore eight reconciliation or agreement-making performances in Australia (we’ve just seen one). I wish to look at the way that state-based and other reconciliation performances, however fraught, seek a transition to a new moral order, and in this way, we might understand them as critical rites of passage in settler societies. They work towards an imagined refounding of nation and offer us new way forward – but they are
not without risk and controversy. Importantly, in search of a new emancipatory politics, I have looked at Indigenous-led refutations or reworkings of the consensus politics of reconciliation in Australia public culture, where often state-based rituals have faltered.

Let’s also think about emotions. I want to take account of the ‘affective economies’ and the ‘cultural politics of emotion’, as scholar Sara Ahmed has termed them. Emotions can mobilise us toward certain public and collective forms of political action where issues of truth-telling, matters of history and violence, and questions of sovereignty and treaty come together in embodied performance. Here, we see the handshake, the heart symbol, many forms of public ‘walking together’ coming up over and over again, but we also see fiery acts of resistance and refutation, and also a creative revisioning of what reconciliation might be. As I’ll show you, these Indigenous-led performances are risky and often experimental border-crossings that can offer us glimpses of new postcolonial futures.

In the year 2000 (17 years ago now) some 300,000 people walked over the Sydney Harbour bridge in what was described by the media as a human sea of goodwill. People also marched across bridges all around the nation in the name of reconciliation, and under the slogan of ‘walking together’ as designed by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR). A few of you may have been on one of these walks for reconciliation. They were uplifting, celebratory, unifying and eudemonic state-sponsored events – full of ‘good feelings’. The historicity of the occasion was also made clear to the walkers in the promotional material: the mass Bridge Walk would be a new start. It would inaugurate an affective and powerful national refounding, and participants were to be part of this crucial moment in the life of the nation. Yet, as some of you will remember, this occurred as a critical moment in the nation: the then Prime Minister John Howard refused to cross the bridge, and he would not apologise. He refused to say ‘sorry’ (in relation to the then recently released Bringing Them Home report on stolen generations).

For some, the Bridge Walk became more protest than celebration. Many people walked in silent reflection. Amid the sea of good feeling and consensus, one word – ‘Sorry’ – stood out as a reminder of a deep and uncomfortable division underpinning the event. Appearing
across the Sydney sky over the 300,000 people at the Bridge Walk was the colossal word ‘Sorry’, floating over the iconic Sydney Opera House in the blue winter sky. The state-sponsored Bridge Walk became unruly. The politics of consensus and good feeling were interrupted ... The plane that wrote this word in the sky was hired by a group of citizens. They wrote the word that the Prime Minister refused to utter. Bridge Walk participants also paraded placards and banners bearing the word ‘Sorry’, and some in the crowd sang the ‘Treaty’ song by Aboriginal rock band Yothu Yindi, demanding ‘Treaty now!’

In the same year, I took part in Melbourne’s reconciliation march attended by over 200,000 people. Being a smallish person, I stood on a fire hydrant and took photos of the huge crowd of walkers, and felt the highly charged cross-currents of emotion in this peace-building performance, reflective of the state of the nation. In the crowd, the embodied (or affective) ‘good feelings’ of togetherness, hope and optimism were mingled with feelings of anger and shame, expressed in defiant chants and banners calling for treaty and apology. These intense and contrapuntal emotions interrupted the good feelings of consensus on which the reconciliation paradigm rests, and were a sobering call to account for past and ongoing violent policies of the state. Like other marchers, I experienced the bad feelings of disappointment and anger, as the country’s reconciliation journey seemed to go off course and did not live up to its promise. While for some, the great Bridge Walks are recalled as moments of tremendous hope and good feeling, in hindsight, others have judged them to be wholly inadequate. Crucially, the mass Bridge Walks, as choreographed by the state, did not permit any form of coming to terms with trauma around the violent means of Australia’s colonisation. In other words, these public performances did not face the past. As Aboriginal author, historian and activist Jackie Huggins, a former member of CAR, wrote: 'The emotional triumphs of the bridge walks gave some people the sense that reconciliation had arrived. But the reality was that, significant as they were, the walks masked the harsh reality of a lot of what we call unfinished business.’ This unfinished business is, of course, a reconciliation process without a treaty, without substantive land rights, without reparation or redress, and without a comprehensive truth commission. Indeed, historian Henry Reynolds called the great Bridge Walks around the country a ‘great closing off’, rather than a progressive movement forward for the nation.
The Bridge Walks all around the nation thus became a dense site of performative and emotional contestation concerning Australia’s history in becoming part of the emerging ‘history wars’, and they were expected to do enormous symbolic, affective and political work. But as some now argue, the reconciliation movement achieved very little, as the conservative (Liberal as we term it) Howard government (from 1996–2007) became increasingly hostile to the aim of Indigenous self-determination, favouring instead the familiar terms of assimilation. This government did not want any ‘black armband history’ as they termed it, and did not want to dwell on collective feelings of national shame for the violence of the past. Yet this was in contrast to many of the key things that Aboriginal people wanted: that is, as Reynolds notes, ‘acceptance of their view of the nation’s history, not with the intention of promoting guilt on the part of whites but to receive acknowledgement of their loss and suffering’. But this did not occur. Noticeably absent from the Bridge Walk performances was any reference to the violent past. The formal Australian reconciliation moment has been criticised by Aboriginal people as still having ‘unfinished business’, and also by academics for its ‘history-less-ness’.

