

**Between Discovery and Deep Time:
A Study of the Cultural Representations of
Mungo Man**

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Abstract

After decades of sub-disciplines that have moved away from grand narratives and long-term trends, some of Australia's leading historians are now embracing frameworks that look beyond traditional history in big ways: through the geological concept of 'deep time,' historians can place narratives within deeper histories of the human species, the earth, and even the universe. This interest in deep history has not been limited to academia, with a similar explosion in public interest around Australia's deep human past and its potential to re-shape national narratives.

At the heart of deep time in Australia is Mungo Man: the 50,000-year-old Pleistocene skeleton found in 1974. Yet despite his prominent role in both academic history and public discussion, there has been no examination of Mungo Man's image and narrative function. This study seeks to unpack the representations of Mungo Man in history and public discourse. How is Mungo Man represented by academics and the general public? How have these representations varied since his discovery in 1974? And why is it only *now* that he has begun to be integrated into historical research and public discussion? This study will provide essential context on the recent surge of interest in Mungo Man, deep time, and the powerful resonance they lend Australian history today and in the future.

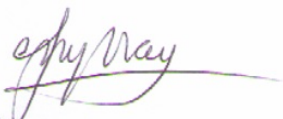
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Without the support of many, this thesis would have remained nothing more than a hazy daydream. I would like to thank the entire Department of Modern History at Macquarie University for the consistent support and enthusiasm they have offered throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. I wish to acknowledge Professor David Christian in particular, for his thoughtful contributions to this thesis and for his work in the field of Big History that inspired its inception. To my family, friends, and especially my fellow MRes students, I offer sincere thanks for sharing this journey with me, and for their steady encouragement to embrace all its challenges and triumphs.

Above all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Alison Holland. Without her unwavering support, keen dedication and critical eye, not only would this thesis be non-existent, but so too would be my ever-growing appreciation for the study of history. What could easily have been a painful and dogmatic process has instead been one of the most enriching and fulfilling of my life. Thank you for sharing your passion with me, and for reminding me of the great possibilities that lay ahead.

This thesis is all my own work and has not been previously submitted for assessment at a tertiary institution.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Amy Way', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Amy Way
10 October 2016

*For my Gran,
who loved to learn.
And for my parents,
who are everything.*

Introduction

On the 26th of February 1974, geomorphologist Jim Bowler was riding his motorbike across the deserted plains of the now arid Lake Mungo, in south-western New South Wales, Australia. As he rode by, the 'late-afternoon sun shined down like a spotlight on a white bulbous tip emerging from the eroding sands. Bowler scraped away the dirt to find a fully intact jawbone.' Two days later, Bowler's colleagues from the Australian National University arrived to excavate what would later be confirmed as the earliest evidence of Australia's deep human past.

This poetic description of the discovery of the remains now commonly known as Mungo Man did not come from Jim Bowler. It came forty years later, from journalist Mark Johanson writing for the *International Business Times*. In the 2014 article, Mungo Man appears as a sceptre of Indigenous antiquity, a voice for twentieth century Indigenous protest, and a scientific boon lending more than 50,000 years of humanity to the Australian continent. This is just one of many recent articles detailing the historical and cultural significance of Mungo Man. The fact that it appeared in a newspaper about business suggests that there is something happening here beyond a simple human-interest story. Discovered over forty years ago, Mungo Man is now experiencing a 're-birth' in Australian society.

Nowhere is this more palpable than in the discipline of modern history. After decades of sub-disciplines that moved away from grand narratives, broad scales and long-term trends, some historians are now using frameworks that look beyond traditional history in big ways: through the geological concept of 'deep time' and the evidences of our earth's 4.6 billion year antiquity, historians have created frameworks that can place Australia's history within deeper, more cohesive narratives of the human species, the earth, and even the universe. At the heart of these new frameworks in Australia is Mungo Man. He and other

¹ M. Johanson, "Mungo Man: The Story Behind The Bones That Forever Changed Australia's History," *International Business Times*, March 4, 2014.

evidences of the deep past are being utilised to question and transform our history. An historical narrative beginning in 1788 looks very different if you incorporate evidence that stretches back 50,000 years. This is the power of Deep Time History.

Johanson argues that his article is a ‘story about bones. About what can and can’t be explained by them, and the tales we choose for them to tell.’² So too, is this thesis: about the bones of Mungo Man, and the tales historians and the Australian public choose for them to tell. While the archaeological site of Lake Mungo forms the foundation of much of Australian Deep Time History, there has been scant attention given to the specific discursive function of its artefacts, particularly Mungo Man. His impressively old ‘age’ is frequently quoted by academics, journalists and tour guides, and yet there has been no examination of his image or narrative function in society, nor in the deep histories he has made possible. Lady Mungo, the 40,000-year-old cremated remains of a female, has been explored in scholarship, film, and political protest since her discovery in 1968. Mungo Man has been given no such attention, a surprising reality considering that he is approximately 20,000 years older, and still the earliest human remains yet found in Australia.³

This thesis unpacks the shifting cultural representation of Mungo Man from the moment of his discovery to the ‘deep time’ present; how is he represented by academics and the general public, and what investments do they have in telling the stories they do? How have these images and stories varied since his discovery in 1974? And why are *historians* only now beginning to integrate him into their research?

² Ibid.

³ Lady Mungo’s remains originally dated at 25,000–32,000 years old: J. M. Bowler, Rhys Jones, Harry Allen & A. G. Thorne, “Pleistocene human remains from Australia: A living site and human cremation from Lake Mungo, western New South Wales,” *World Archaeology* 2:1 (1970), pp.39–60. Jim Bowler has dated Mungo Man’s remains at 28,000–32,000 years old: J. M. Bowler and A. G. Thorne, “Human remains from Lake Mungo: Discovery and excavation of Lake Mungo III,” in *The Origin of the Australians*, ed. by R. L. Kirk and A. G. Thorne (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976), pp.127–138. Controversial dates of 56,000–68,000 years have also been proposed by: Alan Thorne *et al.*, “Australia’s oldest human remains: age of the Lake Mungo 3 skeleton,” *Journal of Human Evolution* 36 (1999), p.591

Interest around Mungo Man has come from a variety of disciplines: from geomorphology and archaeology, to conservation and heritage studies, and more recently, environmental and Indigenous history. While his beginnings are closely associated with archaeology and prehistory, the interdisciplinary nature of Deep Time History can offer one explanation behind Mungo Man's contemporary 're-birth': the discipline has combined the very fields that have paid him attention. Thus the sources of Mungo Man's revival within history, and the sources of Deep Time history are one and the same: Big History, archaeology, environmental and Indigenous history.

