

Rethinking appropriation of the Indigenous – a romanticist approach ¹

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In 1987 an Australian Indigenous man Burnim Burnim encouraged some outback didjerido players to perform at a Down to Earth Festival to help out some white friends. A naked festival goer put his penis into a didjerido while it was being played by a musician from the Kimberleys area of north-western Western Australia. Burnim Burnim's horror and shame at this act that he saw as 'sick and irreverent', made him 'hate whites'. ²

McCarthy, an archeologist working in California described the 'modern assaults' on the "sacred landscape' of Mt Shasta where hundreds of New Agers eat, drink alcohol, defecate, leave trash, make noise and dance nude, violating the sacred springs, and complicating communication for the Indigenous people and their spirits. They throw so many crystals into the sacred springs the water is obstructed. ³

Since the 1980s and up to the present there have been many anthropologists, archaeologists, political activists and chat room discussants who have clearly denounced cultural (mis)appropriation by New Agers and others on the grounds that it is an assault on the integrity of ... personal and specific ties of kinship and country; ⁴ is cultural theft and continues the subjugation of colonialism; ⁵ that it is akin to identity theft ⁶ and

¹ The authors wish to thank Prof Dianne Bell for providing her bibliography on this issue.

² Sherwood, P. The Didjeridu and Alternative Lifestylers' Reconstruction of Social Reality. Neuenfeldt, K. (ed.) *The Didjeridu: From Arnhem Land to Internet*. John Libby (Perfect Beat Publications: Sydney, 1997), 150.

³ McCarthy, H. Assaulting California's Sacred Mountains. In Olupona, J (ed.) *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*. (Routledge: London, 2004), 176-7.

⁴ Bell, D. Desperately Seeking Redemption. *Natural History* 106(2) (1997) 52-3.

⁵ Neame, L. Cultural Backpacking in Lands of Desire: Reinforcing the Coloniser and Other Adventures. BA Arts Hons Dissertation, (Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, 2006); Burke, R. Australian Aborigine: Trying to Understand Their Plight. Helium [online]

dissolution of culture;⁷ that it provides status or financial gain to fakes⁸ while the indigenous continue to suffer the ravages of imperialism; that it is just another attack on a former subject race by its masters, reflecting Empire and Enlightenment;⁹ that it confuses and denigrates efforts by Indigenous to go back to tradition in an effort to overcome serious social issues;¹⁰ and that it inadequately recognizes the knowledge of Indigenous people.¹¹ In fact Muir claims that there has been so much disapproving literature “it is a wonder there is anything left to say”.¹² However, responses by the indigenous to this phenomenon are by no means unanimous¹³ and there are signs that a shift in relation to absolute condemnation of cultural borrowing is taking place in some quarters, in particular from scholars of the New Age¹⁴ and from some philosophers, Appiah in particular.¹⁵ In this sense a simple dichotomy of cultural theft from

<http://helium.com/tm/858348/aborigine-ownership-through-phases>. Accessed March 3 2008; Weinstein Cultural Appropriation! = Outlaw Culture. MaxZine Weinstein. [online] www.osca.wilder.oberlin.edu/articles. Accessed 3 March 2008.

⁶ Eggington, R. Marlo Morgan Campaign.[online] <http://dumbartung.org.au/freedom.html>. Accessed May 16 2008.

⁷ Churchill, W.A Little Matter of Genocide: Colonialism and the Expropriation of Indigenous Spiritual Tradition in Contemporary Academia. In W. Churchill (ed.) *Fantasies of the Master Race*. (City Light Books, San Francisco, 1992), 99-120.

⁸ Rose, W. The Great Pretenders. Further Reflections of Whiteshamanism. In M. A. Jaimes (ed.) *The State of Native America*. (South End Press, Boston, 1992), 403-421.

⁹ Shand, P. Scenes from the Colonial Catwalk: Cultural Appropriation, Intellectual Property Rights, and Fashion. *Cultural Analysis* 3 (2002) 57.

¹⁰ Kasee, C Identity, Recovery, and Religious Imperialism Native American Women and the New Age. *Women and Therapy* 16:2/3 (1995) 83-93,

¹¹ Morgan, D. Appropriation, Appreciation, Accommodation: Indigenous Wisdoms and Knowledge in Higher Education. *International Review of Education*. 49(1-2) (2003), 35-49

¹² Muir, S. The Good of New Age Goods. *Culture and Religion* 8(3) (2007), 236.

¹³ Strathern reports that a Papua New Guinean conference on Indigenous responses to Intellectual property brought responses quite different from the political spokespeople of the fourth world indigenous communities in settler societies. Their main concerns were to protect traditional channels of information exchange, to recognize that culture changes so can not be ‘preserved’ and to protect biological resources for the future for all. Strathern, M. *Property, Substance and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things*. (The Athlone Press, London, 1999), 202. It is possible that the PNG response reflects either an undeveloped appreciation of the continuing negative effects of world capitalism and global inequality or a more secure sense of identity and highly developed cultural value of exchange and reciprocity.

¹⁴ Mulcock, J. Ethnography in Awkward Spaces: An Anthropology of Cultural Borrowing. *Practicing Anthropology* 23(1) (2001), 38-42; Muir, S. The Good of New Age Goods. *Culture and Religion* 8(3) (2007), 233-253; Possamei, A. Cultural Consumption of History and Popular Culture in Alternative Spiritualities. *Journal of Consumer Culture*.2, (2002), 197-218; Welsch, C. Appropriating the Didjeridu and the Sweat Lodge: New Age Baddies and Indigenous Victims? *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 17(1) (2002), 21-38.

¹⁵ Appiah, K.A. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. (Norton and Co., New York) 2006.

indigenous peoples is inadequate to explain the complexities of the interaction between indigenous peoples and New Age movements.

The aim of this paper is, firstly, to set out the effects of romanticism on neo-Pagan and New Age attitudes to the indigenous and, secondly, to problematise the notion of clear lines of right and wrong positions on cultural appropriation. Ultimately the hope is to foster a respectful conversation between Neo-Pagans and New Agers and the Indigenous. As many of the issues wash over to artists, musicians and spiritual seekers in the West generally, it is also hoped that the ideas discussed here may contribute to a more general appreciation of cultural appropriation of the Indigenous in contemporary times.

This paper refers to both Neo Pagans and New Agers and there are problems with clearly defining these groups. Waldron has set out four main categories of neo-Paganism relating to their approach to historicity and this discussion refers mainly to the eclectic and eco-feminist branches, given that reconstructionists and traditionalist Pagans are not primarily concerned with the religious traditions of contemporary indigenous communities.¹⁶ Authors such as Sherwood have differentiated alternative lifestyles from New Age, claiming the former are older and less consumerist.¹⁷ Possamei suggests a new term that 'Perennism' as having some heuristic value but is yet to be widely acknowledged. Perennism describes a 'syncretic spirituality' that is 'world monistic' (interrelated elements with a single ultimate force or principle), develops the potential for 'human ethics' and involves the search for spiritual knowledge.¹⁸ For the purposes of this paper, the term Perennism would apply to Neo Pagans and New Agers.

¹⁶Waldron, David. *The Sign of the Witch: Modernity and the Pagan Revival*. (Carolina Academic Press: Durham, 2008), xxi

¹⁷ (Sherwood 1997, 140)

¹⁸ (Possamei 2002, 199)

Some artists and musicians drawing inspiration from Aboriginal motifs or instruments may also be encapsulated by this concept.

This paper is argued for the most part on the basis of previous literature but is informed to some extent by long term and past associations with respectively the Neo Pagan sub culture and support groups working with Indigenous people and interest in their intersections.¹⁹ The paper confirms the damaging effects of Romanticism and sets out how relationships have been conflicted. Conversely the paper also indicates that cultural appropriation goes two ways; that some Indigenous people have embraced New Age ideology; and that the deep connections and genuine commitment of some New Age/Neopagans suggests potential for a more positive and grounded future relationship between the two groups. There is thus evidence of both conflicted and ambiguous interaction between Indigenous and Non indigenous. There is a continuum of relationship/attitudes between indigenous and non indigenous in relation to belonging to land, indicating overlaps between New Age, Neo Pagan, artists, spiritual seekers, detribalized and forcibly assimilated Indigenous people. The situation is complex.