In the same decade, in 2006, artist Karen Casey’s public and very personal participatory art event called ‘Let’s Shake’ was performed in a number of Australian cities. The event encouraged Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to sit across tables from each other and ‘extend a hand beyond their comfort zone and make a genuine connection with another person’ in the name of reconciliation. These handshakes were special. Plaster was placed between the clasped hands of the participants, who were encouraged to hold the pose together for ten minutes and talk while the plaster dried. This proved to be a very powerful and moving form of personal connection for people as they sat and talked, leaving plaster shapes of the space between their hands – little shells of pure, concentrated affect, if you like. But not everyone wanted to shake hands. And the ‘people’s reconciliation movement’ of the 2000s, as it was billed, with its myriad emotions, seems a very long time ago now.

Conciliation in settler societies is historically and perpetually marked by a critical ambivalence: it may be utopic in its promise of an imagined and emotional refounding, a
virtuous covenant that so many long for, yet it can also be highly coercive and repressive. Throughout the history of settler societies, we see that Aboriginal people have often been conciliated and re-conciliated to their own dispossession. Tasmanian Aboriginal artist and scholar Julie Gough has rejected conciliation as a unifying, desirable or indeed possible process. 'We are sick of being “conciliated”’, she has argued, with reference to Tasmania’s ‘genocidal history, [where] ... [quote] Tasmanian Aboriginal people have been subjected to the term “conciliation” for generations, but not its practice’. Here, Gough is referring to the ‘Great Conciliation’ of 1832, a moment of settler triumph which marked the end of the Black Wars in Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania) between settlers and Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples. She made explicit the connection between this colonial ‘conciliation’ and the rhetoric of the contemporary Australian national reconciliation movement, thus rejecting any notion of a break between the past and the present in settler strategies of political diplomacy directed toward Indigenous peoples in Australia.

In Gough’s incendiary 2010 performance, titled Manifestation (Bruny Island), and which she kindly allowed me to use on my book cover, a European chair is struck ablaze with a Tasmanian Aboriginal spear on the rocky shores of the Tasmanian coastline, symbolically recalling the violent land wars of the Van Diemen’s Land frontier and the effective guerrilla tactics of Aboriginal people who used fire to attack settlers’ huts. The chair is suggestive of the settled and the interior life of European invaders, and their acts of domestication and of ‘making home’ on Aboriginal land. Here again, we should register the ‘cultural politics of emotion’ as Sarah Ahmed called them, not only the ‘good feelings’ of reconciliation, but also the array of ‘bad feelings’ of shame, anger and resentment that attach to the politics of reconciliation. We need to take seriously the ‘politics of resentment an anger’ as Glen Coultard calls them, as signs of critical consciousness. Still burning, Gough’s incendiary image conveys anger and resentment, and exposes the violent legacies of the past. The enactment points to the repressive tendencies of the reconciliation paradigm, one that, in this case, is especially potent in Tasmania, with its closely entwined historical discourses of violence and conciliation.
This performance is so very different to the connection and the good feeling of handshakes in ‘Let’s Shake’ by artist Karen Casey. Gough’s performance is an act of refusal of European conventions, and articulates a resistance to the heavy narrative or script of consensus within the settler state that reconciliation often demands.

We must think too about performance, trust and risk: In her perceptive exploration of the encounter between history, performance and colonialism in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor argues that performance ‘transmits memories, makes political claims, and manifests a group’s sense of identity’.\(^\text{28}\) She reminds us of the critical political and interventionist work of Indigenous performance. She points to the way that historical and social memory and cultural identity are reimagined through affective embodied performances both with and against the state. She asks, if we ‘look through the lens of performed, embodied behaviours, what would we know that we do not know now? Whose stories, memories, and struggles might become visible?’ And what tensions might emerge that would not otherwise be shown in texts and documents?’\(^\text{29}\)