Big history is associated with the work of Australian historian David Christian, whose research has dramatically changed the scale and scope of historical investigation. Diverting from the emotional, experiential based history of social and cultural history, and the discursive and 'decentred'⁴ nature of postmodernism, Big History seeks to construct a narrative history of 'everything' at the largest scale possible: the origin of the universe.⁵ Innovative in evidence as well as scale, Christian's approach uses knowledge from archaeology, cosmology, earth science, chemistry and even physics, creating an interdisciplinary framework that can have a more tangible impact on the real world.

The idea of writing interdisciplinary history at larger scales is not new, with a potential starting point at the work of French *Annales* historian Fernand Braudel in the mid-twentieth century. Braudel's *The Mediterranean* was a history renowned for its emphasis on the *longue durée*, the slow and 'ever-

⁴ Historian Beverley Southgate defines the central characteristic of postmodernism as its "decentredness" or the questioning in any context of the "prioritisation of any single centre." Beverley Southgate, *Postmodernism In History: Fear of Freedom?* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.11

⁵ During an inter-departmental discussion over the content of a first year history course at Australia's Macquarie University, Christian exclaimed that historians ought to "teach them [students] everything!" David Christian, "'Big History', Globalisation and Australia: Towards a More Inclusive Account of the Past" (Lecture given at 31st Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities 'Cultures of Peace', at Macquarie University, NSW, November 2, 2000), p.6

recurring cycles' that capture man's relationship to the environment.⁶ It has been argued that world and global history of the *longue durée* has been practiced since Herodotus.⁷ Historian Patrick O'Brien argues that a school of global historians could be seen to have emerged as early as the Enlightenment, with European thinkers like Voltaire constructing histories that began to reflect on their 'expanding new world.'⁸ And yet, these historians were overshadowed by two centuries of 'Western triumphalism.'⁹ Even for Braudel, who wrote in a period of national disillusionment after the horrors of World War Two, the majority of historians during the twentieth century continued to write histories with narrower foci.

Historical attention to specialist groups and ethnicities increased following the multitude of political movements in the second half of the twentieth century: civil rights movements in the United States and Australia, the women's movement and sexual revolution across the Western world, and the dawn of postcolonialism all fostered an interest in historical voices previously suppressed in traditional political and economic narratives.

It is not surprising then, that the first consideration of 'deep time' should come from a scholar outside of the discipline of history. American writer John McPhee was the first to use the phrase in his 1981 geological work *Basin and Range*, which summarised deep history in this famous metaphor:

Consider the earth's history as the old measure of the English yard, the distance from the king's nose to the tip of his outstretched hand. One stroke of a nail file on his middle index finger erases human history.¹⁰

⁶ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II* (*The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*), Vol. 1, trans. by Seân Reynolds, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 20-21

⁷ Patrick O'Brien, "Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history," *Journal of Global History* 1:1 (2006), p.7

⁸ O'Brien, p.10

⁹ O'Brien, p.11

¹⁰ John McPhee, "Basin and Range", in *Annals of the Former World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p.77

If Braudel's *Mediterranean* opened the field for geography and environment as key historical factors, these have only become more central in transnational, global and environmental history. Indeed, Christian's Big History is deeply environmental, even speculating on human history in the future. A prominent motivator behind this change in attitude has been the increased societal awareness of climate change and what has now been deemed the Anthropocene; an era of human impact on the earth claimed to be so pervasive it can be seen in the geological record.¹¹

Deep Time History combines elements of Big History, environmental and Indigenous history to write broad narratives that probe our understandings of space and time, with environmental and political impacts in the real world. This has been particularly important in Australia, where the emergence of environmental history was closely linked to archaeology in the 1960s and 70s, including artefacts of the deep past like Mungo Man.

Sarah Colley emphasises this link in her work *Uncovering Australia: Archaeology, Indigenous people and the public* (2002). In it she argues that the 1970s were one of the biggest periods of change for professional archaeology in Australia. With the invention of radiocarbon dating in 1950, and the economic growth and political developments of the 1960s, Colley claims archaeology in the 1970s was the domain of young intellectuals that conformed to a baby-boomer attitude of confidence in their own abilities and the future.¹²

The Lake Mungo discoveries were crucial contributors to archaeology's evolution as an academic discipline: 'Lake Mungo placed Australian prehistory on the world map, whereas before Australia could be dismissed as something of an archaeological backwater.'¹³ Yet the antiquity of the site also delivered a scientifically backed political power to Indigenous Australians, who, in the midst of long-established land rights claims, could simultaneously use it to

¹¹ The term "Anthropocene" was informally used by biologist Eugene F. Stoermer throughout the 1980s, but is widely accredited to chemist Paul Crutzen who popularised the term in his article: Paul J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," *Nature* 415:3 (January 2002), p.23.

¹² Sarah Colley, *Uncovering Australia: Archaeology, Indigenous people and the public* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p.4

¹³ Colley, p.6

shape their contemporary politics and challenge the institution and practice of archaeology. Colley argues that this increased involvement sparked complex relationships between archaeologists and Indigenous Australians that developed throughout this period of change.¹⁴

Historians Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths pinpoint John Mulvaney as perhaps the most prominent Australian archaeologist of this period, whose scholarship and public intellectualism provide a notable example of the complex relationship between Indigeneity, archaeology, and the deep past. Although Mulvaney used his research to impress the importance of Indigenous culture and history, he was also staunch in his belief of a universal culture and commitment to world heritage.¹⁵ Despite the positive aspects of a humanistic outlook – namely that a deep, shared heritage can measure human unity and provide ways of overcoming racial stigma – Griffiths argues that a focus on the deep past can be problematic for the very reason it tethers Australian archaeology to the world:

It generalises a local story into a global one; it draws boundaries between the ancient past and the custodial present; it sketches historical, migratory connections between Aboriginal people and other humans, and ultimately finds Australia's human beginnings elsewhere.¹⁶

This raises the interesting, albeit troubling, thought that Deep Time history, so connected to the disciplines of archaeology and environmental history, may yet be another chapter in the history of Indigenous dispossession at the hands of academics, members of the scientific community, and the wider Australian public. As Colley states, many Indigenous Australians ask why they

¹⁴ Ibid, p.126

¹⁵ "Mulvaney's advocacy of 'universal culture' and 'world heritage' sprang from his belief in the importance of education in fundamental, shared human values." Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, "The Making of a Public Intellectual," in *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997), p.17

¹⁶ Tom Griffiths, "In Search of Australian Antiquity," in *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997), p.44

ought to feel grateful for being 'judged by white people on white terms. Why should they need to prove themselves to white society through archaeology?'¹⁷

Archaeologist and heritage historian Denis Byrne is particularly critical of this effect of Australian archaeology and history. In his 1996 article 'Deep nation: Australia's acquisition of an indigenous past,' Byrne argues that since the 1970s Australian archaeology has marched 'hand in hand' with a cultural nationalism based on an appropriation of Indigenous culture and history.¹⁸ Although Byrne sees this appropriation as intensifying through the heritage legislation of the Whitlam government in the 1970s, he traces the practice back to Australia's European settlement. Inextricably linked with notions of authentic Aboriginality and colonial antiquarianism, Byrne argues it is unsurprising that a settler colony like Australia would attempt to root its national identity into a continental deep past as represented by archaeology.¹⁹ While Byrne does not mention Mungo Man specifically, he draws attention to the marked revival of Indigenous history and artefacts that occurred during the period of his discovery:

