

Dialogic Learning in Museum Space

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When I wrote this article ten years ago, many museums were beginning to articulate their mission in terms of a dialogue with communities. In practice, however, that dialogue occurred mostly in the context of education and public programs; exhibitions tended to maintain a detached, authoritative

voice. As a significant site of (informal) learning, how can museum exhibitions also be dialogic? In this article I explore the possibility of self-reflexive museum exhibitions – approaches and techniques by which curators and designers can engage visitors in history but also in its making. Specifically, I describe one model exhibition, and offer suggestions for how the Australian War Memorial could engage visitors more actively in the process of making that site meaningful.

Since it is now easy – and common – for museums to deploy technologies for co-creation, I am surprised that this article remains so relevant. Is it that exhibition curators and designers – those at the heart of museum representational practice – yet resist the dialogic turn?

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At this historical juncture, many museums articulate their cultural function in terms of dialogue rather than instruction, and develop innovative educational programs to attract diverse communities of visitors. What is understated in recent museum theory and practice is the fact that exhibitions are a fundamental form of (informal) learning in museums. In order to realise their rhetoric about facilitating dialogue among communities, museums need to implement techniques for responsive or self-reflexive representation in their exhibition spaces. Models of best practice in this regard remain rare, but the author here describes one exhibition that engaged her in a dialogue, and offers

suggestions for how the Australian War Memorial could engage visitors more actively in the process of interpreting the site and the collection.

How can museums provide visitors with dialogic learning experiences? My interest is the possibility of dialogic exhibitions: museum spaces that involve visitors not only in the material and their meaning, but also in the process of making that meaning. In contemporary discourses of museums, adult education and cultural studies, many theorists and practitioners call for museums to transform their exhibition practice, to provide more empowering learning experiences, and to employ self-reflexive techniques of representation. In the following pages I introduce the discourse that propels this quest for dialogic museum space, and describe one dialogic exhibition, before turning to reflect on the actual and possible exhibition practice of a major national museum.

Traditionally, museums provided an authoritative service to communities of people. Their style of education was didactic and somewhat authoritarian. But at this historical juncture, more and more museums articulate their public relationship in terms of belonging, and seek to learn with and from the communities they serve. Ivan Karp¹ defines museums as “places for defining who people are and

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how they should act and ... places for challenging those definitions" (Karp 1992a: 2). For George MacDonald,² museum collections offer "a sort of yardstick that people could use (if they were taught the skills) to evaluate cultural mythologies" (MacDonald 1992: 162). In the Australian context, Conal McCarthy understands museums as facilitators of communities (McCarthy 1990: 66). This burgeoning interest in community relations, along with the proliferation of community museums and cultural centres, constitutes a kind of anti-authoritarian movement in museum practice. What these quotes share is a sense that museums can engage people in a dialogue with other people about culture and how it develops.

In other words, this new relationship between museums and communities renders them an ideal site for transformative education practices. But for such transformations to occur, new approaches to the theory and practice of museum education are necessary.

Museums offer adults various opportunities for non-formal learning. Apart from exhibitions, guided tours, lectures, seminars and publications have been the traditional means by which museums seek to engage adult audiences in learning. At the turn of a new millennium, however, museums are beginning to diversify their adult learning opportunities, in recognition that engaging adults - particularly those who would not normally attend lectures, and those who would not normally visit museums - requires innovative and creative programs. Museums now occasionally invite people behind the scenes, to view the storage spaces for the collection, offer workshops in conservation, or host performances by dancers, musicians, body painters and so on, to coincide with relevant exhibitions. Many large museums offer kits for group study. These kits tend to be directed at, and used by, schoolteachers, but they are also available to adult and community groups. Museums are also conducting various outreach programs. The Australian Museum in Sydney develops exhibitions in conjunction with Aboriginal communities in New South Wales, to train people in conservation, and to extend the possibilities of the material's interpretation and display. These programs are especially significant in the sense that they can facilitate repatriation of secret, sacred or stolen items.

In this movement to renew and develop the museum as a space for learning, non-formal programs have been privileged over the informal learning that can occur during a visit to a museum exhibition, which many adults prefer. Although exhibitions are the most basic form of museum education, it is rare for museums to approach exhibition development from the perspective of educational theory and practice.