The paper begins with a brief discussion of the role of romanticism in the representations of Indigenous people since colonization, and of the reasons why Indigenous people are particularly vulnerable to cultural appropriation. A short discussion on the influence of Jung on New Age movements follows, before some negative responses from the Indigenous to crass examples of misappropriation are described. A pivotal section of the paper then sets out a relatively recent retreat from a clear post-colonial line on rejecting cultural appropriation, lead most contentiously by

¹⁹ Newton, J. Aborigines, Tribes and the Counterculture. *Social Analysis*. 23, (1988) 53-71; Newton, J. Becoming 'Authentic' Australians Through Music. In J.Marcus (ed.) *Writing Australian Culture*. Special Issue *Social Analysis*. 27, (1990).93-101.

Appiah's book *Cosmopolitanism*, but also informed by the work of Brown, Shand, Coleman and Strathern. This is followed by examples of conflicted and ambiguous interactions between the Indigenous and New Age (or Perennist) users of Indigenous knowledge, before the paper concludes.

A tradition of associating and representing the Indigenous with Romanticism was not born with the Neo Pagans or New Agers. American scholars have long acknowledged distortions, romantic and other stereotypical images of the Native American and versions of their history, promulgated firstly by the colonists and more recently by New Agers and the Indigenous themselves. Most of the earliest scholars concentrated on the power of the colonizer to orientalise, or create 'othering' stereotypes that functioned essentially to reflect 'the white neurosis of the age'²⁰ or establish a 'cultural foil'.²¹ Axtell revealed that romanticized images of Native Americans' conservation ethic did not reflect reality for many Amer-Indians by 1640.²² Clifton attacks the romanticised fictions which passed for a widely believed but fantasized pre-contact history.²³ In earlier colonial history the aim of much of the literature was to sublimate desires and fears and to shore up the colonial idea of civilization.²⁴ In more recent times, amongst at least two main groups sublime and romantic desires have become uppermost. These two groups are the New Age and some of the more vocal and often non-classical or urbanized Indigenous communities.

²⁰ Strickland, R. White Memory, Red Images and Contemporary Indian Policy: a foreword. In Stedman, R.W. *Shadows of the Indian*. (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1982), x.

²¹ Axtell, J. *The European and the Indian*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981), 273.

²² (Axtell 1981, 260).

²³ Clifton, J. The Indian Story: a Cultural Fiction. In J. Clifton (ed.) *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies*. (Transaction Publishers, London, 1990), 29-48.

²⁴ Portraits of Columbus' time, featuring naked, gentle people from a Golden Age, were rooted in romantic mythology of Europe. Issues of cannibalism were 'smoothed over' and the idea promulgated that the 'primitive man' left alone is superior. (Strickland 1982, x); Stedman, R.W. *Shadows of the Indian*. (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1982), 6.

Armin Geertz calls for accelerated Enlightenment approaches to counter the contemporary threat of over-romanticism, deriving from the common appropriation of indigenous religious spaces, objects and ideas by New Age groups. Such appropriations marginalize real people.²⁵ Kehoe draws the New Age together with some Indigenous when she exposes the ‘Plastic Medicine Men’, ‘common charlatans’ and ‘credulous scholars’ that have promoted a ‘cultural primitivism’ in opposition to civilization, promulgating romantic beliefs where Indians are the source of true goodness and knowledge.²⁶ Simard argues that both White and Indian have become ‘fabled creatures’ acting as ‘essentialised opposites’ peering in a window at each other. Romantic images of Reservations, as ‘sacred holy lands’, bear little resemblance to the problems existing within them. Institutionalized dependence in such places is held together by a body of ‘powerful symbols, images and fictions’ depicting the ‘True Native’ as a ‘primeval being’ ‘bound to pristine nature’ and ‘ancient cultural heritage.’²⁷

Romanticism has also been a continuing thread in Australian colonial history, rising and falling at various times in response to particular historical contexts and social milieux. In Australia the first responses to the Indigenous were conflated with previous European responses to the primitive, seen for example with the American Indians or ancient gladiators in classical artworks. James Cook and Joseph Banks were influenced by their Western European intellectual heritage and, according to Williams, would have been exposed to classical texts in fact and fiction espousing romantic and utopian images of

²⁵ Johnson, P. Review of J. Olupona (ed.) ‘Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity’. *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 73(4) (2005), 1247; (Geertz 2004, 59, 61-62). 1247; Geertz, A. ‘Can We Move Beyond Primitivism?’ On recovering the indigenes of indigenous religion in the academic study of religion. Olupona, J (ed.) *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*. Routledge, London. (2004), 53-69.

²⁶ Kehoe, A. Primal Gaia: Primitivists and Plastic Medicine Men. In in J. Clifton (ed.) *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies*. Transaction Publishers, London (1990), 193-209, 207.

²⁷ Simard, J-J. White Ghosts, Red Shadows: the reduction of the North American natives. In Clifton, J. (ed.) *The Invented Indian*. Transaction Publishers, London, (1990), 334-5, 352.

the primitive. When Cook in 1770 wrote positively about a happy people, lacking need or use for material goods, it was an era of debate about the primitive, before alternative ideologies and racialist ideas of hierarchies became entrenched.²⁸

In spite of the significance of ‘Chain of Being’ ideas and later notions of social evolution, Romanticism ebbed and flowed in representations of the Indigenous. In the early nineteenth century, ideas of the noble savage resurfaced in art featuring Aborigines as woodsman hunters.²⁹ By the late nineteenth century the ‘truncated and inactive’ portraits of Aboriginal heads by Fristroem³⁰ reflected a melancholy romantic ideology of a passing race;³⁰ and in the early twentieth century, popular postcard images included romantic depictions of naked Aborigines in natural surroundings.³¹ Such Romanticism, it could be argued, actively works against a realistic and empathetic understanding of the real people represented. Indigenous leader Mick Dodson is concerned that the Indigenous have been made into a romantic ‘other’, an image of what has been lost.³² The identities of the real Indigenous, dominated and outnumbered as they have been by the settler colonizers, is both particularly important and particularly vulnerable.

²⁸Williams, G. Reflections on Cook’s Voyage. In Donaldson, I. and Donaldson, T. (eds.) *Seeing the First Australians*. (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985), 35-45; Smith, B. The First European Depictions. In Donaldson, I. and Donaldson, T. (eds.) *Seeing the First Australians*. (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985), 30.

²⁹ Urry, J. Savage Sportsmen. Donaldson, I. and Donaldson, T. (eds.) *Seeing the First Australians*. George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985), 58.

³⁰ Maynard, M. Projections of Melancholy. In Donaldson, I. and Donaldson, T. (eds.) *Seeing the First Australians*. (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985), 97, 107.

³¹ Peterson, N. The Popular Image In Donaldson, I. and Donaldson, T. (eds.) *Seeing the First Australians*. (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985), 175-180.

³² (Possamei 2002,199). Lois O’Donoghue, Indigenous Magistrate, also acknowledges that a uniform, generalized Aboriginal culture has been constructed as a negative of Western culture, espousing opposite values – ‘adopted by modern-day Aboriginal activists as well as by the many non-Aboriginal Australians’. This does not offer the recognition that cultures interact and evolve, nor help people confront the real problems they face. O’Donoghue, L. Creating Authentic Australia(s) for 2001: An Aboriginal Perspective. *Social Alternatives* 10 (2) 1991, 17-20, 19.