...on the face of it, there is something quite radical and extraordinary in the prospect of a settler culture which for so long had pronounced indigenous culture to be a savage anachronism suddenly turning to embrace the past of that culture as its own.²⁰

Geographer Lesley Head makes a similar claim in her work *Second Nature: The History and Implications of Australia As Aboriginal Landscape*. Her research emphasises the integral role of the environment and its conceptualisation, particularly the discomforts and ambiguities that processes of re-conceptualisation bring to the surface.²¹ Writing in 2000, Head still sees Australian archaeology as attempting to provide legitimate history for two

¹⁷ Colley, p.74

¹⁸ Denis Byrne, "Deep nation: Australia's acquisition of an indigenous past," *Aboriginal History* 20 (1996), p.82

¹⁹ Byrne, p.82

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Lesley Head, *Second Nature: The History and Implications of Australia As Aboriginal Landscape* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p.6

peoples without it: 'for white Australia, who valued measureable antiquity but had only a measly two-hundred years of their own, and black Australia, the timeless people.'²²

Writing only a few years apart, both Byrne and Head explicitly link environmental history, archaeology and the legacies of colonialism, with deep time. This link in the context of 1970s archaeology is undeniable, and yet Byrne and Head's arguments can also be read in the contemporary context of Deep Time history. This thesis will argue that while deep time featured prominently in the field of archaeology at the time of Mungo Man's discovery, it is experiencing a marked contemporary revival in the discipline of history.

Australian historian Tom Griffiths' research has been instrumental for Deep Time history in Australia. With his background in environmental history, Griffiths' work is driven by an anxiety over climate change and a desire to pursue a more tangible historical engagement with Australia's anthropogenic context.²³ He argues that for historians to achieve this, they *must* develop an intimate relationship with deep time.²⁴ For Griffiths, both environmental and Deep Time History are uniquely grown out of the experience of living on the Australian continent, to the extent that Australia may be the ideal place for the framework:

We need meaningful histories of the really *longue durée* that enable us to see our own fossil-fuel society in proper perspective, and to see ourselves not just as a civilisation but as a species. Australia, with its unusually long human history, unique ecology and compressed settler revolution, offers striking parables for a world facing transformative environmental change.²⁵

The late historian Greg Denning also saw Australia as an ideal context for the discipline, believing that all peoples live in and with the deep time of their

²² Head, p.99

²³ Tom Griffiths, "Environmental History, Australian Style," *Australian Historical Studies* 46:2 (2015), p.157

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, p.173

past.²⁶ He claimed however, that deep time impinges upon peoples differently, and that the past belongs to those on whom it impinges the most. In Australia, this is our Indigenous population: 'Their health, their life span, their living, their education tells us that. In 1788 this continent became the largest prison in the world for them. All their deaths have been prison deaths for more than 200 years.'²⁷

This understanding of the negative legacies of the past drives Ann McGrath's research in *Deep Time History*. With a background in Australian Indigenous history, McGrath has consistently argued for the historical consideration of Indigenous perspectives: in particular, Indigenous understandings of time and place, and how they might be used to change history's temporality. McGrath dealt with the Lake Mungo site specifically in her 2014 documentary *Message From Mungo*, which explores Indigenous reactions to the discovery of Lady Mungo. McGrath's 2015 work *Long History, Deep Time* considers history's temporality and how it might accommodate a 'deep time sequence'²⁸ represented by artefacts of the deep past like Lady Mungo and Mungo Man.

In both works, McGrath reflects a similar attitude to Denning, who claimed that 'We who have the obligation to write the history of this bound-together Land must be committed to the humanistic ideal that understanding requires some entry into other people's metaphors about themselves.'²⁹ McGrath argues that historians should consider the deep past as it is witnessed in material and human ecology in the present: for example, in the 'ancient memory' of Indigenous peoples, and the ways in which the sense of their immense past is 'carried and held in living memory.'³⁰

²⁶ Greg Denning, "Living In and With Deep Time: Public Lecture XII David Nichol Smith Conference, July 19, 2004," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18:4 (2005), p.269

²⁷ Denning, p.271

²⁸ Ann McGrath, "Deep Histories in Time, or Crossing the Great Divide?" in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb, (Canberra: Australian University Press, 2015), p.1

²⁹ Denning, 272

³⁰ McGrath, p.22

While scholars like Griffiths, McGrath and Denning offer interpretations on Deep Time's methodological potential, Australian geologist Kirsty Douglas is the first to make an investigation into the relationship between deep time, history and public memory. Douglas' thesis and subsequent book *Pictures of Time Beneath: Science, Heritage and the Uses of the Deep Past* focuses on physical landscapes of deep time and makes similar arguments to that of Byrne and Head. Douglas argues that since 1831, Australia's deep past has been 'conceived, mobilised and popularised'³¹ through landscapes recursively linked with ideas of national identity. She uses the Lake Mungo site to argue that deep time landscapes are not only historical artefacts in their own right, but canvases on which to 'paint or write regional and collective identities.'³² Once regarded as a desolate wasteland, Lake Mungo is now a legitimate site of national heritage for the signs of longevity and human antiquity it holds.³³

Trained as a geologist, Douglas' research unsurprisingly focuses on deep time landscapes and not their specific artefacts. In her study, Mungo Man is represented as additional evidence that simply confirms the region's deep past.³⁴ Nevertheless, Douglas' notion that the artefacts of Lake Mungo catapulted the region into the 'geological archaeological canon'³⁵ offers a productive lens through which this thesis can examine Mungo Man himself. If Lake Mungo is the 'poster-child for human antiquity in Australia,'³⁶ then Lady Mungo and Mungo Man are undoubtedly the poster-children for the Lake Mungo site.

While scholars like Byrne, Head and Douglas have compellingly drawn attention to the appropriation and conceptualisation of Indigenous culture and deep time landscapes, their texts do not make a detailed investigation of the

³¹ Kirsty Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath: Science, Heritage and the Uses of the Deep Past* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), p.6

³² Douglas, p.6

³³ Douglas, p.5

³⁴ "...the exhumation of Mungo Man – the oldest recognised ritual burial in the world – pushed Aboriginal occupation of the south-east back to the limit of carbon dating and confirmed Lake Mungo's status as a canonical archaeological location." Douglas, p.131

³⁵ Douglas, p.144

³⁶ Douglas, p.129

specific artefact of Mungo Man. Nor do the historians currently engaged in Deep Time history. Just as Douglas traces the historical interpretation of deep time landscapes, this thesis will explore the historical interpretation and representation of Mungo Man, from the moment of his discovery until our contemporary moment of deep time revival.