These performances of reconciliation are inherently about border-crossings, trust and risk. Here, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples frequently stand in for their own ancestors as they face past violence together. As Roxana Waterson notes, in such performances ‘we are at the extreme end of the risk continuum, since these are rites in which the stakes are high, there are no comforting precedents to fall back on, some might be at best reluctant participants’, and participants cannot always know the outcome of the success of a performance in advance.\(^\text{30}\) Waterson alerts us to the intersubjective, experimental and precarious nature of such performances. They therefore emerge as new cross-cultural sites of negotiation, which draw on complex and nuanced genealogies of Indigenous diplomacy, culture and knowledge, just as they draw on a European cultural repertoire of diplomacy. These performances I speak of are not like medieval re-enactments, which are creative anachronisms that are distant from time and place. Rather, they are highly risky events, where descendants of Indigenous peoples and settlers face each other, and/or work together, or walk together, sometimes calling the state to account, and offer, we hope, a different order of national justice and possible new futures.
So, I now want to turn now to a very different kind of Australian walking together. As we know, the great Bridge Walks had become an intense site of performative and emotional contestation concerning Australia’s history, and they were expected to do enormous symbolic, affective and political work. But in the same year (2000) another walk occurred. Two weeks after the great Bridge Walks, the Myall Creek massacre commemoration ceremony occurred for the first time, which also came out of this public state ‘reconciliatory’ framework, but it did much more to break open the silences of history. The ceremony acknowledged and commemorated one of the most significant acts of violence against Aboriginal people in Australian history.

This heart-shaped object is a powerful and difficult item from Australis’s colonial past. It is a breastplate, or gorget. Such metal plates were given out by the government and settlers in Australia to Aboriginal people to conciliate and pacify them on colonial frontiers, much like in North America. This one is unique because it is in the shape of a heart. Breastplates are difficult objects, and I realise that for many people (especially Aboriginal people) they are discomforting. But I do not think we should pull punches about the past. I came across this curious nineteenth-century heart-shaped breastplate and found myself at the front door of a frontier massacre at Myall creek. It was given out to Aboriginal people living in the vicinity of the Myall Creek, and can be traced back to around 1843, five years after the massacre took place.

In the 1830s, as settlers increasingly moved onto Aboriginal land in the colony of New South Wales, conflict arose with Aboriginal peoples. A series of massacres of Aboriginal peoples by the military and settlers occurred at this time. On the afternoon of Sunday 10 June 1838, at a cattle station near Bingara on the Gwydir River, a gang of 11 convict and ex-convict stockmen surrounded and tied up 28 Wirrayaraay Aboriginal men, women and children, who were camped peacefully next to their huts on the Myall Creek. They were taken away and slaughtered by the gang. The gang later burned the cut the heads off the bodies. Despite public outcry, and after a second trial, seven men were hanged in December 1838. This was one of the few instances when white men were tried, convicted and hanged for the mass-
killing of Aboriginal people. When His Honor Judge Burton passed sentence on the men, he remarked:

_I sincerely hope that the grace of God may reach and penetrate the hardened hearts that could surround a funeral pile lighted by themselves, and gloat on the tortures and sufferings of so many of their fellow beings._

By the 1850s the remaining Aboriginal people in the area continued to seek protection on stations where they could, with men and women often working as shepherds and stockmen. The breastplate was given to ‘U. Robert King of the Big River and Big Leather Tribes’ by an unknown settler at Goonal station, established in 1843 on the Gwydir River or ‘Big River’ in New South Wales. ‘U. Robert’ (could this be Uncle Robert?) was probably a senior Aboriginal man and possibly a shepherd.

This difficult object is, then, part of a widespread settler tradition of giving crescent-shaped breastplates plates to Aboriginal people for alliance and pacification, in a country where there were no formal treaties. With its heart-shaped form, it is exceptional, and at the top – between an emu and kangaroo – it shows an intriguing motif of crossed spears and gum boughs, similar in style to the North American ‘peace medals’ that were given to Native Americans and displayed a crossed hatchet and peace pipe, suggesting pacification or the halting of violence.

It is a hard object to look at, knowing what we know. Murderous spirits and the politics of heart and compassion could mix uncomfortably together. This is an object of alliance and friendship, given all too late to an Aboriginal man after widespread settler violence to obtain his people’s lands. On the other hand, it may be expressive of compassion and conscience. In fact, Robert Brown, the owner of Goonal Station, to which the breastplate is linked, and a devout and evangelical Christian, went quite mad and was declared a ‘lunatic’ in 1862, and died a year later in an asylum. Did he commission this breastplate for the Aboriginal people living and working on Goonal Station, in the new England region, only so recently invaded
and beset by violence? We may never know. It shows us how on violent frontiers, conciliation and violence often went hand in hand.\textsuperscript{35}

Aboriginal artist Andrea Fisher has rightly critiqued the coercive message of the breastplate tradition with her reworkings and subversions of the breastplate motif in her works ‘heart’ and ‘blood’, referring openly to frontier violence and calling for ‘truth’.\textsuperscript{36} This is not dry history from textbooks. These are emotional artworks and performances, where the past plays out powerfully in the present. They are just as powerful as any Anzac Day commemorations held in Australia. The symbol of the heart can mean conscience, and it can also mean hope and acting in good faith.