Tension between New Age and neo-Pagan romanticised models of indigenous identity and the struggles for recognition by indigenous people are far from localised in conflicts between Australians and New Age authors. Cultural identity is a critical resource in the struggle of indigenous peoples to assert their political, economic, social and cultural interests. Notwithstanding the large gap between most settler populations and fourth world indigenous communities in terms of access to social and material resources such as health, education, employment and wealth, to a large extent a group's survival, its identity and sense of solidarity depend on the secure possession of cultural and historical narrative as a means to define who they are in relation to the dominant cultural base in which they operate. When non-indigenous individuals and businesses reinterpret, reinvent and market indigenous culture for the benefit of the New Age and neo-Pagan movements they are placing themselves in competition with indigenous communities' own capacity to represent themselves to the broader community.³³ The fact that the extent to which the New Age industry can influence broader cultural perceptions of indigenous societies identities far more than their capacity to do so, means that these differences of representation are inevitably going to become the site of political battles over the ownership and representation of culture.

It matters little that the romanticized images of indigenous cultures are almost invariably positive. At the very least the romanticized image invariably de-politicises and reconfigures indigenous identity as legitimate only within the confines of the stereotyped construction within the discourse of the dominant culture episteme. The issue of cultural representations and the ownership of culture are intrinsically interwoven with the political struggles of indigenous peoples to have their voices heard

³³Mulcock, Jane. *Cultural Property and the Dilemma of the Collective Unconscious: Indigenous Imagery, New Spirituality and the Politics of Identity*. Alternative Culture Seminar. Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference. Sydney. July 10-13. (1999), 12.

and their interests recognized and accepted by government industry and mainstream culture. As Aboriginal lawyer Larissa Behrendt argues,

The long-term outcome or rights protection based on the assertion of noble savage/positive stereotypes are extremely detrimental to the Aboriginal community. If rights are granted because of a sympathy based on a particular stereotype, those indigenous people who do not fit into this stereotype will be excluded... those who do not fit into this image who do not live lives based on an affinity with nature and devoid of any material possessions are seen as outside the net of worthy beneficiaries. The real noble savage is above the need of human and legal frameworks. The noble savage is depoliticised and as a result the issue of rights is relegated to the sidelines.³⁴

The assumption that symbols, rituals and artifacts are simply resources to be consumed by a western and New Age avaricious appetite for aesthetic experience, ignores the role played by cultural property in community order and cohesion. The need for the appropriate people to be given custody of particular information, to perform appropriate rituals, artwork, songs and story telling and decide how that material is used, forms an important part in maintaining the social and economic structure of a classical community.³⁵ Post-classical Indigenous communities attempt to preserve a sense of cultural identity and community in the face of the potential disintegration of their society.

The struggle to maintain the appropriate channels of authority in the face of destabilizing European attempts to assimilate and absorb indigenous cultures can become a severe threat in maintaining cultural identity. When people such as New Agers appropriate culture following an ethos of western consumerist individualism that ignores cultural restrictions on who should and who should not be privy to such information, they risk further disenfranchising indigenous people from their culture and disrupting the socio-cultural base of their communities. In many indigenous cultures

³⁴ Berendt, L. In *Your Dreams: Cultural Appropriation, Popular Culture and Colonialism*. *Law Text and Culture*. 4(1) (1998), 272-273.

³⁵ Berndt, R & C. *The World of the First Australians*. (Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999), 287ff.

the issue is not simply the significance of the symbolism but the mode of transmission – both of which are integral to the nature of sacred symbols. As a consequence the New Age and neo-Pagan assumption of universality to a consumer driven cultural eclecticism can pose a significant challenge to attempts by indigenous cultures to assert their identity and preserve socio-cultural cohesion.

Urbanised and de-tribalised, ‘post-classical’ Indigenous communities from the south-east of Australia in particular, are vulnerable to the effects of cultural appropriation and at the same time may be drawn to romanticized images of their ancestral culture. Three decades ago in his collection *Living Black* Indigenous writer Kevin Gilbert critiqued romanticized, golden images of sharing, kin-centred families that seemed in stark contrast to the lived reality of most Indigenous people at the time.³⁶ Policies of assimilation have created a body of Indigenous Australians deemed ‘inauthentic’ in many contexts.³⁷ Native Title and Heritage legal decisions since then have declared, for example, that history has wiped out the association with the land and associated cultural rituals, (Yorta Yorta decision)³⁸ and years of Government policy designed to remove Aboriginal children from their language and tribal links have created gaps in cultural knowledge that create the space in communities for cultural revival movements that may draw on Romanticised or New Age stereotypes.³⁹ Essentialist and romantic theories of authenticity are currently part of ethnic nationalism and include emotional

³⁶ Gilbert, K. *Living Black*, Allen Lane, (Penguin Press, Melbourne, 1977) 1 Some of these images have also become part of the general understanding of Australians in general, who are positive towards Indigenous people. Eckermann, A. Dowd, T., Chong, E., Nixon, L., Gray, R. and Johnson, S. *Binan Goonj: Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal Health* (ed 2) (Churchill Livingstone, Sydney, 2006) 86, 89.

³⁷ Wolfe, P. Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era. *Social Analysis* 36, (1994), 93-152.

³⁸ Sutton, P. *Native Title in Australia: An Ethnographic Perspective*. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003) 135-137.

³⁹ Sutton, P. Aboriginal Spirituality in a New Age. In F. Dussart and C. Schwartz (eds.) *In Dialogue with Christianities: Rethinking Aboriginal Australia*. Special Issue, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (in press 2009) 11/19; (Donoghue 1991, 19).

pleas that, given the loss of land, power, autonomy and so on, images are ‘all we have left’.⁴⁰

We see then that there was certainly a Romantic tradition in Australian representations of Indigenous people that surfaced at various times in the colonial and post-colonial history. At the same time we had an Indigenous community struggling to survive materially, but also struggling to maintain a positive cultural identity. Sometimes the material deprivation is almost taken for granted as it is so obvious, but it needs to be taken seriously because it underpins political policies and deep individual and cultural forces. When Indigenous people say, ‘Do not take our culture because that is all we have left’, we should listen. In a situation where an Indigenous person retains land, kinship structures, language and much more, they may be in a position to be more generous with their ‘culture’.

In the decade before these issues of cultural appropriation went to centre political stage for the Indigenous people, developments occurred in New Age and neo Pagan communities which were to set forth at least a conflicted conjuncture, if not a collision course in the future. The 1960s was an especially important era in terms of development among the neo Pagans, as it was a time when historicity and factually historical accuracy became less important as a rationale for spiritual ritual and knowledge than subjective and subconscious frameworks, such as those of Jung.

Jungian oriented neo-Paganism, like many other New Spirituality movements of the 60’s, became almost completely focused on culture and symbolism as the ultimate source of legitimacy so long as it could be interpreted via Jung’s model of archetypes

⁴⁰ Coleman, E. B. *Aboriginal Art, Identity and Appropriation*. (Ashgate, Hants, UK, 2005), 1

within the collective unconscious or be constructed as a signifier of cultural identity or political action. One of the most significant manifestations of this eclectic approach among Neo-Pagans and New Agers is the appropriation of the symbols, motifs and rituals of indigenous cultures as a means of defining contemporary neo-Pagan identity. Jane Mulcock argues that this embracing of eclecticism, the perception that all sacred sites belong to all humanity and the collective appropriation of indigenous cultures, is indicative of a broader belief in a primal heritage that all humans share but is better represented in indigenous cultures through their perceived closer relationship to the land. From this perspective it is believed that by visiting sacred sites and embracing the rituals of indigenous peoples, it is possible to tap into deeper layer of earth spiritualism and to get in touch with the shared, primal heritage of human spirituality.⁴¹ Neo-Pagan and New Age author Leila Castles illustrate this perspective when she writes,