One excellent collection of articles addressing the issue of museum exhibitions as a site for informal learning was published in 1996 by the British Group for Education in Museums. Edited by Gail Durbin, *Developing museum exhibitions/or lifelong learning* is a compilation of dozens of short articles from over a decade of museum work and critique (Durbin 1996). In 'Educators on exhibit teams: A new role, a new era', Lisa C. Roberts notes that it was as recently as the early 1980s that educators began to be routinely invited to participate in exhibition development and that the notion of 'exhibit teams' emerged (p. 10). Introducing the section on learning theory, Durbin acknowledges a

debt to American research and to scholars outside the museum sector, arguing that "despite the widespread acceptance by museum staff that education is a core function of museums and research is one of their fundamental responsibilities, in practice the learning process is a low priority" (p. 19). Maureen Matthew's article on adult learners advocates recognising adult visitors' prior learning as a rich resource. When Matthew argues that museum exhibit developers need "methods to encourage a two-way street of learning" (p. 70), the notion of dialogue emerges as a clear strategic objective. A paper by Douglas Worts describes the use of 'Share your reaction' cards posted throughout an exhibition, which solicited much more personal and reflective comments than the traditional visitors' book at the point of exit (p. 126). A general point, made in reference to Britain but applicable in Australia as well, was that "responsive models of exhibition production are still very rare" (p. 155). Indeed, *Developing museum exhibitions/or lifelong learning* is a rare exploration of the possibility of responsive or dialogic exhibition practices.³

If informal learning is neglected in museums' educational praxis, so too is adult education in general. A recent publication by the UNESCO Institute for Education illuminates the current relationship between museums and adult education (UNESCO 1999). This booklet synthesises workshops held at the fifth International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg in 1997.⁴ Introducing the section 'Are museums in crisis?' it states that cultural education in general, and museums' role in cultural learning in particular, are marginalised in adult education practice, and that conversely, museums "often perceive their public as passive recipients who need to be told how a collection has to be interpreted" (UNESCO 1999: 5). Museums have not been closely involved with developments in adult education, although many museum educators "see the need for acquainting themselves with new teaching methods and believe that they have much to learn from adult education theory" (p. 5).⁵ Prominent museum studies teacher and prolific author Eileen Hooper-Greenhill has acknowledged the potential value for museums of the problem-posing educational strategies that emerged in adult education circles in the 1970s. She notes the failure of museums to take up these strategies, and criticises them in particular for continuing to regard education as a jurisdiction separate and subordinate to curation (Hooper-Greenhill 1994b: 138).⁶

The mutual neglect by adult educators and museums of each other is disappointing given the extent to which museum critics and adult educators alike recognise the importance of dialogic representation. Paulo Freire's notion of dialogue⁷ may not be well known in museum circles, but many museum critics agree that museums should effect a dialogue among visitors, indeed whole communities, about the material and its meaning. One dialogic technique museum critics call for museums to employ is reflexive representation. Reflexive museum

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exhibitions draw attention to their representational practice in such a way that visitors can recognise that the material is not just there; that it is staged, and how. A reflexive history exhibition, for example, would enable visitors to see the process by which the display was put together at the same time as it invited them to be transported through the display into the mythic realms of the past. Bodies of literature on museums and their cultural function are also replete with calls for museums to present material and its meaning as a problem for visitors to investigate, rather than a position for its producers to deliver. For example, some writers plead for museums to acknowledge the specificity of their displays⁸ so that witnesses can recognise that many interpretations are possible, and be more alert to the politics of interpretation. Others have called for museums to reveal their interpretive schematics: how they have acquired, selected, organised and placed objects⁹ to manifest their metatext (Lumley 1988: 13); to draw attention to the seams of their historical knowledge (Tchen 1992: 311); or to the institution's own history as an instrument of domination and exclusion (Merriman 1989: 162-3). Several writers argue that this reflexive imperative would generate new possibilities for interpretation, promote criticality in visiting audiences, heighten consciousness and inspire a commitment to socially just regimes (Jones 1992; Karp 1992a and 1992b; MacDonald 1996; Silverstone 1994; Tchen 1992).

In a reflexive museum, it is possible to investigate both the museum's vision of something and its capacity to see. Recent museum theory here resonates with Freirean or dialogic education, whose very purpose is to enable a process of reflection on and action in the world, and to pose the object of study as a problem to which teachers and learners mutually apply themselves. In a Freirean class, the students would help construct their own learning program. In a Freirean museum, the

exhibitions would leave space for visitors to produce their own meanings, and invite them to join in the process of exhibition making, whether on a conceptual or practical basis.