Every year, for 17 years now, commemoration ceremonies have been held at the site of the Myall Creek massacre. Here, the descendants of Aboriginal people and settlers come together in good faith as part of a community-based reconciliation project. In 1998, after community discussion and at the suggestion of Aboriginal Elder Sue Blacklock, the Uniting Church held a conference on reconciliation at Myall Creek. This led to the creation of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee, including members Sue Blacklock and Uniting Church minister John Brown. In 2000, 162 years after the massacre, the Committee opened the Myall Creek Memorial ‘in an act of reconciliation and in acknowledgment of the truth of our shared history’.\textsuperscript{37} This memorial brought together the descendants of the victims, survivors and perpetrators of the massacre.

People gather from the local area and across Australia to attend the Myall Creek massacre service to commemorate those who were murdered. More recently, up to two thousand people have attended. Facing the past and its legacy directly, the yearly commemoration service takes the participants through a ritual at the very site where the massacre occurred. After morning tea and formal speeches, they are welcomed by the Indigenous Elders and others. A welcome dance is performed, followed by a smoking ceremony, as cleansing marks the beginning of the ritual event. The group begins the walk along the memorial walkway. The walk is part pilgrimage, part re-enactment – participants walk in the footsteps of victims, taking the route by which Aboriginal peoples were led to their deaths at Myall
Creek. It is also commemorative and educative: throughout the walk, various plaques take participants through the story. The group gathers at the memorial rock and everyone brings a stone to place at the memorial, reminiscent of the practice of shiva, the Jewish custom which marks a site as having been visited and also commemorates the deceased.\textsuperscript{38} The non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal participants in the reconciliation ceremonies at Myall creek have described ‘a great lifting’, and that they felt ‘set free’ when they acknowledged the violence of their shared past. These acts of reconciliation were possible at the Myall Creek site because some form of justice, at least in part, had been seen to be done. This is unlike Waterloo Creek, another site of massacre where perpetrators were never charged. The plaque on a stone memorial at the Myall Creek massacre site reads:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Erected on 10th June 2000 by a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in an act of reconciliation and in acknowledgement of the truth of our shared history. We remember them/ Ngiyani winangay ganunga.}\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Every year more people attend the ceremony, and the site is now listed on an official Australian heritage register as an important national site of reconciliation. These ceremonies are rites of passage in settler societies, events crucial to peace-building and healing, where the past has been strewn with conflict and trust can be low; through truth-telling and ritual the past is acknowledged and shared, and new stories are made. Importantly, the Myall Creek memorial service did not begin as a state-based, top-down ceremony, but originated as a grassroots, community-inspired ceremony. While it emerged from a ‘Reconciliation’ framework, it is a community ceremony that is structured largely by Aboriginal epistemology, combined with some elements of European and Christian ritualism. It works, I suggest not only because it faces the past, but because it is largely an Aboriginal-led cross-cultural ritual.

This was a very different walk from the Bridge Walks in the same year, with their ambitious national refounding agenda. At the site of the Myall Creek massacre, Indigenous peoples and settlers, victims and perpetrators, recall their own ancestors and the events of the past. While the 2000 Bridge Walk across Sydney Harbor offered a hopeful future, without any real
acknowledgement of the past, the Myall Creek commemorative service, which began in the same year, is instead a walk into the past in order to revision the future.

Australian scholar Katrina Schlunke, who has attended the memorial service, argues that the ceremony offers us new ‘innovative ways to be Australian’. The Myall Creek memorial service is, she argues, a postcolonial performance and a ‘place of possibility’, where the commemoration service acts as ‘an opening’ into a new postcolonial way of being. Acknowledgement of the massacre site raises the question of ‘how to actively and ethically live with the knowledge of massacre undertaken to “secure” settlement for white Australians?’ This is a question, she writes, that is particularly tested in the annual performance of the memorial space. It goes to the very heart of reconciliation in Australia – the unfinished business of heart, truth-telling and peacemaking. However, the site has been vandalised twice. Not all Australians support the Myall creek ceremony, and they are threatened by the performance work it does, and by the new reconciliatory future it offers. In contrast to one of the most famous icons of European settlement – the Sydney Harbour Bridge – the massacre site of Myall Creek is a far more confronting performance space. For some Australians, it threatens established narratives of belonging and peaceful settlement, a threat which was not present, or quite so palpable, in the Sydney Bridge Walk. The site and the performance thus have a heavy burden to bear, for in the historical imagination Myall Creek has come to stand in for all massacre sites. It thus carries the emotional and symbolic weight of the past. The ‘Friends of Myall creek’ group hope to build a reconciliation centre at the site. Today, there are more memorials to the many massacres in Australia, which also seek to perform a reconciliatory role, but they remain a rarity. The Myall Creek commemoration performance is just one response to the question of violence and reconciliation in contemporary Australia.

Let’s turn back to Tasmania, to ask what was happening during the same period? In May 2001, a year after the great Bridge Walks across the nation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people met at Risdon Cove on the banks of the Derwent River in Hobart as part of National Sorry Day commemorations. The event was organised by various reconciliation and church groups, and attended also by school children. As Aboriginal Elder Aunt Brenda Hodge
recalls, there were nearly 150 people present at the commemoration. ‘We all walked together through the pyramid structure on the site, and everyone was given a piece of black twine and white twine to represent black and white people coming together. We then walked slowly over a bridge together and up to the slope where the violence had occurred. We then came back to form a large reconciliation circle.’