Structure

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One charts Mungo Man's appearance in the public sphere and the images shaped around him in the period immediately after his discovery, the 1970s and 1980s. By examining various texts of public discussion, it will reveal that Mungo Man's image was utilised in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, including in a public narrative of Australian history and national identity that emphasised universal humanity to create a proud past.

Chapter Two charts Mungo Man's public representations from the 1990s to the present day interest in the concept of deep time and Deep Time history. The chapter reveals a major shift in Mungo Man's representation, an artefact suddenly capable of transforming perspectives on Australian history and the spirit of the nation itself, healing past injustices and assisting reconciliation in the present. It was also in this period that Mungo Man's image and significance moved into the realm of academic history, as distinct from pre-history, for the first time through the discipline of Deep Time history. Despite a greater inclusion of Indigenous voices, Mungo Man's image in this period was still conceptualised primarily by non-Indigenous Australians and appropriated to produce a proud national narrative.

While Chapters One and Two are dedicated to mapping Mungo Man's representations across time, Chapter Three provides an interpretive framework. How do we explain these shifting representations? Chapter Three shows that while regimes of disciplinary practice are important, changes in society at large are also crucial to understanding the shifts in Mungo Man's image and narrative function. The decades since Mungo Man's discovery saw some of the broadest and most pervasive social and political changes in Australian society,

which in turned impacted the realms of academia, civil rights and social justice. Equally important are the changing conceptualisations of Australia's national identity, which these broader social and political changes both reflected and helped shape.

Methodology

Employing a cultural history approach, this thesis will utilise a range of sources – both public and private – to chart and explain the representations of Mungo Man. In this thesis 'the public' refers to an imagined community of creators and consumers of public texts. These 'public texts' are primary sources that have directly represented or engaged with depictions of Mungo Man in the public sphere or a public platform. These include written sources like newspaper articles, magazine features, written interviews, and letters to the editor, as well as visual sources like television programs and documentary films.

This thesis analyses public texts from a variety of platforms marketed at a variety of audiences. The construction and consumption of Mungo Man's image took place in platforms created for specified audiences, such as *Geo: Australia's Geographical Magazine*; for intellectual audiences, such as *New Scientist* and *Australasian Science*; for general readers like *The Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Australian*; and even in lifestyle magazines such as *The Australian Women's Weekly*.

Unpacking Mungo Man's representation in academia is more straightforward. Along with pieces of personal academic correspondence, there are a finite number of academic texts that catalogued the initial discovery and discussed Mungo Man's antiquity and historical significance. However, these are primarily from disciplines outside of history, such as geomorphology, archaeology and stratigraphy. As this thesis will reveal, historical engagement with the artefact has been a scant and mostly recent affair. The historical texts that do construct or engage with his image and meaning are the recent works of Deep Time History.

Note on Terminology

Throughout this thesis, I will use the phrase 'Indigenous Australians' to refer collectively to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, and the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to Indigenous peoples from New South Wales.³⁷ This thesis will also utilise the term 'Indigeneity' to refer to the status of an artefact, person or peoples as being indigenous to the country of Australia. Indigeneity is taken to imply first-order connections between group and locality, and connotes belonging and deeply felt processes of attachment and identification that distinguish 'natives' from others.³⁸ While 'Indigeneity' has expanded in meaning to refer to peoples who have great moral claims on nation-states and on international society, often because of inhumane, unequal, and exclusionary treatment,³⁹ this thesis will use the general concept of 'Indigeneity' in the first-order sense.

For consistency and clarity, this thesis will refer to the remains Lake Mungo I and Lake Mungo III by the personified title Lady Mungo and Mungo Man, respectively. Although problematic, these labels have now come into common vernacular, making them the most productive for assessing public representations of these artefacts.

³⁷ New South Wales Department of Education and Training, "The terminology of Aboriginal Australia," *Curriculum Support for primary teachers* Vol. 10 No. 4, 2005. Accessed at <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/hsie/assets/pdf/csarticles/abterminology.pdf>

³⁸ Francesca Merlan, "Indigeneity: Global and Local," *Current Anthropology* 50:3 (2009): pp.303-333

³⁹ Merlan, p.304

Chapter One: Discovery

‘Everyone who looked at it drew back because suddenly we were not looking at a lump of something, but we were looking at us.’

On 5 July 1968, Jim Bowler discovered a deposit of burnt bones in an eroded sand dune at Lake Mungo. At first, he thought they were only evidence of human occupation, perhaps an animal cooked and eaten by a Pleistocene tribe. It was not until March 1969, when a team from the Australian National University (ANU) inspected the find, that the bones were discovered to be those of a human itself. The bones were written into academia in 1970 as Lake Mungo I, a young adult female who had been buried approximately 25,000 to 32,000 years ago.² Six years later, five hundred metres from this initial site of discovery, Bowler uncovered another set of remains: the complete skeleton of an adult male, named Lake Mungo III, buried approximately 28,000 to 30,000 years ago.³ Both discoveries remain among the oldest evidences of humanity in Australia.

Monumental in the academic fields of archaeology, prehistory and palaeontology, the remains now known as Lady Mungo and Mungo Man did little to influence mid-twentieth century history. Focusing instead on Australia’s colonial period, academic historians would not begin to engage with these ‘pre-historic’ discoveries until decades later. Nonetheless, both Lady Mungo and Mungo Man had a complex and powerful impact on the wider Australian community and its publicly articulated narratives of history and identity.

¹ Jim Bowler in Edward Stokes, “Skeletons in the Sand,” *Geo: Australia’s Geographical Magazine* 3:3 (1981), p.28

² J. M. Bowler, Rhys Jones, Harry Allen & A. G. Thorne, “Pleistocene human remains from Australia: A living site and human cremation from Lake Mungo, western New South Wales,” *World Archaeology* 2:1 (1970): pp.39-60.

³ J. M. Bowler and A. G. Thorne, “Human remains from Lake Mungo: Discovery and excavation of Lake Mungo III,” in *The Origin of the Australians*, Human Biology Series No. 6, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra (New Jersey: Humanities Press Inc., 1976): pp.127-138

This chapter charts Mungo Man's appearance in the public sphere and the images shaped around him in the period immediately after his discovery. Although academic information filtered into public discussion slowly, often through vague, generalised statements, Mungo Man's discovery and antiquity were discussed in a range of media outlets. His image formation took place in platforms created for specified audiences, such as *Geo: Australia's Geographical Magazine*, those for general readers like *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and even in lifestyle magazines such as *The Australian Women's Weekly*.