Among the museum theorists, practitioners and critics I have identified, there is a strong commitment to community-building, to empowering forms of education and to self-reflexive representation. Despite these calls - and due in part to the long history of museums as institutions of public instruction - an overwhelming majority of museums fail to identify the codes within which their presentations operate. Self-reflexivity is far from a standard modus operandi of museums, and remains a rare and courageous contravention.

One Dialogic Exhibition

Many exhibitions offer extraordinary knowledge, and as a visitor, I occasionally manage to retain some of that knowledge (though often it later slips from my grasp). But very few exhibitions have prompted me to alter my understanding of myself and my culture. Such an experience is unforgettable, and this is the difference between an interesting exhibition and a dialogic one. Here I describe an exhibition that engaged me in a dialogic learning experience, before turning to share part of my larger-scale and longer-term experience of learning through and about another museum site. 'Captive lives: Looking for Tambo and his companions' tells a story from the late nineteenth century, although it begins long before then and continues to the present day.¹⁰ In 1883 a group of Aboriginal people were taken from their home in north Queensland on behalf of P.J. Barnum. In Barnum's words, they were collected as "curious attractions for the great Exhibition"¹¹ - 'Barnum's Ethnological

Poster promoting the exhibition *Captive Lives: Looking for Tambo and His Companions*

Congress' - a kind of freak-show circus that travelled across America and to Europe. By 1885, six of the group of nine were dead. Tambo was the first to die, of pneumonia, in Cleveland. His body was embalmed and displayed in Barnum's museum and elsewhere in Cleveland well into the twentieth century. A century after his death, his body showed up in a funeral home, and in 1993, Tambo's body was returned to his country and his descendants.

The exhibition owes its existence to chance. At around the same time that Tambo's embalmed body turned up, curator Roslyn Poignant happened upon a photograph of an Australian Aboriginal in a very old anthropology textbook. It was Tambo. She began researching and planning for the exhibition at this point. In this sense the exhibition is also Poignant's story, of how she learned the awful truth about Tambo and his people's experience.

'Captive lives' is structured to incorporate both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, so it enables all visitors to engage with the material and bear witness to the story. The first section introduces Manbarra and Biyaygirri country, its formation by the rainbow serpent, and so on. The next section is about the forcible removal of this group of people, and the conditions of their life on tour as live exhibits. The story of this group's experience is then situated in the context of the nineteenth-century process of image-making - mass production for the popular press - which "did much to imprint the racial and social stereotype of the 'savage'".¹² The final section of the exhibition concerns the rediscovery and return of Tambo's embalmed body. In late 1993, members of the Palm Island community, including two of Tambo's descendants, travelled to Cleveland to release his spirit and bring him home. In February 1994, the community held a traditional burial and celebration for Tambo. The final display includes

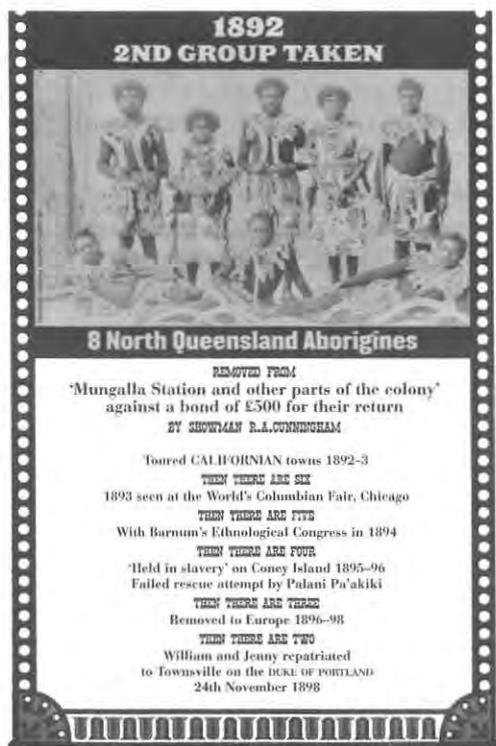
memorabilia from the event of Tambo's return - a welcome home banner made by school children, excerpts from the order of ceremonies, photographs and video footage.