Imagine listening to the voice of the Earth for guidance in matters of government. This is an awareness preserved in the teachings of most indigenous people everywhere, and lost to Euro-American cultures for centuries. With the loss of our ancestral wisdom teachings, we are fortunate enough to be able to reconnect with this ancient memory through our relationship with the Earth, most vividly with sacred places. This association of sacred places and wisdom is found worldwide.⁴²

The romanticist idealization of indigenous cultures as a model for utopian ideals, rituals and symbolic configurations has a long history in western culture. Eco-spiritual representations of indigenous peoples can be traced back as far as the 18th century when they were posited in contrast to dystopian visions of industrialization. Even as early as the 17th century there were prominent cultural trends that described the Noble Savage as evidence of the innate goodness of man in the perceived state of nature. Seventeenth and 18th century writers such as Gabriel de Foigny, Jonathon Swift, Denis Diderot and Jean-Jaques Rousseau commonly utilised primitivist and utopian notions of “natural

⁴¹ (Mulcock, 1999, 6)

⁴² Castle, Leila. *Earthwalking Skydancers: Women's pilgrimages to Sacred Places*. (Berkeley: Frog publishers, 1996), xxx

man” based on the descriptions of “pagan societies” living close to the earth and following nature.⁴³

From its earliest origins, the neo-Pagan movement relied extensively upon representations of pre-industrialised, pre-Christian and supposed pre-Patriarchal societies as a cultural resource in defining neo-Pagan identity and values. The extensive idealization and construction of images relating to Greek, Celtic and medieval Saxon civilization are clear examples of this process of utilizing representations of pre-industrial civilizations as a source of symbolism and rituals.

However, the post 1960s appropriation of indigenous societies differed from previous romanticist, neo-Pagan and occultist idealization of the past in three important respects. Firstly, the appeal to legitimacy on behalf of these appropriations was not based in literal claims to historicity but according to Jungian derived models of the collective unconscious and the psychological impact of symbols. Secondly, the representations of indigenous societies were based almost entirely on mass produced material culture via the New Age industry and mass media. Thirdly, these representations of indigenous societies have become increasingly embroiled in attempts by indigenous cultures to redefine and assert their own unique socio-cultural identities and politico-economic interests.

These conflicting interests have often led to confrontations between new age and neo-Pagan practitioners and the indigenous and foreign cultures they seek to amalgamate under the banner of Paganism via a perceived sharing of the doctrine of immanence, the sacralizing of nature, animism or polytheism. Two prominent examples of this kind of

⁴³ Ross, Andrew. ‘Cultural Preservation in the Polynesia of Latterday Saints.’ In Bennett, David, *Cultural Studies: Pluralism and Theory*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (1993), 4-5.

privileging of the Western Romantic imagination over the culture, traditions and mode of transmission of indigenous peoples are the commercially successful New Age books Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under* and Lynne Andrews' *Crystal Woman*.

Marlo Morgan's book *Mutant Message Down Under*⁴⁴ tells of an American woman's three-month journey into the desert where she was chosen to be the sacred messenger of the Noongar people. Morgan gave herself the name of *travelling tongue* and in the story she spreads the wisdom she claims to have inherited from a secret community of Aboriginal people who have remained uncorrupted by white man's influence. There is very little evidence that her journey took place and the experiences and rituals described stand in contrast to what is known of Aboriginal culture. Amongst other glaring errors it included facile ideas such as dolphins, koalas and platypus being sacred to Aborigines in the middle of the desert and culturally denigrating statements which confused intimate and secret details of men's and women's lore.⁴⁵ For many American and European readers it is the only source of information about Australian Aboriginal culture and society and Morgan has engaged in a worldwide series of lecture tours on aboriginal colonization attended by predominantly Anglo-Saxon New Age practitioners.

Crystal woman: the sisters of the Dreamtime also concerns a visit (two weeks) by an American to discover secrets among Aboriginal women of Australia. The book's illustrations resonate with native American symbols and despite some concerns that part of it is borrowed from an anthropologist's work⁴⁶ it just does

⁴⁴Morgan, Marlo. *Mutant Message from Down Under*. (Harper paperbacks: New York, 2004)

⁴⁵Mutant Message Down Under Campaign. <http://www.dumbartung.org.au/report.html>

See also "The Stanton Report." <http://www.dumbartung.org.au/stanton2.html>

⁴⁶ Kehoe 1990, 205.

not 'ring true' for anyone with first hand experience with desert communities.⁴⁷

The elders are referred to as 'Koori' though she claims to travel through Western Australia to Central Australia. She refers to bandicoots, which have not been seen for thirty years in the area and claims that the origin of the Aboriginal people is Central Australia.

Morgan's book became extremely popular in the US and stands to earn in excess of 90 million US dollars, selling over 500,000 copies in the US alone with a Hollywood film production still to come.⁴⁸ Similarly, Andrews' books are a 'steady back list seller' and are 'stolen from library shelves in Canada and the US'.⁴⁹ The extent and scale of the financing behind the New Age industry, combined with the high level of international publicity, throw the power imbalance and level of presentation and powerful exposure between indigenous and New Age representations into stark relief.

There is a strong underlying tension between a society's desire to define and promote their own socio-cultural identity and attempts to romanticise and appropriate its symbols and rituals for the purpose of cultural identity by the New Age and Neo-Pagan movement. The conflict between Nyangar Robert Eggington from Western Australia and New Age author Marlo Morgan is a clear example of how attempts to appropriate indigenous identities by the New Age and Neo-Pagan movements often conflicts with contemporary indigenous struggles for recognition and socio-political goals.⁵⁰ This is heightened by the attack upon Indigenous identity from the bureaucratic machine of Anglo-Celtic dominated government and industry. This is well illustrated by the 1980

⁴⁷ Andrews, L. *Crystal Woman: the sisters of the dreamtime*. (Warner Books, New York 1987)

⁴⁸ Mutant Message Down under campaign <http://www.dumbartung.org.au/report1.html>

⁴⁹ P. Benesh, 'Questionable view of the Dreamtime,' *The Age* 17 Sept 1988, Extra, 10.

⁵⁰ (Mulcock, 1999, 11)

Boyer Lectures titled “The Spectre of Truganini”, where Bernard Smith describes the late mid 20th Century as the “Years of the Walrus, the years of a manifest hypocrisy, during which we extend our sympathies increasingly to the Aboriginal people while our institutions, legal and otherwise, continue to permit the cannibalization of their culture and their aspirations in the name of technological progress.”⁵¹

As he writes in his 1995 declaration against “The Continual Spiritual Colonization of our People and Noongar people” entitled *Jannga Meeynya Bomunggar* (The Smell of the White Man is Killing Us), Eggington claims,

Herbalists, Alternative Religious Practitioners, Self Proclaimed Healers, Spiritual and Psychological Refugees, New Age Shaman Cultists and their followers, individuals involved in the New Age movement, Women’s Movements and the neo-Pagan Cults and Shamanic workshops who have all exploited the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Nyangar people by imitation of ceremonial practices, understanding and beliefs and have meshed this with non-Aboriginal occult material in an oppressive manner.⁵²

Native Canadians describe Andrews’ former books as ‘a pastiche of pseudo mysticism and self-proclaimed shamanism to be unadulterated charlatanism’ and the Mohawk newspaper listed Lynn Andrews as ‘one of several “plastic medicine men and women” who are alleged to make speaking tours and charge gullible white people for their performances.’⁵³

Eggington’s response is comparable to views of Indigenous academic R Morgan of University of South Australia(Get title). Morgan is a little more circumspect but still argues for recognition of Indigenous knowledge as authentic and valuable and for a resistance to cultural appropriation. He believes that there is a

⁵¹ Smith, B. *The Spectre of Truganini*. 1980 Boyer Lecture, ABC 1980.