By examining these texts of public discussion, this chapter will argue that Mungo Man's image, and the historical narrative he was made to represent, had three distinct strands: an emphasis on world discovery, an apparently 'positive' image of Indigenous Australians, and a notion of universal humanity.⁴ These strands were not mutually exclusive, and were utilised in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that public texts of the 1970s and 1980s emphasised these strands to construct Mungo Man as evidence of Australia's deep and internationally significant past.

However, such representations were complicated by tensions between images of humanity and Indigeneity. Through mild to intense levels of personification, public texts emphasised Mungo Man's universal humanity and international significance while consequently displacing or ignoring Indigeneity. This not only worked to diminish his Indigeneity, but also displaced Mungo Man's modern-day Indigenous descendants. By exploring Mungo Man's early public representations, this chapter will reveal that from the moment of discovery his image, significance and meaning were constructed and appropriated into a historical narrative non-Indigenous Australians could be proud of.

⁴ These depictions of Indigenous Australians were positive only in the eyes of the non-Indigenous Australians who constructed them. As this thesis will reveal, many representations of Mungo Man in particular, and Indigenous Australians in general, were either based on problematic stereotypes of primitivity, or diminished Indigeneity in order to better emphasise a universal humanity.

A Man of Few Words: The 1970s

In the brief period between Lady Mungo's discovery in 1968 and Mungo Man's in 1974, there was limited public attention given to the site of Lake Mungo and to the history of Indigenous Australians in general. Public discussions on Indigenous peoples had a distinctly ethnographic tone, perpetuating historical stereotypes of a 'doomed race.' One 1971 *Sydney Morning Herald* article asked, 'Aboriginal Cultures: Will they survive?'⁵ It portrayed Indigenous Australians almost as alien peoples with 'no conclusive evidence to show where they came from.'⁶ Positioned as a problem for white Australia, the article claimed that the apparently 'positive approach' of assimilation had been complicated by the many 'categories of Aborigines.'⁷ Similarly, in contemporary Australia, Aboriginal culture risked extinction from its own apathetic youth, who looked upon elders 'who do their ritual dances in the dust...and considers them unenlightened.'⁸

Despite the significance attributed to the artefact by those who uncovered it, Mungo Man's discovery initially did little to change the detached, ethnographic tone used by many public texts when discussing Indigenous Australians. Information about Mungo Man's discovery filtered into printed media slowly, and was reported in vague, generalised statements. What may have been one of the first newspaper reports on Mungo Man referred to the artefact only as 'the find.'⁹ It stated that archaeologists had 'uncovered part of a complex cultural society,' confirmed as 'the oldest positive site for modern man' in Australia.¹⁰ Another article from August 1974 briefly mentioned a 'Mungo skeleton – that of a tall man' that had been discovered by Jim Bowler 'after rain last March.'¹¹ It is unclear whether or not this skeleton is Mungo Man, who was

⁵ "Aboriginal Cultures: Will they survive?" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 6, 1971, p.15

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Homo sapiens' NSW link," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 3, 1974, p.3

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ G. Souter, "Adam and Eve in Australia...Part One: The young woman at Lake Mungo," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 10, 1974, p.13

in fact discovered in February. A similarly vague mention appeared in an April 1975 article that described the excitement of British anthropologists over the discovery of ‘two 30,000-year-old skeletons in Australia.’¹²

However, in June 1975, a more defined image of Mungo Man emerged. Rather than in printed media, the place of this image formation was the television screen. On 8 June 1975, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) featured Lake Mungo in an episode of the documentary current affairs program *Four Corners*. Opening on a sun rising from behind one of Lake Mungo’s arid peaks, reporter Jeffrey Watson immediately framed the landscape and its historical significance for viewers:

A strange, melancholy landscape; riven by erosion, stricken by drought, studded with the remnants of dunes and grotesque tree stumps; a wild hostile place; an unlikely place one would ever find evidence of human occupation. But man did live here a long time ago: 40,000 years – 4000 centuries before the first European settlers set foot in Australia, man lived and hunted here. Not an ape-man, but a man identical, in all respects, to the contemporary Aborigines. A modern man. Mungo Man.¹³

As Watson spoke, the camera zoomed in on a still image of Mungo Man’s excavated skeleton as choral music climaxed. This may be the first time that the remains were publicly personified as Mungo Man, and along with Lady Mungo, were positioned as ‘probably the single most important archaeological discovery in Australia.’¹⁴ This significance was further emphasised when Watson depicted Mungo Man as representing an entire race of people: ‘This discovery makes Mungo Man one of the oldest races on earth.’¹⁵

In the episode, Watson interviewed Jim Bowler and prominent ANU Professor Derek John Mulvaney. Bowler described Mungo Man’s skeleton as a ‘remarkable site,’ a ‘fellow’ whom he and his colleagues found ‘very moving’ to

¹² “Skeletons 30,000 years old,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 12, 1975, p.78

¹³ The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, “Lake Mungo Man,” *Four Corners* (ABC: 1975)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

encounter.¹⁶ Despite this emotive description, Bowler's representation of Mungo Man's historical significance was measured: he reminded Watson that there might be other older finds not yet adequately dated. Mulvaney was similarly reflexive about the site and its ability to definitively determine the lives of Lake Mungo's Pleistocene population.

These measured conclusions took on a different tone in the episode's closing segment. Wide-shot walking among the dunes, Watson continued Mungo Man's representation with a personalised list of achievements:

Mungo Man at least was a very sophisticated farmer. He knew how to harvest mussels, he was a good fisherman... and there's further evidence of his awakening intellect in his burial rituals. He smashed the bones up of the dead and burnt them so that the spirits wouldn't haunt him.¹⁷

It is unclear where Watson gathered the information on the specific spiritual beliefs he attributed to Mungo Man, and in the process, to an entire group of Australian 'Aborigines': neither Bowler nor Mulvaney mentioned them in their interviews. Undoubtedly, the medium of television calls for a level of dramatic re-enactment and audience engagement perhaps missing from traditional print media and academia, which may in turn require a higher level of creativity. However, the final scene's use of re-enactment created the episode's, and indeed this period's, most startling image of Mungo Man. An Indigenous man, alone amid the dunes and naked except for a loincloth, lit a fire as Watson's voice-over returned:

Mungo Man has posed as many questions as it has uncovered answers. When the Lake at Mungo turned salty and dried up, where did the Aborigines go? Who was the graceful young woman cremated on the sands? Why was her body systematically burned and smashed? A great piece of Australia's pre-history is suddenly coming alive. The Dreamtime Man lives.¹⁸

¹⁶ Jim Bowler, in "Lake Mungo Man," (ABC: 1975).

¹⁷ Jeffrey Watson, in "Lake Mungo Man."

¹⁸ Ibid.

Eerie music played as the Indigenous man removed a human skull from the fire. He then hoisted a large rock over his head and in slow motion brought it down to collide with the skull. Bold, triumphal brass music played as the man smashed the skull, over and over, in time with the crashing of cymbals. The camera zoomed in and out on the smashed fragments, occasionally glimpsing the Indigenous man's aggressive face, before fading to the sun setting behind Lake Mungo's twisted dunes.