The exhibition is as much about the process of remembering (and forgetting) as it is about those Aboriginal people and their experience. The story was pieced together using Barnum's records, advertisements for the tour, staged studio portraits of the Aboriginal people, and anthropologists' observations. The exhibition was developed in consultation with Manbarra and Biyaygirri people, but the material evidence in the exhibition is comprised mainly of white people's constructions of Aboriginal people as savage or primitive others. It is only with the passage of time - about 100 years - that it is possible for us to distance ourselves from that process of constructing Aboriginal people as savage. Now, we can read Barnum's Ethnological Congress as obscuring the genuine experience of Indigenous people; we can situate this bleak story in the broader context of the frontier violence occurring at that time; and we can attempt to understand what Tambo and his companions' experience must have been like.

I understand this exhibition as dialogic in the sense that it is not a neatly sewn-up presentation by an expert curator. It is clear that much of the story is missing and will never be known; and it is clear that the involvement of Aboriginal people in the process of the exhibition's production is what grants it authenticity and legitimacy. The design of the exhibition also has a dialogic effect. It sets up a clever ironic play, recreating the atmosphere of Barnum's spectacle by replicating his sensationalist style. Tent-like banners, wooden crates bearing the names of numerous tour destinations, photographs of expectant faces of audiences and so on all invoke the circus spirit of the shows in which Tambo and company performed. To inhabit this space is to be situated, partially and temporarily, in the cultural milieu of the time. Furthermore, present-day visitors can inhabit this milieu with a critical eye, consider the mechanisms cultivating the spectacle as such, and witness the experience from the point of view of the captive participant-objects as well as that of the enraptured audience. In these ways, the exhibition also draws attention to its genealogical association with the exhibitions and fairs of the nineteenth century; as a visitor to the exhibition, how different am I to a thrilled member of the audience of Barnum's Ethnological Congress? It is an unsettling, even harrowing association. Thankfully, the resolution to the story that is effected by Tambo's homecoming creates a sense of hope that other lost ones can find their ways home, and that reconciliation is possible.

A Dialogue with the Australian War Memorial

If a museum does not deliberately or immediately engage visitors in a dialogue with the material and its representation, it is possible to enact dialogue under one's own volition, by researching the museum and its signifying practices. What follows is a series of commentaries on various aspects of the representational practice of the Australian War Memorial: its commemorative scope; its display of military hardware; the Roll of Honour; 'relics'; and the hegemonic Anglocentric paradigm within which the Memorial was constructed.¹³ Each of the



Poster promoting the exhibition *Captive Lives*

following commentaries comprises a description of the Memorial's representational practice, and a suggestion as to the possibility of instituting a more dialogic practice. But first, an introduction to the site is in order.

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra commemorates the sacrifice of Australians who have died in war, but its mission is articulated in broader terms: to enable Australians to remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its impact on Australian society. Due to its status as the national war memorial, and to the mythic nationalist discourse that figures the experience of First World War soldiers as particularly formative of the Australian nation, many Australians relate to this museum site as a medium for the nation itself. Promotional literature for the Memorial in fact asserts that it houses "the spirit of the nation". Almost a million people attend the site every year, and for many Australians it is an important, if not sacred, place. Clearly, the Memorial 'speaks to' many Australians, which suggests that its program has a popular as well as an official mandate to mediate national history, identity and spirit.

The Memorial is an intensely ambivalent place, largely because of its dual function. It is a kind of shrine at which visitors can pay homage to the dead. But it has also always been a museum, with an extensive collection of material produced for, at the scene of, as a result of and in response to the practice and experience of war. Visitors are expected to worship here, but they are also expected to learn; and herein lies a contradiction, at least in Freirean terms. As a shrine, invested with spiritual significance and shrouded in propriety, the Memorial does not open itself up to dialogic engagement and reflection. But as a museum that purports to represent the nation, the Memorial is obliged to invite visitors to reflect on the practice and experience of war. There is a tension inherent in the Memorial's function to facilitate both mourning and learning, which it tends to smooth over, always privileging the former at the expense of the latter. But it need not shy from or try to reconcile this fundamental tension. Indeed, my point is that the Memorial should strive to maintain it, because without tension, the realities it represents – war and death – are meaningless, and because dialogue is essential to the learning process.

i. Commemorative Scope

Originally, the Memorial was dedicated to commemorating the First World War alone. It was decades later, in 1952, that legislation was passed that multiplied and thereby drastically altered the Memorial's commemorative purpose. Responsible since its inception¹⁴ for commemorating a single war that was almost unanimously understood as a horrific and pointless exercise, the 1952 Act burdened the Memorial with commemorating every war in which Australia has participated, is participating, and will participate, regardless of its purpose or character or outcome. These include everything from the colonial wars of late last century (which served the purpose of displacing Indigenous people from lands valuable in the capitalist economy) to the high-tech 'hyperreal' Gulf War (which served a similar purpose, of securing access to natural resources, and which required the sacrifice of very few Allied lives), and beyond. The War on Terror will presumably be next.