The Risdon Cove ceremony was also held on a foundational site of violence where up to forty to fifty Aboriginal people were killed at the first settlement of Hobart, in May 1804. I have pointed to the uncomfortable politics of the handshake, and the ambivalence of reconciliation. Likewise, we need to think critically about the ‘Sorry Day’ performances and examine the affective work they do, and for whom, and the ways in which the emotional economy of remorse and forgiveness dominant in the Christian tradition can be contested by those who refuse to forgive. Sara Ahmed has critiqued the affective agenda of ‘Sorry’ politics within the settler state’s reconciliation movement, interrogating the work that remorse does in recuperating the settler self as moral and virtuous. In addition, the problem with the model of reparative justice, of course, that we have seen at Risdon Cove and in the Myall creek ceremony, is that it may deny victims the right to refuse to be reconciled with the perpetrator, which is, in the case of Risdon, the state (the British military and settlers).

While the Risdon Cove ceremony did address past colonial violence directly, its aim was not centered around Aboriginal experience or Aboriginal cultural reclamation; it was not therefore, at its heart, a decolonising experience. As a public event attended by church groups and school children, it was as much about consciousness-raising for settlers as it was about mourning and commemoration. We should not underestimate this important work. Crucially, however, Indigenous peoples have the right to refuse the coercive politics of ‘Sorry’, part of the broader program of reconciliation, with its Christian principles of restorative justice based on linear ideas of confession, forgiveness and moving on. Such an affective script is at work in such principles of restorative justice, where victims and perpetrators are encouraged to meet together for the expression of remorse and forgiveness to encourage healing on both sides. In its coercive aspect, reconciliation can also place a
hefty psychic burden on Aboriginal peoples to forgive – but without the benefits of meaningful reparation. This has been termed the ‘cunning of reconciliation’ by Pauline Wakeham.\textsuperscript{46} Annalise Acorn has termed this a form of ‘compulsory compassion’.\textsuperscript{47}

Now turning to performance seven, let’s look at the ‘Black line ceremony’, which was held at a site known as at ‘Three Thumbs’ in Tasmania. Here we see a different order of cross-cultural affect and performance, which is not based on the politics of ‘Sorry’. In October 2001 in bushland at ‘Three Thumbs’, a combined Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal group from the United Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands churches group, gathered to hold a ceremony of remembrance, survival and healing.\textsuperscript{48} The group, and led by Tasmanian Elder Aunty Ida West, assembled at one of the key sites of the notorious ‘Black Line’. The ‘Black Line’ was part of the ‘Black War’, at it is known, in Van Diemen’s Land, that led to the almost total annihilation of Tasmanian Aboriginal people in 1828 to 1834. At this now popular picnic spot, with its expansive views over Prosser Bay to Great Oyster Bay and the Freycinet Peninsula, and a year after Australia’s nation-wide Bridge Walk for Reconciliation (2000), in Tasmania, a cross-cultural ceremony and performance was held that did not focus exclusively on reconciliation or ‘Sorry’ between settlers and Aboriginal peoples. It was not a state-based or a top-down ceremony. Rather, it was a grassroots ceremony of healing, and a performance that called on the colonial past in its foregrounding and remembrance of colonial violence on a site of the notorious ‘Black Line’.

This was a performance directed by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, led and conceived by Aboriginal Elder Aunt Ida West (1919–2003), in conjunction with Reverend Grant Finlay from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC Tasmania), and designed with cross-cultural Indigenous-Christian rituals.\textsuperscript{49} Indeed, Ida West was a member of the Glenorchy Reconciliation group, which is one of the very last such groups still left in Tasmania.

The Black War in Van Diemen’s Land resulted in the almost wholesale slaughter of Aboriginal peoples on the island in a settler land war that many have argued was genocidal. At the time of contact in 1803, it was estimated that around 6,000 to 8,000 peoples lived on
Trowunna (the Aboriginal name for Tasmania), but that number was rapidly reduced to a remnant population. By late 1830 Arthur had lost faith in the possibility of conciliation. His desperate solution was to conduct a military-style campaign to capture or force Aboriginal people into the Forestier and Tasman Peninsulas. Arthur had collected around 2,200 men, 550 of which were troops, the rest enthusiastic civilians. The Black Line was the largest force ever assembled against Aboriginal people anywhere in Australia.