⁵² Mutant Message Down Under Campaign. <http://www.dumbartung.org.au/report1.html>

⁵³ P. Benesh, Questionable view of the Dreamtime’ *The Age* 17 Sept 1988, Extra p10.

continuum from appropriation, through appreciation to accommodation and that dissatisfaction with Western science has led many to that first stage of appreciation of Indigenous wisdom and knowledge, but that economic exploitation is closer to current reality than the rhetoric of accommodation.⁵⁴

In the case of Marlo Morgan and Lyn Andrews we see clear cases of white people from dominant settler societies making a commercial success from misrepresenting Indigenous society and offending at least some key Indigenous scholars and political activists. Much of the theoretical debate about appropriation has centered, however, around material artifacts and art, and physical appropriation.

The ‘hardline’ approach to cultural appropriation and cultural relativism has recently been subject to critique by number of scholars. There is a retreat from ‘black and white’ notions of exploitation and appropriation. African born, English-educated, US- based philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism* advocates a future where we do not eschew universal values but think of ourselves as a global tribe with obligations to people beyond our kith and kin and a commitment to value other people’s practices. European cosmopolitanism is not new. Europe has shown receptiveness to literature and art from elsewhere in the past.⁵⁵

Appiah argues that relativism has limited potential for learning from each other, that it has constrained our conversations across cultures. Furthermore, positivism has contributed to a focus on ‘obstacles to cross-cultural understanding’ by assuming one cannot critique desires and values and neglecting to consider the group context of

⁵⁴ Morgan, D. Appropriation, Appreciation, Accommodation: Indigenous Wisdoms and Knowledge in Higher Education. *International Review of Education*. 49(1-2) (2003) 35-49, 43ff.

⁵⁵ (Appiah 2006,xv-7)

individual actions.⁵⁶ Some concepts like ‘good’ and ‘disgust’ apply universally but they, and notions of right and wrong even more so, are ‘thickly enmeshed’ in social contexts.⁵⁷ Appiah believes the interests of other peoples should be taken seriously and that we should ‘walk a while in another’s moccasins’⁵⁸ but that we do not have to agree on values to develop political co-existence. He strongly believes that interaction, conversation and gradually ‘getting used to’ strangers and difference can lead to a new way of seeing things to engagement with new experiences and ideas. If one engages with particular strangers, ‘the stranger becomes real’.⁵⁹

Appiah recognizes both the problems associated with defining what is authentic in a culture when cultures change and the role of globalization in this change. Although globalization produces homogeneity in terms of similar products and processes all over the world, the threat of such homogeneity and usual adaptive responses within differing cultural contexts creates local pockets of ‘invented difference’.⁶⁰ He argues that respect for human difference should be tempered with ‘respect for actual human beings’.⁶¹

The crux and contentious practical significance of Appiah’s argument in his chapter (and article) ‘Who owns Culture?’ In a context where many nations and indigenous peoples are calling for repatriation of cultural artifacts from metropolitan museums (now deemed as traffickers in stolen goods), and where the United Nation supports claims that cultural property should be regarded as the property of its culture, Appiah argues that we should start thinking about all humanity and show our respect to other cultures by keeping objects from other places secure. He gives a number of mainly

⁵⁶ (Appiah 2006, 18)

⁵⁷ (Appiah 2006, 47)

⁵⁸ (Appiah 2006, 63)

⁵⁹ (Appiah 2006, 85, 99)

⁶⁰ (Appiah 2006, 103)

⁶¹ (Appiah 2006, 113)

practical reasons. There are pragmatic difficulties defining the owning unit when objects were created by past civilizations and states that do not match current ethnic groups and national boundaries. Regulations designed to protect artifacts have allowed the opposite to occur because the owning countries have neither the money to properly protect and police objects, nor the wealth to resist selling. Difficulties with private ownership may be addressed by banning export of articles, but can we really claim that arts belong to current states when they were created by and for institutions like courts and churches?⁶²

Appiah considers the impact on art of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the specter and reality of the destruction of art that he considers is the heritage of the world. He believes that much art is made to be looked at and shared, and, therefore, should become part of the culture of the world.⁶³ As such he presents a persuasive argument counter to much post-colonial scholarship and to the direction of United Nations policy since the 1980s. But it is an argument that perhaps takes too easily the assumption of an unequal world where metropolitan centers become the safe haven for the culture of the world. It also assumes a particular perspective on ownership and usefulness. The western desire to preserve for the sake of aesthetic voyeurism is not shared by all cultures.

Other scholars work more on the details of how modern states can effectively work within or on the edges of a legal system, recognising the ownership of cultural property. There are, however, at least three main problems with the practical application of Western law, such as copyright law, to issues of Indigenous cultural ownership.

⁶² Appiah, K. A. Whose Culture Is It? *The New York Review of Books*. 53(2) 2006b, 9ff.

⁶³ (Appiah 2006b, 7-8)

First, there are many difficulties in terms of establishing level of individual, group or even network ownership of a cultural artifact or custom.⁶⁴ Strathern reminds us that ‘cultures are not discreet bodies’. Social communities may claim common cultural identity but do not reproduce the same way.⁶⁵ Secondly, the continuities between tangible and intangible art and culture are recognised in many Indigenous cultures⁶⁶ but are not dealt with well in copyright law.⁶⁷ In fact, a non-Indigenous person who photographs an Indigenous person’s body art has more ownership rights than the person who wears or applies the art. Thirdly there are practical difficulties, especially with the World Wide Web, in removing previously published books and photographs, now considered special or secret owned knowledge, from the public domain.⁶⁸

There are three more issues of ‘essence’ or morality that create difficulties. Firstly, copyright law fails to address the central matters, motivations and person/property nexus of Indigenous people, which are ideas of identity, relationship and struggle.⁶⁹ Strathern wonders if Intellectual Property Rights are the right vehicle for conserving rights to heritage. In capitalist law its aim is to *dis-embed* property, but the Indigenous wish to *re-embed* property.⁷⁰

Elizabeth Coleman, a philosopher from Australia, pursues this link between person and things or art. She began her research into Aboriginal claims that cultural appropriation of art or art motifs was identity theft with some skepticism. The increasingly ventilated claim in the international political arena that the theft of images and unauthorized use of

⁶⁴ (Shand, P. 2002, 64-66); Brown, M. *Who Owns Native Culture?* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 65 ; (Strathern, 1999, 169); Langton, M. *Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television*. (Australian Film Commission, North Sydney, 1993), 66.

⁶⁵ (Strathern, 1999, 168)

⁶⁶ Morphy, H. *Aboriginal Art*. (Phaidon Press: London, 1998), 193ff.

⁶⁷ (Shand 2002, 60)

⁶⁸ (Brown 2004, 6, 35, 92)

⁶⁹ (Shand 2002, 61-62); (Coleman 2005, 13, 20, 49)

⁷⁰ (Strathern, 1999, 177, 194-5)

motifs would destroy communities was juxtaposed to western moral claims about artistic freedom. Her very detailed and careful argument concludes by accepting that, for traditional clan-based communities, unauthorised use of art and motifs does amount to identity theft. She believes that the notion of insignia from European noble houses best explains how the individual art of Aborigines is linked to the collective identity. What we have in place in our law in relation to insignia and logos may be more appropriate for effectively addressing issues of appropriation.⁷¹

The second main issue of essence or morality states that the effects of copyright of Intellectual Property law can be too strong. Its application can hamper ultimate reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous because it sets up barriers and confrontation between them. Strathern says that Intellectual property rights 'have been drawn into a cultural whirlwind that sweeps up the potential of anyone's creation'.⁷² Brown adds that hard line attitudes to owning culture create a separatist lobby and end the conversation that could lead to more harmonious relations.⁷³ Such ideas of separate ownership also bring up the divisive dilemma of ethnic fraud.⁷⁴

The third moral issue arises from the recognition that over-zealous guarding of Indigenous culture fails to acknowledge and problematise the reverse cultural borrowing