The Memorial was established to "teach the lesson of peace". But how can an institution that is required to commemorate wars that are yet to occur teach peace? With such an open-ended mission, the Memorial is precluded from even imagining an end to war, let alone fostering peace. Given the difficulty of its situation, a sensible approach for the Memorial to take would be to draw visitors' attention, subtly or otherwise, to this paradox. In the entrance to the Memorial galleries there is a quote printed in large type across the wall: "HERE IS THEIR SPIRIT, IN THE HEART OF THE LAND THEY LOVED; AND HERE WE GUARD THE RECORD WHICH THEY THEMSELVES MADE".¹⁶ It alerts visitors to the fact that they are entering a space of reflection, and sets an appropriately sombre tone. But in the context of the Memorial's fraught mission, it is a rather bland frame through which to view the galleries. There is no matching quote at the exit from the galleries – nothing that signals to visitors that they are about to leave this space of reflection and re-enter the space of everyday life. An appropriate quote at this point would be the epitaph: 'I fought and died in the Great War to end all wars. Have I died in vain?'

Although the Memorial's commemorative scope is far-reaching, it does not include every conflict involving Australians. The legislation that sets out the Australian War Memorial's commemorative function is finely crafted. It states that the Memorial commemorates "Australians who have died in or as a result of active service, or as a result of warlike operations in which the Australian services have been involved".¹⁷ The first clause – "Australians who have died in or as a result of active service" – specifies the general object of the Memorial's commemoration. The first half of the second clause – "or as a result of warlike operations" – opens the commemorative field out, ostensibly to include such people as merchant seamen, but potentially including people who have died in unofficial or undeclared wars, such as that between Indigenous and white Australians. But as soon as this possibility is opened, it is closed by the second half of this clause – "in which the Australian services have been involved". Since it was not 'the Australian services' in the strictest sense that fought Indigenous peoples' resistance to British colonisation, this conflict is excluded from the field of the Memorial's commemoration. The letter of its legal mission clearly excludes frontier conflict from the Memorial's field of vision. But in the celebrated spirit of the Memorial itself, its mission is surely less exclusive. It seems inappropriate that a museum called the Australian War Memorial commemorates the dead of every war in which Australians have been involved except that which played out here. It takes no great leap of imagination to envisage a memorial for the unofficially declared Australian War somewhere along Anzac Parade, where all the other mini-memorials are sited. Such a memorial could constitute a collective lament about the many dimensions of the inter-racial war in Australia, including massacres, the unprovenanced Indigenous Australian human remains still held in museum collections within and outside Australia; and the Stolen Generations. Marcia Langton and many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous observers have made similar suggestions.

ii. Tools of War

As a visitor to the site, certain aspects of the Australian experience of war are apparent, and certain others are subdued or absent altogether. Approaching the building, and walking through the exhibitions, the large military objects - guns, planes, tanks and so on - are difficult to miss. Each one is labelled with its technical specifications and a brief story as to its significance in military history. For example, on the approach to the building from the carpark at the rear, the path takes you past a huge gun barrel. This is the 45-ton, 41-foot barrel of the 28cm Amiens gun, a "GREAT GUN" used by the Germans in 1918 to shell Amiens from a distance of 15 miles, and captured by the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) when twenty-two Allied Divisions "BROKE THE GERMAN FRONT".¹⁸ Obviously, military hardware comprises a significant portion of the Memorial's collection. In addition to the aircraft hall and all the smaller military technology throughout the galleries, there is now Anzac Hall, which opened in 2001 with \$12 million from the Centenary of Federation Fund. This 3500 square metre hall contains the restored Lancaster bomber 'G for George', First World War artillery, other aircraft and tanks, as well as the Japanese midget submarine caught in Sydney harbour. At another point in the galleries, you can walk into a small room that simulates the experience of being in an aircraft as it takes off, reaches its target, and drops a bomb.