This portrayal of Mungo Man provides a stark example of the meaning constructed around him in early public representations. Whatever measured, evidence-based image offered during the program was replaced, by its end, with the depiction of a half-crazed Indigenous man crushing bones to a pseudo-psychotic orchestral soundtrack. Similar to pre-discovery representations of Indigenous Australians, the re-enactment presented the public with an ethnographic Mungo Man that was primitive and aggressive. Any cultural sophistication was tinged with an accompanying sense of mystery, which in turn suggested difference and perhaps even fear, as the viewer watched 'Mungo Man' crushing the skull of his deceased contemporary.

This process was heightened by the program's increased personification of Mungo Man's remains. What were initially represented in a measured, impersonal tone as 'remains' and 'bones,' were quickly reformulated into 'Mungo Man,' and then, 'The Dreamtime Man.' While the label 'Dreamtime Man' suggests recognition of Mungo Man's Indigeneity, it instead works to portray an entire population of Indigenous Australians with the same primitive image constructed through the re-enactment.

These early to mid 1970s representations of Indigeneity in general, and Mungo Man in particular, give a graphic sense of how constructions of Indigenous primitivity were deployed in Australian history and society. At the moment of Mungo Man's discovery, the discursive framework of Indigenous humanity at our disposal was an overly lurid depiction of a half-crazed aggressive brute. Into the late 1970s, however, this began to change. While primitivity would prove to be a thread common in many of Mungo Man's representations, its place in his image became more nuanced and complex.

Indeed, Mungo Man's image, and the historical narrative he was made to represent, gradually emerged with three distinct strands: an emphasis on world discovery, an apparently 'positive' image of Indigenous Australians, and a notion of universal humanity. Even the briefest of newspaper articles drew connections between Mungo Man and these three aspects, utilising him to construct a deep and internationally significant past for the Australian nation. This time-depth and international status could then foster a sense of pride in Australia's archaeology, history and national identity.

The most palpable aspect of Mungo Man's image and associated national narrative was the emphasis on the artefact as a world discovery. Throughout this period, Lake Mungo's 40,000-year-old antiquity was regularly quoted, while 'overseas scientists' hailed both Lady Mungo's cremation and Mungo Man's burial as global discoveries.¹⁹ This international significance was attributed partly to the unique Indigenous culture the artefact's represented. Based on their reflection of art and technology, Mungo Man's remains were seen as clear evidence of a unique and sophisticated Indigenous culture.

The status of this culture was accentuated by comparisons to other early-human societies, most notably to Pleistocene and Palaeolithic Europe. In a 1974 article, journalist Jacqueline Rees described the Mungo population as living 'an ancient but intelligent and advanced life-style.'²⁰ Specifically, the use of ochre in Mungo Man's burial revealed a population 'the equal of artists of Palaeolithic Europe.'²¹ Environment writer Joseph Glascott made a similar comparison in 1978: 'The first occupants of this land were not as primitive for their time as most people believe. They were as well developed culturally, perhaps even more so, than their European counterparts.'²² *The Australian Women's Weekly* used vivid language in 1975 to juxtapose Australia, Europe, and even the entire planet. In the article, Mungo Man was proof that the 'Aborigines of 50,000 years ago were the most advanced people on earth. Tribes

¹⁹ "Homo sapiens' NSW link," p.3

²⁰ J. Rees, "Traces of Ancient Australians," *The Canberra Times*, August 10, 1974, p.9

²¹ Ibid.

²² Joseph Glascott letter in, "The foggy kiss of death," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 2, 1978, p.7

were endowed with art and religion at a time when Europe was still floundering in intellectual gloom.²³

Comparisons to Europe were common in newspaper articles of this period, demonstrating a strong desire to represent Australian archaeology and Indigenous history as not only significant but superior to those of other nations. The fact that Europe in its continental entirety is shown as inferior presents an interesting image of a contemporary Australia trying to firmly establish a post-colonial identity. The role of Mungo Man in this process is unmistakable. Regardless of how briefly he is mentioned in public texts, his antiquity and world significance were always emphasised to foster an implicit sense of national pride. An important aspect of this pride came from Mungo Man's integration into the discipline of archaeology and the ways in which he was used to boost its status in international academia. The specific effects of this contextual influence will be explored in Chapter Three.

The desire to highlight the unique culture of Indigenous Australians is also a common thread throughout the printed media texts of this period, and a prominent aspect of Mungo Man's image and narrative function. When newspaper articles highlighted Mungo Man and Lake Mungo's international significance it was often coupled with the recognition that it was 'Aboriginal culture' or evidence of 'Aborigines' being uncovered. After all, it was this unique and ancient culture that proved Australia's internationally significant archaeological legacy, and created a proud, national narrative for the public.

However, Mungo Man's dual image strands of Indigeneity and humanity complicated this sense of pride. There is a consistent tension between many texts' use of Mungo Man as an image for Indigeneity and one for humanity. Take for example this quote from Professor Derek John Mulvaney, from a 1974 *Australia* magazine feature:

The Australian Aboriginal has often been written off as unimaginative and dull, but this work has shown that their way of life 40,000 years ago was one admirably suited to the environment. ... they used the land more sensibly for 40,000 years than have many Europeans in Australia in 100 years...I think scientists can contribute a lot to present Australian

²³ "In Australia, 50,000 years ago," *The Australian Women's Weekly*, June 18, 1975, p.12

culture and the world knowledge of early man by uncovering the length and breath of Aboriginal achievements. It may be cliché, but this is our cultural heritage.²⁴

As the chair of prehistory at ANU, and an academic whose work was strongly influenced by a desire to highlight Indigenous heritage, it is not surprising that Mulvaney featured in many texts in this period. His belief in the significance of the Lake Mungo artefacts is undeniable. However, Mulvaney's desire to show the uniqueness of 'Aboriginal achievements' simultaneously linked them to a broader Australian identity: as part of a deep past belonging to *all* Australians, 'this is *our* cultural heritage.'²⁵ The result is a conceptual contradiction between Indigeneity and humanity.