This campaign is commonly agreed to have been waged for around six weeks, from 7 October to 24 November 1830. But historian Lyndall Ryan has recently argued that, in fact, it endured for far longer, and rather than a six-week folly was a fifteenth-month campaign that was far more successful in its goals of Aboriginal eradication than many realise. The Black Line was a serious and expensive operation. Ryan has persuasively argued that the line was in fact three lines, and these enabled constant military harassment and violent clearance of Aboriginal peoples, and eventually resulted in the forced surrender of the Big River and Oyster Bay people. As she rightly asserts, the Black Line was a ‘grim success’ for the government. It forced the surrender of terrorised and exhausted Aboriginal peoples into government protection, under the aegis of George Augustus Robinson the ‘Conciliator’, or else they faced being hunted down and killed.

The bushland at ‘Three Thumbs’, near Orford on the eastern coast of Tasmania, became one of the key sites of the notorious ‘Black Line’. As the line drew closer to Aboriginal people, a few managed to breach it in the night: two Aboriginal men were killed and two were captured. Two days later, at night and in the midst of a storm, at least seven others forced their way through the Black Line. The site at Three Thumbs is therefore an important site of escape and of emancipation for Aboriginal people. In 2001, one year after the great Bridge Walks, Tasmanian Aboriginal people engaged in a very different form of memorialisation, which foregrounded and commemorated their escape, defiance and survival of the Black Line, and sought to overcome the trauma of the line and the heavy weight of history.

As the ritual began in the crisp, foggy air, participants rolled out a strip of black cloth to symbolise the ‘Black Line’, and it was passed over people from the back to the front of the
group ‘to remind us of the Line that moved across the land’.\textsuperscript{56} The participants stepped over and under a length of black cloth, a figurative Black Line, which stretched out before them, and commemorated the violence of the Black Line suffered by Aboriginal peoples. They said:

In gathering here, we say that our history is not the last word. The Black Line is not the only movement across this land. There is another movement, a movement of survival, of renewal, a movement of healing. And rather than being organized by a government, the Spirit is stirring within people’s own lives, among families and communities.\textsuperscript{57}

Combining Aboriginal and European ritual, the Three Thumbs performance addressed the Aboriginal past, overturned accepted colonial narratives to reveal the ‘other side of the frontier’, and reached into the mythic to build community survival and empowerment.

What is impressive about Ida West’s work – and I think you will begin to see now how some of the ceremonies I am discussing this evening are created and led by very impressive and visionary Aboriginal women – is that she and her group visit many sites of violence around Tasmania.

These enactments are a deliberate process of ritualised healing of people and landscape. The performances thus constitute a radical form of localised Aboriginal counter-mapping, involving physical travel to places of violence, the performance of ceremonies and the resacralisation, or return to the sacred, of the landscape. These ‘services’ at sites of violence thus have a great amount of symbolic and political work to do, so much more than memorialisation. The affective qualities of the ceremonial work transform these dark sites into spaces where new and ‘innovative ways of being’, or new post colonialities, can be forged, and thus offer the potential for a ‘different order of politics’.\textsuperscript{58} The ceremonies, led by Indigenous people, can therefore crack open the heavy consensus politics of reconciliation and ideas of ‘one nation’. They also have the potential to unravel the tight connections between nation-war-ANZAC as Australia’s guiding national myth by directly exposing, memorialising, and overcoming the violent frontier wars on our very own soil, on our very own doorstep.
In many ways, Ida West had the last word. When she declared, 'Our history is not the last word’, it was an affirmation of Aboriginal survival and a rejection of the heavy historical narrative of both a ‘Great Conciliation’ and an (erroneous) Aboriginal extinction; but it also pointed to an as-yet unwritten future.

In December of last year, that future, and unique way of addressing the past, came to the fore again. In the midst of intense national debates about federal constitutional recognition and reconciliation, the Australian states were already dealing with this within their own constitutions and running formal state-based ‘treaty talks’ with Aboriginal groups. Though many people did not realise it, on 15 December 2016, Aboriginal leader Patsy Cameron and the Tasmanian Governor, the Honorable Kate Warner, signed a pioneering and historic preamble in the Tasmanian constitution. But many people in Tasmania missed it in the news – because it was legally elegant and largely uncontroversial. A change to formally recognise Aboriginal Tasmanians had unanimously passed the state parliament in October. The December ceremony occurred after many talks, where it was announced that Tasmania had joined the rest of the country in officially recognising the state’s first peoples, adding the ‘missing chapter’ to its constitution. Like other states, Tasmania’s constitution had made no mention of the Indigenous inhabitants of the land. Addressing the ceremony, Professor Warner said the historic move was ‘not an act of tokenism but another step on the journey of reconciliation’. The words in the constitution are:

> And whereas the Parliament, on behalf of all the people of Tasmania, acknowledges the Aboriginal people as Tasmania’s First People and the traditional and original owners of Tasmanian lands and waters; recognizes the enduring spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance of traditional lands and waters to Tasmanian Aboriginal people; and recognizes the unique and lasting contributions that Tasmanian Aboriginal people have made and continue to make to Tasmania.
Conclusion

To return to the beginning now, and to the ‘Statement from the Heart’ at Uluru made to the nation. This was indeed a form of Makarrata or treaty, which directly engaged the issues of heart, power of sovereignty, truth-telling and history. As Aboriginal filmmaker Rachel Perkins wrote, ‘The ... statement delivers a realistic consensus. It is pragmatic but principled. The consensus position is both big hearted and hard headed.’ We wait the federal government to formally respond, however. It has now been 5 months.