The Memorial is host to an endless proliferation of military hardware. This much is inevitable. But its careful conservation, elegant display and precise description impede the Memorial's capacity to inspire visitors to adopt a critical perspective on war. As a corrective to the implication that the machinery of war is itself sacred, a single, large, disorderly assemblage of military hardware could be left to weather and decay in the Memorial grounds. And inside the galleries, to accompany the detached lists of technical specifications of each weapon or tool, the Memorial could juxtapose a dissonant piece of text or an image or object. For example, next to a weapon used in the Vietnam War, the Memorial could display the following reference, by a veteran of that war, to "the shameful hyper-exhilaration" that arises from "exercising the politically and morally sanctioned right to coldly aim at and kill another".¹⁹

iii. Roll of Honour

Upstairs in the cloisters of the Commemorative Area, all along the side walls, is the Roll of Honour, containing the names of those who have died in military service. It is comprised of hundreds of brass column panels from which protrude over 102,000 names. About 60,000 of them identify people who died in the First World War. The names are organised according to the battalion in which these people were fighting, but the list provides evidence of little else. A family name and one or two initials are the only markers that distinguish one dead person from another. Military ranks have been studiously omitted. Some characters have been visited and a red paper poppy²⁰ on a wire has been inserted next to their name, in the vertical groove between panels.

During the Memorial's construction, there was an intense debate over the Roll of Honour, and especially who to include on it. The idea that the Roll would exhibit the principle of absolute, perfect inclusivity -

incorporating the names of all Australia's 'fallen' - created enormous difficulties, which the Memorial Board set up a sub-committee to address. Precisely who should belong to the category of Australia's 'fallen'? For instance, would a person who was Australian-born but had enlisted in London be included?²¹ What about those who had died after the war but as a direct result of War service?²² What about members of the Merchant Navy and civilians serving with the Australian forces, such as Red Cross workers, war correspondents and photographers?²³ Despite insisting on strict limitations for these people, when it came to deciding the fate of those who had died "in dishonourable circumstances" - of self-inflicted wounds or after a breach in discipline - the Board was more generous. Of the 60,500 people on the First World War section of the Roll, 94 died of suicide or self-inflicted wounds; 10 died while serving sentences for desertion; six were absent without leave at the time of their death; eight died while attempting to escape legal custody; and one committed suicide after murdering his wife.²⁴ Inaccurate record-keeping compounded the Roll of Honour project's difficulties. In 1969, the Board learned that the Roll of Honour contained 1,744 errors. Of these, 1,279 related to incorrect unit listings. Every single one of the 87 Army panels needed correction; the names of seven officers, one soldier and 158 'native soldiers' had been omitted; and three names should be removed.²⁵

Imagine if the Roll of Honour was introduced by a panel that indicated the magnitude and complexity of compiling a complete list of the 'fallen'. Such a panel could state the Memorial's intention, and acknowledge the decades-long struggle to decide who to include and where to draw the line. It could also acknowledge the variety of causes of death: killed in action; died as a result of injuries sustained in action; died from disease; committed suicide; died from self-inflicted wounds; was shot during the attempt to escape legal custody; and so on. This panel could acknowledge that mistakes have been made, that some names were omitted, and that the corrections are listed on the Supplementary Roll, and it could end with the hope that the list will cease to grow. Contrary to the idea that admission of this information would detract from the Memorial's or the nation's coveted spirit, I believe it would render the effort and its spirit more profound.

iv. Relics

One significant part of the Memorial's collection that will never be seen on display is the collection of 150 bottles containing body parts of Australian soldiers killed in the First World War. Doctors working at casualty clearing stations on the Western Front collected the specimens for scientific study. They are internal and external organs that illustrate the effects of mustard gas, trench foot and bullet and shrapnel wounds.²⁶ Currently, the specimens are on loan to the University of New South Wales School of Forensic Medicine. According to the head of the National Collection at the Memorial, these items will never be on public display. It is not surprising that the Memorial refuses to display these specimens. They are an extreme example of precisely what is absent from this museum space, of precisely what the Memorial seeks to avoid invoking: the trauma of war. The Memorial is a sombre place (although often also thrilling, in that it revels in technological prowess and military might) but its representations are never appalling. As if to

present horrifying material would dishonour the dead, or offend their living relatives and descendants. The refusal to display the medical specimens is more curious in light of Charles Bean's fervent desire that items in the Memorial's collection be understood as war 'relics'. Strongly objecting to the term 'trophies', he wanted his museum to contain 'the atmosphere, the spirit and the relics of the AIF'.²⁷ In a letter to long-serving Director Major John Treloar, he wrote that his relics had "as much history and sanctity attaching to them as to the bones of Captain Cook" (McKernan 1991: 88). The reference to Cook's bones recalls the most potent of meanings of the term 'relic': the Catholic sense of a relic as part of the body of a saint, venerated as holy. To my mind, the Memorial's attempt to contain the emotional impact of material such as these body parts is worse than futile. By refusing to acknowledge their existence, it denies Australians access to relics of the most potent, evocative and sacred kind. I am more disturbed by the fact of their removal to a School of Forensic Medicine than I would be by their interment next to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, or even by their display in a discreet, dimly lit recess in a corner of the cloisters. Either way, they would serve as a vivid reminder to living Australians of the harsh reality of war.