⁷¹ This bold argument is quite persuasive but does not appear to have been taken up by many. Two main reasons for this could be uneasiness about associating beautiful works of art with more simple insignia and logos. The aesthetic value of Aboriginal art in Australia has only been publicly acknowledged in the last 40 years or so. It seems a backward step to begin to apply a law, which down grades it to insignia or logos. Another reason may be that the justification for application of this law hinges on detailed work of Morphy on the Yolngu of Arnhem land who are one of the 'outback' Indigenous communities maintaining language, kin based structures and so on. Application of the insignia law effectively disenfranchises all those indigenous people who are not living in traditional clan or kin based units associated with clear songs, stories and artistic designs. (Coleman 2005)

⁷² (Strathern, 1999, 168)

⁷³ (Brown 2004)

⁷⁴ Brown considers the Hindmarsh Island case in South Australia as an example of ethnic fraud, despite the final judgment exonerating the Anthropologists and women claiming they had secret knowledge that warranted the cessation of development of a bridge. He claims that the issue of women's secret knowledge held attraction for middle class women in Australia, hence the strong support base over the issue. (Brown 2004, 178).

that has taken place amongst the Indigenous population of the world, with Christianity in particular.⁷⁵ Olupona notes that world religions have affected Indigenous communities throughout the world but that there is general agreement that indigenous people have been able to maintain separate cultural identities through the creation of new beliefs and institutions and adapting to new challenges.⁷⁶ Consideration of a number of key Indigenous Australian figures through their autobiographies sets out both the two way transmission of culture and syncretism. Patrick Dodson, former Catholic priest and significant Aboriginal leader from northern Australia holds somewhat syncretic beliefs.⁷⁷ Banjo Clarke, a former Aboriginal leader from south western Victoria synthesized beliefs from his elders and the Baha'i faith⁷⁸; and Margaret Tucker and 'Mum Shirl' from New South Wales merged Indigenous beliefs with Christian spirituality associated with Moral Rearmament⁷⁹ and Catholicism.⁸⁰

Applying Intellectual property rights to Indigenous knowledge could also have an unintended consequence of entrenched essentialising views that Indigenous 'intellectual property is cultural tradition', while that of the west is 'productive' and 'progressive'.⁸¹ This has its own array of contentious issues when dealing with very immediate and pronounced problems of economy, public health, political representation and development in indigenous communities

The other main issue broached by the above scholars concerns the efficacy of negotiated solutions. Shand tries to differentiate between unacceptable and acceptable forms of

⁷⁵ (Brown 2004, x-xi, 178)

⁷⁶ Olupona, J (ed.) *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*. (Routledge: London, 2004), 7.

⁷⁷ Keeffe, K. *Paddy's Road: Life Stories of Patrick Dodson*. (AIATSIS, Canberra, 2003)

⁷⁸ Clarke, B. *Wisdom Man*. (Penguin, Camberwell, Vic. 2005)

⁷⁹ Tucker, M. *Margaret Tucker: autobiography of Margaret Tucker*. (Grosvenor: London, 1983)

⁸⁰ Mumshirl. *MumShirl: An Autobiography with the Assistance of Bobbie Sykes*. (Heinemann Educational, Richmond, 1981)

⁸¹ (Strathern, 1999, 200)

appropriation. He believes that there are three aspects of cultural appropriation: modernist affinity which often expressed through Romantic discourse, post modern 'quoting' and commercial exploitation. Post modern quoting allows critical comment on society. It is only the last of these, commercial exploitation, that gives major concern.⁸²

Brown, in particular, and Shand describe and advocate negotiated solutions in relation to commercial exploitation of indigenous places, products, art, clan designs and so on. Brown believes that solutions reached in the US, for example regarding limitations on climbers' use of a sacred site for Native Americans in Devils' Tower Park, create some hope for a future that is not separatist.⁸³ Shand considers use of a Maori inspired logo in contemporary New Zealand commodities such as rugby boots and swimwear. The institution of a 'Maori made' label has some potential to facilitate community involvement and profit share.⁸⁴

The above discussion acknowledges the practical barriers and conceptual cultural differences impeding the application of western law to legitimate Indigenous ownership of aspects of their culture and knowledge. We also recognize the real risk to some of the world's cultural art and property, where repatriation could lead to loss. Negotiated solutions do seem more practical but satisfactory negotiation surely rests on an equitable base between the negotiators. In this retreat from post colonial certainties about right and wrong in cultural appropriation few of the recent scholars cited above, except Strathern, make much of the underlying inequality between the west and cultural others. Strathern recognizes that there is some excess and absurdity in attempts to apply

⁸² (Shand 2002, 52-59). Similarly, Homan believes that when a Non-Aboriginal musician like Charlie McMahon plays the didgeridu, it should be considered as a 'postmodern juxtaposition that interrogates rather than plunders the Indigenous culture'. Homan, S. *Terra Incognita: The Career of Charlie McMahon*. In Neuenfeldt, K. (ed.) *The Didgeridu: From Arnhem Land to the Internet*. (John Libby Perfect Beat Publications) Sydney, 123-137, 132.

⁸³ (Brown 2004, 172)

⁸⁴ (Shand 2002, 77-79)

intellectual property rights but that in an unequal world it is a useful and powerful slogan when dealing with problems of authenticity, representation and cultural transmission.⁸⁵

The inability of poor nations to protect their own art does not give the West a moral right to ‘mind’ everything and there may also be further issues raised by different cultural interpretations of the idea of ‘protection’ itself. The hybrid world of Appiah is not yet a reality for most of the world who cannot hope to view treasured art from all over the world in a London Museum or even on the Internet. That so, it is also apparent that some negotiated solutions founded on conversations and respect are possible. Concerns with the negative potential for all our futures of separatism, may not only rest with the west. The following section details examples of ambiguous, conflicted and some positive interactions between real Indigenous people and neo Pagans and New Agers. It looks firstly at the popularity of the Indigenous from ‘somewhere else’.

As indicated above an area where this tension between ethnicity and neo-Pagan eclecticism is particularly prominent is in the rather ambiguous relationship between neo-Pagans and indigenous societies perceived to be primitive. An indication of conflicted unease is the perceived preference of the indigenous from elsewhere. Amongst the New Age and Neo-Pagan movements, particularly within Australia, there is a strong predominance of Native American based rituals, symbols and culture. The extensive penetration of the Australian New Age industry by major US book publishing companies like Llewellyn and Harper-Collins press has led to a preponderance of US material culture in Australian society including the New Age and neo-Pagan movements.

⁸⁵ (Strathern 1999, 166, 169,170, 176, 202)

In New Age stores across Australia customers are exposed to a wide variety of images displaying ecologised and spiritualised Native Americans, providing tales of spiritual healing and personal transformation accessible to all those who wish to uncover their unconscious and spiritual “true” selves by absorbing symbolic representations of indigenous peoples. Workshops and seminars on Native American sweat lodges, drumming circles and meditational journeys abound, very few being run by indigenous peoples, according to particular representations of Native American culture that focus on the connectedness with nature, spirituality and the supernatural.

Similarly, Australian New Age and neo-Pagan practitioners are bombarded with representations of Native Americans in mass media and cinema. In Mulcock’s research for example, she found that many of the participants in Australian New Age and neo-Pagan movements were attracted to Native Americans as a result of exposure to films and novels like *Dances With Wolves* and the *Last of the Mohicans* as well as through empathizing with the Indians in Cowboy stories from their childhood.⁸⁶ The ultimate result of this cultural bombardment is a vast array of symbolic models of Pagan belief that can be easily absorbed as a cultural resource that is far removed from the daily political and social realities of most Australian New Age and neo-Pagan practitioners.