So, I hope that this evening I have shown you what reconciliation looks like on the ground. It is not a top-down, state-based phenomenon, but something being worked out at the grassroots level. Rather that the ‘great Australian silence’, the term coined by anthropologist WEH Stanner in his 1968 Boyer Lecture referring to Australia’s long and deep denial of the violent settlement of the land, we see an array, indeed a cacophony, of public performative actions in response to the past that are simultaneously creative, resistive, productive and polyvalent, all with very different orders of emotion and affect.

I hope too that you have seen the way that bodies, objects, emotions and performances come together with Indigenous and European genealogies to form a distinct genre of performance in settler nations: reconciliation performances. These are supercharged histories where descendants of violence face each other or act together. And, you’ll have noticed that many of these performances which seek to address and overcome the past are conceived and led by Indigenous women, who are powerful, strategic long-term activists and leaders in their community with significant political acumen.

Perhaps then, all of these performances are forms of ‘makarrata’, or peacemaking together, after a fight. Most of all, by paying attention to these performances we see that there is such a thing as an expansive Indigenous-led decolonised reconciliation, which, though fraught, is a day-by-day personal and relational endeavour. Through an attentive and critical emancipatory politics led by Indigenous peoples, glimmers of new postcolonial futures, however temporary, do appear.
**Postscript:**
On 26 October 2017, the Australian Government responded to the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’, but it was a response that engendered disappointment, dismay and anger. Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull formally rejected the central recommendations of the Referendum Council, whose deliberations were based on six months of extensive consultation with Indigenous peoples on constitutional change across Australia. In this way, hopes for a referendum to establish an Indigenous ‘Voice’ or a new Indigenous advisory body in the constitution were dashed. The Prime Minister noted that the idea was neither ‘desirable or capable of winning acceptance’, with fears that the body would ‘become seen as a third chamber of Parliament’. In contrast, Labor Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, who has committed to the tenets of the ‘Statement from the Heart’ said he was deeply disappointed, at the Government walking away from the Statement and ‘the views of the majority of people consulted’. Many constitutional commentators have argued that the ‘Voice’ to parliament was, in fact, a modest change and rather than a ‘judicially enforced prohibition on racial discrimination, the body was designed to offer “active participation in the democratic life of the state”’. In the government’s response it noted that it would create a joint parliamentary committee with the opposition to consider alternative proposals for constitutional change to benefit Indigenous people and is ‘confident that we can … develop constitutional amendments that will unite our nation rather than establish a new national representative assembly open to some Australians only’. Noel Pearson of the now disbanded Referendum Council remarked that the decision was devastating for the Indigenous community, concluding ‘I think Malcolm Turnbull has broken the First Nations hearts of this country’. Australians await further developments, but with this government rejection the future for reconciliation in Australia has never been more uncertain.
Good evening. My name’s Dr Simon Sleight, Senior Lecturer in Australian History here at King’s College London. And I’m delighted to respond to Penny’s outstanding 2017 Reese Memorial Lecture, before overseeing a concise Q&A, offering a vote of thanks on and ushering in the next part of the evening.

I’ve had the pleasure of responding to our Reese Lecturers for some seven years now, and I hope that previous speakers won’t mind me opining that tonight’s talk is up at the very top of a strong selection in terms of its urgency and its significance. This evening we’ve learned a good deal: we’ve taken on board the failures of top-down decolonisation in Australia, for instance, encountered the coercive impacts of short-sighted reconciliation initiatives, and experienced the economies of affect that burn bright, and cut deep. We’ve learnt, too, that unsettlement and disruption – as well, when appropriate, as hands clasped together in friendship – are surely called for in any reckonings with the past. As many in the audience familiar with Australian history will know, the wheel of colonisation rolled far and wide in Australia, that notion of the wheel in Deborah Bird-Rose’s formulation also suggesting colonisation-as-process, not event. The ongoing legacies of that process are pervasive: that expression of Makarrata – agreement after a fight – reminds us that a contest about the past and about the present must very much be had. Substantial sections of the non-Indigenous Australian public, as one can so easily see by scrolling through comments threads beneath news articles, are
still a very long way from accepting on-shore violence and persecution as fundamental to the continental story. But this edifice can’t hold, and the dam is breaking. Performative memory has had a part to play in this.