v. White Australia

In the Commemorative Area of the Memorial, as one walks through the courtyard past the pool of reflection, along the walls on both sides there are the names of battlefields that are important in Australian history. Below each name is a sculpted stone face of Australian native fauna. For instance, below 'Gallipoli' there is an eagle. Further along is a frilled-neck lizard. But the last two stone heads in each row are human: the heads of Aboriginal men.

Of all the heads along this wall, these last two are the least prominent: they are almost obscured by the garden beds at the edge of the stairs up to the Hall of Memory. Whether by accident or design, it is unlikely that many visitors would notice them. It is almost possible to interpret this sculptural series in benign terms, as a kitsch array of 'Australiana'. But given the visual association with both gargoyles and hunting trophies, that Indigenous people are here likened to animals, and that museums have historically collected and displayed Indigenous people's bodies, skins, skulls and skeletons, in the early twenty-first century this stone assembly is disturbing.²⁸

So what is the Memorial to do? Removing the last head from each row is no solution (although I imagine this would be the Memorial's preferred course of action, if it could do so without drawing further attention to the heads). There is clearly no easy solution, but consulting with Indigenous people and organisations would be an appropriate first step. In fact, such an approach would be an opportunity for the Memorial to begin to atone for the many ways in which the Australian Defence Forces, Australian governments and the Memorial itself have sought to exclude Indigenous people from the Australian nation. The most obvious problem, as noted, is that the Memorial excludes frontier violence - the Australian War - from its commemorative field. But apart from a single temporary exhibition, 'Too dark for the light horse', the Memorial also fails to acknowledge the poor treatment that Indigenous people have received as prospective, actual and ex-members of the

defence forces. For example, there was a long-standing prohibition on enlisting Indigenous people, and those who did serve often received far lower rates of pay. After the First World War, Indigenous people lost more land to the soldier settler scheme for which some Indigenous returned servicemen were deemed ineligible. As noted, the names of 158 'native soldiers' were omitted from the Roll of Honour. And it was only because a Canberra woman took it upon herself to raise funds that a small plaque commemorating Aboriginal service personnel was mounted, not in the Memorial grounds, but on a rock on the foothills of Mount Ainslie, up behind the Memorial.

In general terms, we can understand the Memorial as a monument to belonging. In nationalist discourse, it was through the blood shed at Gallipoli that the Australian nation was born. The sculptor who carved the stone heads in the Memorial's courtyard was presumably intending to situate the Memorial, fondly, in its geographical and historical context. Now that white Australians have discovered a sense of belonging to this country, and affirmed Indigenous people's equality with us, it would be prudent for us to acknowledge this change of heart, and that Indigenous people are a source of inspiration for the celebrated 'Australian spirit'. Exactly how the Memorial performs this acknowledgement is - or at least should be - open to debate.

Since the early 1990s, the notion that museums' role in society is to facilitate a dialogue with communities about the meaning of their collections has gained currency. In this watershed moment in their history, museums have an opportunity to transform their educational practice in line with this historical shift, from one of uncritical didacticism to one of genuine dialogue. To that end, non-formal educational programs for visitors have proliferated among museums. But few museums have managed to overhaul their representational practice, to develop exhibitions that offer opportunities for informal dialogic learning. As part of their transformation, it is crucial that museums present exhibitions that are transparent or self-reflexive, and that thereby enable visitors to see the questions and tensions arising from the material, rather than the answers alone. As I have sought to demonstrate in this paper, the possibility of dialogic museum space is as boundless and rich as the communities to which museums belong.

Footnotes

¹ Karp is one of the editors of two collections on museums, published in 1991 and 1992, that emerged from Smithsonian Institution conferences on the politics of exhibition and the shifting relationship between museums and communities.

² McDonald was Director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization before his appointments as CEO of the Museum of Victoria in Melbourne and Director of the new Melbourne Museum.