This tension was still present five years later. In an article devoted entirely to 'Professor Derek John Mulvaney and prehistory,'²⁶ Mulvaney showed clear disdain for the 'myth fed to most school children that Captain James Cook discovered Australia,' claiming that the Europeans were over 40,000 years too late.²⁷ He even described Indigenous Australians as the colonisers of Australia,²⁸ painting a positive image of a population with a foundational role in Australian history. However, this image was dampened when Mulvaney subsequently claimed that prehistory could provide depth to Indigenous Australians' racial heritage and engender a new pride in their identity. Mulvaney saw prehistory, and the Lake Mungo artefacts specifically, as evidence Indigenous Australians 'weren't parasites in this country...it can show that they made choices in the realms of ideology and culture.'²⁹ It is unclear to whom this non-parasitic image need be shown. Nevertheless, it presents a troubling example of contemporary

²⁴ John Mulvaney, in Terry Brandson, "Mungo's Modern Man: 38,000 Years Old," *Australia* 2:4 (1974), p.5

²⁵ Emphasis added. John Mulvaney, in Brandson, p.5

²⁶ J. Jesser, "Professor Derek John Mulvaney and prehistory: A study of heritage," *The Canberra Times*, February 18, 1979, p.9

²⁷ Jesser, p.9

²⁸ "The Aborigines colonised this country and changed its ecology." Jesser, p.9

²⁹ Jesser, p.9

conceptions of Indigenous Australians and perpetuates a damaging public stereotype of primitivity even whilst trying to diminish it.

This image of Indigenous Australians was further developed when Mulvaney argued that ‘Unfortunately, Aborigines seeking a cultural identity don’t really know what their cultures are.’³⁰ The ‘major educational task’ of providing this cultural identity was apparently one for the discipline of prehistory, which ought to ‘fulfil its promise of providing Australians with a proud past.’³¹ Thus, Mungo Man’s role was to not only provide Indigenous Australians with a defined sense of identity, but an identity that was transferable to *all* Australians through a ‘proud’ deep history.

As the tension between notions of Indigeneity and humanity in these articles reveal, acknowledging Mungo Man as an artefact of Indigenous heritage had a complicated effect on his ability to create a proud, historical narrative for all Australians. In the 1970s, Mungo Man was represented as an internationally significant discovery that symbolised a unique Indigenous culture. And yet, this culture continued to be associated with stereotypical images of primitive and sometimes alien Indigeneity that could not adequately provide a sense of pride for contemporary non-Indigenous Australians. Public texts attempted to emphasise all three of Mungo Man’s image strands, yet they often existed in complex tension with each other. Indigenous heritage was the evidence necessary to form a deep, proud narrative, while Indigeneity itself was distanced or stereotyped in the process.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

A Man in Demand: The 1980s

The image of Mungo Man as a universally human, internationally significant artefact is much more perceptible in public texts of the 1980s. Despite a greater public consideration of Indigenous Australians in this period, many texts still exhibited a tension between the portrayal of Mungo Man as a symbol of humanity and a symbol of Indigeneity. It would appear that many texts attempted to overcome this tension by reinforcing Mungo Man's status as a profoundly human and increasingly personified artefact, making him, and Lake Mungo itself, even more integral in the construction of a proud national narrative for Australia.

In a detailed 1981 *Geo* magazine article, Mungo Man was distinguished for the first time as the most significant of Lake Mungo's artefacts. Journalist Edward Stokes presented a glowing image of Lady Mungo, but claimed 'The Mungo woman was eclipsed four years later by an even more startling find.'³² Stokes attributed Mungo Man's superior status to the simple fact that the remains were more scientifically valuable:

People often believe that archaeologists regularly discover complete skeletons; in fact, archaeologists are lucky to find even a small scatter of bones. Finding a complete skeleton may be a once-in-a-lifetime event. Consequently, there was elation on the 'Walls of China' as the protruding bones were systematically excavated.³³

This is an aspect of Mungo Man's discovery that was rarely dwelt upon in the 1970s, but one that would become increasingly significant thereafter. While Stokes maintained some distance by referring to Mungo Man by the archaeological label 'Mungo Three,' the significance the article assigned to the remains is clear. Archaeologist Wilfred Shawcross, who helped excavate Mungo Man in 1974, was quoted at length. Shawcross acknowledged the importance of both 'Mungo finds,' yet argued Mungo Man's superiority in simple terms:

³² Stokes, p.31

³³ Ibid

‘Mungo Three is more important because it is a complete individual, and of course it is older.’³⁴

This article not only marks a shift in the personification of Mungo Man into the 1980s, but also in the intellectualism attributed to him and the Pleistocene peoples he represented. While many articles stressed Mungo Man’s sophisticated ‘Aboriginal culture,’ Stokes also quoted archaeologist Rhys Jones who described the ‘Mungo people’ as possessing ‘superior technological powers’ and ‘a superior intelligence.’³⁵ Stokes then positioned these peoples within a broader ‘intellectual advance that occurred throughout the world between about 60,000 and 40,000 years ago.’³⁶ For Stokes, Mungo Man was clear evidence of a population that made ‘an intelligent adaptation to a difficult environment’ of which ‘higher intelligence...ability to speak, reason and plan [were] important factors.’³⁷

The print media’s emphasis on Mungo Man’s intelligence and sophistication was mirrored throughout this period by an increase in personification. Ten years after discovery, a *Weekend Australian* article described the bones as the individualised Mungo Man, a member of a sophisticated community with superior spiritual beliefs.³⁸ The article argued that his ochre-sprinkled burial suggested a society in which death was viewed with dignity and awe, while the crushed and cremated bones of Lady Mungo suggested a society that ‘feared the dead might get up and move around.’³⁹ While this claim about spiritual beliefs, like earlier examples, may be questionable, the article’s explicit personification of the remains is mimetic of the greater attention Mungo Man received during the 1980s. Representations of his cultural superiority and the emphasis on international significance were

³⁴ Wilfred Shawcross, as quoted in Stokes, p.37

³⁵ Rhys Jones, as quoted in Stokes, p.37

³⁶ Stokes, p.37

³⁷ Stokes, p.45

³⁸ “Mungo Man had been decorated in powdered ochres and entombed...Mungo Man was found to be earlier at 30,000 years.” S. McGrath, “Mungo: the world’s best-kept secret,” *The Australian (Weekend Magazine)*, July 14-15, 1984, p.1

³⁹ S. McGrath, p.1

frequent and acute, and his status as a symbol of humanity was simultaneously solidified.

One factor influencing the reinforcement of Mungo Man's three symbolic strands of world discovery, an apparently 'positive' image of Indigeneity, and universal humanity, was the increased public attention given to the site of Lake Mungo itself. Purchased by the government in 1978,⁴⁰ and included in the World Heritage List in 1981,⁴¹ Lake Mungo and the Willandra Lakes region became an iconic landscape in the public consciousness, constructed as an internationally significant, culturally unique and universally human artefact in and of itself. In 1983, journalist Kim Lockwood travelled to Lake Mungo to document a gathering of international scientists. After entering the park on a dirt road with 'little on it worth signposting,' Lockwood revealed its true significance:

But Lake Mungo itself, ah. Lake Mungo IS a signpost, one of the most significant signposts pointing to the birth of civilisation in Australia. Lake Mungo, in the south-west corner of NSW, is Australia's East Africa, Australia's Olduvai Gorge, the site of hundreds of archaeological finds which take radiocarbon dating to its limit.⁴²

Lockwood conceptualised Lake Mungo as an internationally significant landscape with an 'eerie mixture of shifting sand and stark, exposed peaklets.'⁴³ She interviewed Jim Bowler, who described the site as one unlike any other in Australia: 'It stands alone.'⁴⁴ Mungo Man and Lady Mungo were both implicitly catalogued in Lake Mungo's 'full array of artefacts and human remains.'⁴⁵

Journalist Sandra McGrath used similar imagery in her 1984 article 'Mungo: the world's best-kept secret.' In it, Lake Mungo was portrayed as an 'awesome landscape' that in its entirety was 'one of the most important

⁴⁰ "Govt buys historic lake site," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 31, 1978, p.3

⁴¹ "Willandra Lakes Region", *UNESCO World Heritage Conservation Listing*, accessed at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/167>

⁴² Capitalisation in original. K. Lockwood, "Top scientists gather at Lake Mungo looking for a birthplace," *The Australian (Weekend Magazine)*, December 3-4, 1983

⁴³ Lockwood.