The predominance of Native American oriented rituals and culture as a model for contemporary pagan beliefs and practices over Indigenous traditions is commonly cited by Australian anthropologists studying the New Age and neo-Pagan movements of Australia.⁸⁷ According to research into the neo-Pagan and New Age movements by Mulcock, indigenous cultures, particularly those in North America, are far more commonly perceived to be a strong source of inspiration, symbolism and ritual for the

⁸⁶ Mulcock, Jane. (Re)Discovering our Indigenous Selves: The Nostalgic Appeal of Native Americans and Other Generic Indigenes. *Australian Religious Studies Review*. Vol 14, (2001) Number 1. p 47.

⁸⁷ Bowman, M. The Noble Savage and the Global Village: Cultural Evolution in New Age and neo-Pagan thought. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 10(2) (1995), 142. Mulcock, Jane. (Re)discovering our Indigenous Selves: The Nostalgic Appeal of Native Americans and other Generic Indigenes. *Australian Religious Studies*. Vol 14. No 1. (2001) , 45-64

neo-Pagan and New Age movements than domestic indigenous societies such as Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines. In her research into the neo-Pagan movement in Western Australia for example, 42% of those interviewed claimed to have a deep personal or spiritual connection with Native American culture. Significantly though, less than 15% claimed to have actually met with any indigenous peoples and only 2% had actually had any contact with Native Americans.⁸⁸ Significantly, the majority of neo-Pagan and New Age practitioners interviewed by Mulcock did not share the same attitude towards the rituals, symbols and religious beliefs of Australian Aborigines. “Native Americans are articulate, spiritual and have a far deeper connection with the Earth Mother.”⁸⁹

Bowman also argues that while there is some interest into Indigenous beliefs, rituals and symbols within the New Age movement in Australia it is far less common and less visible than the interest oriented towards Native American beliefs. Instead he claims that the bulk of attention directed towards Aboriginal spirituality originates in the United States and Europe.⁹⁰ From Bowman’s perspective one of the central underlying reasons behind this bias towards foreign or at least remote indigenous peoples as a source of inspiration is the sense of comfort and air of mystery granted by the perception of distance. He writes “The Noble Savage becomes more noble and less savage with distance, be that distance geographic, temporal or imaginary.” In other words, the more removed a culture is from the daily experiences of a society the easier that culture can romanticise and reconstruct its representations of that culture to suit its socio-cultural needs.

⁸⁸ Interviews and surveys described in detail in Mulcock, Jane. (Re)Discovering our Indigenous Selves: The Nostalgic Appeal of Native Americans and Other Generic Indigenes. *Australian Religious Studies Review*. Vol 14, Number 1.

⁸⁹ (Mulcock, ‘(Re)Discovering our Indigenous Selves:’ 2001) 47.

⁹⁰ (Bowman 1995, 142)

Sherman too claimed that few alternative lifestylers that she has interviewed over the past 20 years (including those who are attracted to the didgeridu) ‘have shown in depth understanding of Aboriginal culture’.⁹¹ Comments after workshops and seminars that may feature Native Americans as well as Indigenous Australians add insight.

Australian aboriginals form a contemporary and commonplace source of experience and representation within the lives of Australians and as such, the attempt to reconstruct aboriginal cultural identity is inherently integrated with the lived experience of white/aboriginal relations, negative representations in media, the Australian Aboriginal population’s attempts to resolve their own social and cultural issues and their need to define and rediscover their own unique socio-cultural identity.⁹² In this context, New Age responses to interaction with actual Indigenous people can be unsettling or even confrontational. For example, one of the respondents interviewed by Mulcock commented that,

Most of the people who were talking at the seminar were great; there was just one lady there who was still really angry. I can understand that anger at the whites...but then she started sort of saying to us “you whites took the land... you will never have what we have”... and it was hitting me, it really hurt you know. I thought this is racism coming around the other way again; it’s just happening again, you know, “what are you saying this for? You’re telling me and I feel it really deeply, exactly like you have been doing, and yet you are turning around and calling me a white.... I was very upset – I learned a lot from that though. You don’t have to be *born* into it to understand....⁹³

Many of Mulcock’s participants argued that they preferred to avoid contact with Indigenous culture altogether. One interviewee commented, “They don’t express themselves clearly, they don’t make eye contact and they still have a lot of anger to work through.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ (Sherwood 1997, 149)

⁹² (Bowman 1995, 142)

⁹³ (Mulcock, ‘(Re)Discovering our Indigenous Selves:’2001, 54)

⁹⁴ (Mulcock, ‘(Re)Discovering our Indigenous Selves:’2001, 47)

The response of the neo-Pagan and New Age movements to crass misrepresentations of culture in popular new Age books is extremely varied. Michael Kissor in his review of *Mutant Message Down Under* argues that it is difficult to understand the antagonism of Australian Aboriginals considering that the Aboriginal people in Morgan's book are invariably represented as mystical and wise and that Aboriginals are portrayed as far more spiritually advanced than Western civilization.⁹⁵

However, despite the more overtly exploitative responses and appropriations of indigenous peoples by New Age writers and practitioners, there is also evidence of amicable and productive interaction and support for active engagement from Indigenous participants. Prominent neo-Pagan and feminist author Starhawk for example offers an alternative response to the questions raised by indigenous antagonism towards cultural appropriation. She argues that whilst the rituals, symbols and culture of indigenous societies can serve as a powerful source of inspiration and psycho-cultural impact there is nevertheless a responsibility towards the cultures from which these signs have been appropriated. She writes that,

People of European heritage, out of hunger for what their culture lacks, may unwittingly become spiritual strip miners, damaging other cultures in superficial attempts to uncover their mystical treasures. Understanding the suppression and grounding ourselves in the surviving knowledge of the European traditions can help people with European ancestors avoid flocking to the sad tribe of "Wannabes" – want to be Indians, want to be Africans, want to be anything but what we are. And, of course, any real spiritual power we gain from any tradition carries with it a responsibility. If we learn from African drum rhythms or the Lakota sweat lodge, we have incurred an obligation not to romanticize but to participate in the very real struggles being waged for liberation, land and cultural survival.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Michael Kissor reviews *Mutant Message Down Under*.

<http://quanta-gaia.org/reviews/books/mutantMessage.html>

⁹⁶ Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Religion of the Ancient Goddess*. (Harper Collins Press: San Francisco. 1989), 214.

Possamei wishes to take apart simplistic views of cultural genocide and to consider motivations for the ways the indigenous knowledge is received and consumed. He interviewed 35 'New Agers', broadly fitting his new conceptual category 'perennists' (syncretic spirituality). They see their appropriation of Indigenous culture as peaceful and respectful and some are working towards an ethics of appropriation that will not 'pose a threat to indigenous cultural integrity and survival...'⁹⁷ They have a different view of history,; they look for the 'heart' and 'warm glow of hope' rather than facts. Their reappropriation of the past is not 'objective historical but subjective interpretations and sometimes invention about something which Perennists know little can be said or proved but which feels right to them.' Their myths are highly personalized, known primarily to the self.⁹⁸ They draw on popular culture, science fiction and fantasy and in some ways are more 'comfortable with the unreal than the real'.⁹⁹ Possamei considers that the consumption of such texts define and redefine the reader's self and could be considered as indicative of a grand narrative of the age: the 'Age of Aquarius' which is also part of a larger trend in the cultural consumption of history.¹⁰⁰

Although, as we have seen, Mulcock's informants prioritized Native American informants over Indigenous Australians, she found that New Age exposure to the latter demonstrated 'emotional investment' and 'deep personal significance'.¹⁰¹ Some Indigenous people have shown generosity of spirit in the sharing of special and possibly secret knowledge with trusted people such as urban artists and doctors.

⁹⁷ (Possamei 2002, 201)

⁹⁸ (Possamei, 2002, 202, 204)

⁹⁹ (Possamei 2002, 209)

¹⁰⁰ (Possamei 2002, 211)

¹⁰¹ (Mulcock 'Creativity and Politics in the Cultural Supermarket', 2001. 173) See also Ryan, M. A New Age Dawning? Coming to Terms with the New Age Movement.1998 [online] <http://rel-ed.acu.edu.au/ren/ryaarna2.htm>. Accessed 16 May 2008.