³ Another British book, published by the National Organisation for Adult Learning, explores the potential for collaboration between adult educators and museum staff, and incorporates examples of good practice (Chadwick & Stannett 1995).

- ⁴ The booklet, titled 'Museums, libraries and cultural heritage: Democratising culture, creating knowledge and building bridges', is available as a PDF file from the UNESCO website.
- ⁵ This booklet also introduces some recent museum initiatives that work to foster the relationship between museums and adult education. For example, Cristobal Rochas, a Venezuelan museum of visual arts, visits the public rather than vice versa, going to schools, offices, the streets and local prisons.
- ⁶ Many reports and other analyses have recommended that museum educators be more involved in the planning and production of displays, but few museums have heeded this call (Hooper-Greenhill 1994a: 242).
- ⁷ In his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire critiques the 'banking model' of education (as something that is deposited into students) (1970: 58) in favour of a dialogic, problem-posing model in which students and teachers are co-intent on learning.
- ⁸ See, for instance: Gerald 1990: 18; Home 1986: 7; Way 1993: 110.
- ⁹ See, for instance: Bennett 1988: 83; Janes 1992.
- ¹⁰ This exhibition was open at the National Library of Australia from 3 November 1997 until 18 March 1998. From there, it travelled around Australia to other museums.
- ¹¹ A letter in which P.J. Barnum wrote this description, on 27 October 1882, is reproduced in the exhibition.
- ¹² This quote comes from a mailout advertising the exhibition.
- ¹³ This section of the paper draws on research I undertook for my doctorate.
- ¹⁴ Although collecting began during the First World War, the Act that brought the Memorial into being was passed in 1925.
- ¹⁵ In 1928, when plans for the site and design of the Memorial were discussed in Australian newspapers, an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* used the headline 'Australia's War Memorial to Teach the Lesson of Peace'. That the Memorial would foster peace was important to its visionary, Charles Bean.
- ¹⁶ It is attributed to Charles Bean, who is named as an official historian of the First World War (but not, somewhat curiously, as the Memorial's visionary and first Director).
- ¹⁷ *The Australian War Memorial Act, 1980*.
- ¹⁸ The interpretive panel for the Amiens gun was replaced during recent developments at the Memorial. The new panel uses a different description to the one quoted here, and the measurements are now metric.
- ¹⁹ Tony O'Brien, letter to the editor, *Australian Magazine*, 19-20 February 2000.
- ²⁰ A visitor brochure informs me that the poppies can be purchased from the Memorial shop.
- ²¹ McKernan notes that '[i]n deciding to exclude the service of such individuals the Board created a difficulty for the 1939-45 Roll because

many Australian airmen, in particular, had served with British forces and would therefore be excluded if the same rule applied' (McKernan 1991: 229).

²² The designated cut-off point for deaths attributed to the First World War was the date of the first AIF's disbandment, 1 April 1921. For the Second World War, it was 30 June 1947.

²³ The Board 'eventually agreed that those serving in other forces and merchant seamen would only be included on a supplementary roll, to be produced possibly in book form' (McKernan, 1991: 229). In fact, in 1998 the merchant seamen were granted their own memorial when the Merchant Navy Roll of Honour Memorial was unveiled.

²⁴ The Board drew the line, however, by deleting from the honour list a man 'shot while deserting to the enemy after having thrown away his arms and equipment' (McKernan 1991: 230).

²⁵ The solution found was to establish a Supplementary Roll on a computer database. Ironically, the same problem beset the Memorial in relation to its Vietnam War memorial, into which was entombed a stainless steel scroll with 'all' the names of those who died serving in that war. Donald Murray Clark was last on the list of names faxed to the Australian Vietnam Forces Memorial Committee and his name did not transmit. In this case, the Committee apologised to the man's family and announced that \$21,000 would be spent to slice through the granite to replace the scroll. Tina Diaz, 'Soldier missing on the scrolls', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November 1992 p. 2.

²⁶ Catherine Armitage, 'Organ collection poses problem for museum', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 August 1992, p. 2.

²⁷ Charles Bean, as quoted in the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1928, in the Minutes of Evidence, p. 8, in AWM 38 3DRL 6673, item number 641.

²⁸ In its early life, when the Memorial was still known as the Australian War Museum, the idea of interring the remains of a soldier in a museum caused great controversy, which delayed the establishment of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier until 1993.

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Stone bead in the Australian War Memorial's courtyard