Penny’s lecture this evening has offered us a ‘politics of the heart’ – her own, as well as that of her protagonists and Australia as a whole. For us as listeners that process of opening out may well have been troubling – it’s hard to forget the searing image and underlying story of the heart-shaped breastplate, for example, for this is indeed a ‘supercharged history’, as Penny put it so eloquently. Her case studies have taken us across some fascinating terrains of land, body and soul, to performances ‘just as powerful as any Anzac commemoration’, to chairs still ablaze, and to much more besides. To invoke the words of the great social historian E.P. Thompson, what we’ve perceived this evening are the contours of an ‘alternative nation’, a history from below that forces considerations of pasts-in-the-present and the today in the long and not-so-long ago. The implications of this are fundamental for all Australians.

Though he didn’t feature in tonight’s talk, in thinking through Penny’s assessments, we might like to ponder Gerald Vizenor’s concept of ‘survivance’, a concept inspired principally by Native American histories but readily applicable outside that territory. Sometimes described as a mix of survival and resistance, or else of survival and endurance, ‘survivance’, in Vizenor’s words is ‘an active sense of presence over absence ... the continuation of stories ... [a] repudiation of dominance’. ‘Survivance is a practice’, he continues, ‘an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence’ and a practice to which Indigenous stories are central. Societal change can come through embracing survivance, it is held, and we might like to link Vizenor comment that ‘survivance is the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate’ to shifting views of the heart of Australia, often located geographically and spiritually at the great glowing monolith of Uluru. Once cast dismissively as the centrepoint of the so-called ‘The Dead Centre’, it was here, significantly, that ‘the Statement from the Heart’ was issued in May 2017. As part of an expansive Indigenous-led decolonization, as Penny puts it, the statement returns us to the notion of the Red Centre, the giant red
The heart as oxygen pump and emotional core. We might like in reflecting further, to tie together our thoughts on the past and possible future via an altered idiom. ‘Home is where the heart is’, it’s often said, but hope, surely is where the heart is, too.

These, then, are just a few stray thoughts in response to tonight’s lecture. Penny has kindly agreed to take perhaps a few questions before you’ll have the chance for some more informal discussion with her and each other at our drinks reception along the corridor. But please do join me first in offering very well-deserved round of applause for Associate Professor Penny Edmonds, this year’s Reese Lecturer.

References

1 Penelope Edmonds, Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation: Frontier Violence, Affective Performances, and Imaginative Refoundings, Macmillan’s Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies series, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).


3 Edmonds, Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation, 1-3.


5 The Australian Federal Constitution is the supreme legal authority and much debate surrounds two sections that refer to race. These are Section 25, which permits the states to ban people from voting based on their race, and Section 51 (26) which gives Parliament power to pass laws that discriminate against people based on their race, known as the ‘race power’ section. The Australian Constitution can only be changed through a national referendum. As Castan notes, the Constitution ‘has some serious exclusions: both by not acknowledging the place of Indigenous Australians in our nation, and by authorising discriminatory laws. The concept of “race” as the basis for discriminatory treatment is long discredited, yet it is there still, an artefact of constitutional history.’ Melissa Castan, ‘Explainer: what Indigenous constitutional recognition means’, https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-indigenous-constitutional-recognition-means-31770 accessed 28 September, 2017.


In Australia, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was established under the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991 and was charged with the mission to ‘promote a process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community’. See Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991, Section 5. In 2001, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was replaced with a new private body, Reconciliation Australia. Reconciliation Australia is the current peak national organization charged with building and promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.


Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation*, 1-3.


Reynolds, ‘Reconciliation and Its Denunciation’, 137.


Karen Casey, interview by the author, 24 November 2014. I wish to thank Karen Casey for her generosity and for sharing images of ‘Let’s Shake: Handshakes for Reconciliation’ performances in the writing of this book.

Julie Gough, personal communication with the author, 2010. I wish to thank Julie Gough for her generosity and for sharing images and discussions for this book.

Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation*, 5, 6.

Glen Coulthart cited in Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation*, 135.

Aboriginal breastplate for U. Robert King of Big Leather and Big River Tribes, courtesy National Museum of Australia. Photograph by Dragi Markovic.


Thanks to Elder Brenda Hodge, Riawunna Aboriginal Centre, University of Tasmania, and Sally Fulsang, personal communication with the author, 11 November 2014.

Various accounts exist of the number of Oyster Bay people killed, and this continues to be debated. In Collins’s despatch to Governor King in Sydney on 15 May 1804, he wrote that three Aboriginal people had been killed. Later, after an enquiry, some testified that five or six had been killed, while a following report stated that 40 or 50 Aboriginal people were killed. See Lyndall Ryan, ‘Risdon Cove and the Massacre of 3 May 1804: Their Place in Tasmanian History’, Tasmanian Historical Studies 9 (2004): 107–3.


49 Tasmanian Aboriginal Elder Aunt Ida West passed away in 2003. I thank her children for permission to use the Black Line ceremony image. I am also grateful to photographer and Elder Aunt Brenda Hodge, Riawunna Aboriginal Centre, University of Tasmania, and for our conversation about the Black Line ceremony.


51 Lyndall Ryan, ‘The Black Line in Van Diemen’s Land’.


57 Elders of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, ‘Three Thumbs ceremony booklet.’


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