Urban Aboriginal artists Lin Onus¹⁰² and Gordon Bennett¹⁰³ individually experienced epiphanal ‘pilgrimages to meet traditional, ‘classical’ Aboriginal artists’ and learn from them. A healer from Yuendumu featured in the film *Smokey*,¹⁰⁴ shared knowledge on special sites and their representation on an artifact with a South Asian medical doctor with whom he shared a relationship of trust and respect. Similarly, Indigenous people, notably from post-classical communities whose authenticity has been established as vulnerable, have actively sought out and incorporated New Age rituals. The American conference leading to the publication of *Beyond Primitivism* sparked a ‘lively debate’ over issues of incorporation of New Age rituals into Indian traditions.¹⁰⁵

In Australia individual Aborigines also offer New Age style workshop of self – discovery¹⁰⁶ and reveal ‘crossover philosophies’.¹⁰⁷ Pecotic critiques the idea that the New Age beliefs are hegemonic, intrusive and destructive of native tradition by researching texts written by Indigenous Australians, one by a Western Australian elder, another by a woman from SE Australia and the third a Central Australian response to New Age efforts to experience harmonic convergence at Uluru at the turn of the century. In spite of differing central elements in approaches to spirituality such as holism, these Indigenous responses to New Age beliefs indicate ambiguity and co-option rather than negative resistance. There are varying degrees of dialogical response in the examples he gives. David Mowaljarli, the elder from the Kimberley region has produced an interesting grid drawing of Australia, criss-crossed by grid lines

¹⁰² *Aboriginal Art: Today and Yesterday* (videorecording). Bendigo Video Education, Bendigo, Vic, 1996.

¹⁰³ *Black Angels: A Widening Vision*. Dir. J. Trisham & I.J. Wilson . ABC & Juniper Films, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ *Smokey*. Prod. S. Baker. Dir. G. Chase. Film Australia, Lindfield, NSW, c1976.

¹⁰⁵ (Olupona 2004, 7); (Geertz 2004, 56)

¹⁰⁶ (Possamei 2002 199) citing Lynne Hume. Langton notes the ‘assumption of undifferentiated *Other*’ leads to a ‘naïve belief that Aboriginal people will make better representations of Aboriginal people.’ Langton 1993, 27).

¹⁰⁷ Burri Dainghutti Jerome. Interview by Sheridah Melvin, 13 November 1987. *The Mirror of Waranjari. Oral History Project Blue Mountains* (1987) Held Katoomba Library.

reminiscent of energy lines and convergences of the New Age. He has a ‘self-understanding that engages with New Age religion while reaffirming place’¹⁰⁸

Mafi-Williams also has a co-operative approach to universal shamanism. She talks of energy grids with crystals and a new rejuvenated world. Pecotic argues that the spiritually destabilized populations are the most dynamic centres for the diffusion of New Age ideas and values to a culturally-disoriented indigenous population.¹⁰⁹

Mulcock, coming to her early fieldwork with strong political values against cultural appropriation of the indigenous, found that ‘the line between the appropriating group and the appropriated group was not as clearly defined as I imagined’. Aboriginal healer, ‘Goreng-Goreng demonstrated what she described as a form of Aboriginal healing using hands and breath to identify and manipulate energy blocks within the body.’¹¹⁰ Mulcock found that she had to reconceptualise ‘appropriation’ as ‘cultural borrowing’ in order to ‘acknowledge the role of cultural exchange as an ordinary part of everyday life’.¹¹¹

More recently Stewart Muir has argued that Aborigines and Non Aborigines make similar use of romantic images of the New Age. Indigenous people are involved in the production of imagery that complements and competes with New Age representations. As New Agers use such images to ‘make their own lives’, they should not be stereotyped as cultural dupes lacking their own agency. A ‘suite of images of utopian

¹⁰⁸ Pecotic, D. Three Aboriginal Responses to New Age Religion: a textual interpretation. *Australian Religious Studies Review* 14(1) (2001), 65-81. Similarly, musician Mandawuy Yunupingu from Arnhem land claims that the breathing in didjeridu playing can enable the collective process of healing, as it is the sound of Mother Earth. Kev Carmody, Indigenous musician, from Queensland in the same publication acknowledges that the didjeridu is played by people striving for a new identity, people looking for the kind of affinity and belonging to the country that Aboriginal people already experience (Carmody, K. with Neuenfeldt, K. Ancient Voice – Contemporary Expression: The Didjeridu (Yidaki) and the Promotion of Aboriginal Rights. In Neuenfeldt, K. (ed.) *The Didjeridu: From Arnhem Land to Internet*. (John Libby Perfect Beat Publications, Sydney) 1997, 11-21, 15-16.

¹⁰⁹ (Pecotic 2001, 75)

¹¹⁰ Mulcock, J. Ethnography in Awkward Spaces: An Anthropology of Cultural Borrowing. *Practicing Anthropology* 23(1) 2001c??, 45-65, 39-40.

¹¹¹ (Mulcock 2001c 40)

tribalism and romantic primitivism' act as 'conduits to an essence of Aboriginality' which they are often attracted to because 'it speaks to them' and offers something for their ambivalent feelings of belonging.¹¹²

Rachel, one of Muir's informants, believes the Aboriginal spirit of her Aboriginal art tarot cards have spoken to her.¹¹³ Jennifer is attracted to the holistic and environmental aspects of Indigenous nature spirituality. Its appeal is rooted in her 'life history' and her desire 'to remake her life'.¹¹⁴ Although in 2001 Jennifer made a decision to make Aboriginal spirituality-inspired healing her career, Muir sees this as indicating deep commitment rather than charlatanry. Heather's utopian view of a lost culture gives her a vision towards reconciliation.¹¹⁵

Romanticism damages empathetic and solid relationships between differing cultures, exaggerating otherness and hindering appreciation of commonalities. It often expresses desires or fears of the dominant western culture rather than any sort of rational appreciation of the issues confronting actual Indigenous peoples. Although not always a dominant ideology, it has a resurfacing presence in the cultural representation of the Indigenous in Australia. In contemporary times New Agers, lacking or critiquing aspects of their own lives, have been drawn to such Romanticism, and in doing so have sought images, artifacts and spiritual knowledge from Indigenous peoples as well as their own heritage. Some members of post-classical Indigenous communities have also sought such inspiration. Except for a small minority of obvious charlatans it seems churlish to dismiss all of these people as 'Plastic Medicine Men'. However, that being said, for post-classical Indigenous Australians the rise of the New Age industry and its assorted paraphernalia and romantic representations does have a tangible negative

¹¹² Muir, S. The Good of New Age Goods. *Culture and Religion*. 8(3) 2007, 233-253, 234.

¹¹³ (Muir 2007, 236)

¹¹⁴ (Muir 2007, 239)

¹¹⁵ (Muir 2007 241) Sherwood explains how alternative lifestylers 'tune into Aboriginality by playing the didgeridu.' (Sherwood 1997 149)

impact on their ability to represent themselves and come to terms with their own sense of cultural authenticity, transmission and sense of heritage and identity. Many of the New Agers are naïve, ignorant and motivated by concerns to self develop, so have behaved inappropriately in circumstances when their cultural worlds overlap with those of Indigenous people. Some however are serious and thoughtful and are able to turn their romantic attraction to genuine concern and greater understanding on the basis of interaction and further exploration of indigenous culture. Histories of violent and harsh material appropriation and continuing inequality make negotiated solutions less likely if the west does not listen or take seriously claims of cultural appropriation and instigate respective conversations. As Starhawk says ‘we have incurred an obligation not to romanticize but to participate in the very real struggles being waged for liberation, land and cultural survival’. That said, the interrelationship between indigenous people, the landscape and New Age culture is extremely complex, ambiguous and fraught with peril in the search for cultural authenticity and social justice for exploited indigenous cultures.