⁴⁴ Jim Bowler, as quoted in Lockwood.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

archaeological finds in history.⁴⁶ Despite this attention, however, McGrath also described Lake Mungo as 'Australia's forgotten park.'⁴⁷ Perhaps this was to aid the spectral aura the article constructed for the region, as 'one of the most chilling landscapes in the world' whose dunes held 'some of the great secrets of humankind.'⁴⁸

The image of Lake Mungo as mysterious and chilling was one that appeared frequently throughout this period. Interestingly, it is precisely this imagery that inspired many forms of artistic expression, from documentary film⁴⁹ and novels,⁵⁰ to dance performances⁵¹ and wearable art,⁵² ultimately contradicting McGrath's claim of secrecy. Indeed, by the end of the 1980s, Lake Mungo's 'ghostly dunes'⁵³ and 'ancient lake bed'⁵⁴ had become a distinct image in the Australian consciousness, and it was one explicitly linked with a national origin story. In 1974, Lady Mungo was portrayed as Australia's notional Eve.⁵⁵ By 1988, the entire site of Lake Mungo had been transformed into Australia's 'Garden of Eden.'⁵⁶ Journalist John Lyons described Lake Mungo at the time Mungo Man and Lady Mungo lived there as a 'lush paradise teeming with life,' the home of a 'flourishing, harmonious society.'⁵⁷ Even the sun was

⁴⁶ S. McGrath, p.1

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Peter Butt's *Out of Darkness* (1986), reviewed in M. Smith, "The Down Under cradle of humanity," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21, 1986, p.57

⁵⁰ Review of Bruce Pascoe's *Fox* (1988), "Respectable, but they fail to shine," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 30, 1988, p.77

⁵¹ J. Sykes, "Quest for meaning in a desert sunset," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 29, 1992, p.18

⁵² D. Jopson, "Ready-to-wear art just priceless," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 6, 1994, p.3

⁵³ P. Quiddington, "Time flies when you play the dating game," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 12, 1988, p.8

⁵⁴ B. Lee, "Records in the Sands of Time," *Qantas Inflight Magazine*, July/August, 1984, p.18

⁵⁵ Souter, p.13

⁵⁶ J. Lyons, "40,000 years ago, our Garden of Eden: Our first Paradise," *The Australian (Weekend Magazine)*, February 20-21, 1988, p.1

⁵⁷ Lyons, p.1

encompassed into the landscape – ‘the Mungo sun’ – whose 50,000-year-old sands ‘bury the deep secrets of our past.’⁵⁸

Similarly to the 1970s, conceptual tensions between Indigeneity and humanity were common. Lyons’ article included an interview with Mutti Mutti⁵⁹ tribal elder Alice Kelly, who described Lake Mungo as ‘the heritage of all Australians. This is not about any one race but the human race.’⁶⁰ However, this humanised, nationalist perspective was contradicted later in the article when Kelly spoke of ‘Aboriginal land councils,’ ‘the Aboriginal cause,’ and research on ‘Aboriginals in Australia.’⁶¹ While she acknowledged the site’s potential to educate people on more than just ‘a particular race, but the human race,’ Kelly still explicitly linked Lake Mungo to Indigenous Australians: ‘We want to share our heritage.’⁶² Lyons, however, clearly denoted ownership of the site to *all* Australians: Lake Mungo’s sands ‘bury the secrets of *our* past,’ representing ‘*our* Garden of Eden’ and ‘*Our* first paradise.’⁶³ The article consistently positioned Lake Mungo as a representative landscape of ‘Australia’s past,’ and while Mungo Man and Lady Mungo may have implicitly symbolised ‘the original Australians,’⁶⁴ they too were drawn into an identity that displaced Indigeneity for a nationalised humanity.

While Lake Mungo became a prominent symbol in the public consciousness, Mungo Man’s representations also continued to have tensions between Indigeneity and humanity. A 1988 article by archaeologist Rhys Jones captured these inconsistencies. Discussing his work on the Lake Mungo site, Jones didn’t hesitate in representing Mungo Man and Lady Mungo as the ‘ancestors of the modern Australian Aborigines.’⁶⁵ However, he also argued that when dealing with deep prehistory, there was no place for racial or ethnic

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ One of the three tribal groups that share traditional ownership of the Willandra Lakes region.

⁶⁰ Alice Kelly, as quoted in Lyons, p.1

⁶¹ Lyons, p.1

⁶² Alice Kelly, as quoted in Lyons, p.1

⁶³ Emphasis added, Lyons, p.1

⁶⁴ Lyons, p.1

⁶⁵ R. Jones, “Exploring landscapes of the past,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 1, 1988, p.11

pride: 'The salient fact that emerges from a global perspective is how similar were the lives, the artefactual remains, the casual byproducts of all us humans on all continents...We have a common future and we have a common past.'⁶⁶ The seemingly irreconcilable conceptualisations of Mungo Man and Lake Mungo as a symbol of Indigeneity and humanity characterised the public discussion in this period.

Considering Lake Mungo's integration into the Lake Mungo National Park,⁶⁷ the appropriation of the site and its artefacts into a nation-forming narrative is not surprising. However, as plans and programs for the management of the site progressed during the 1980s, the tensions between the Park and Mungo Man's representations of Indigeneity and humanity caused tangible conflict for the first time. On the one hand, maintaining the image of Mungo Man as a symbol of humanity, were various academics from ANU. On the other hand, portraying an image of Mungo Man as an Indigenous ancestor, were members of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NP&WS) now responsible for the park's management. Despite being heavily involved in a nationalist project, the NP&WS attempted to represent Indigenous Australians and work with them to exert Indigenous control over the Willandra Lakes region, while many ANU academics fought for the region and its archaeological and scientific value.

Tensions between ANU academics and members of the NP&WS were evidenced in both newspaper articles and personal correspondence throughout the 1980s. At the forefront of representatives from the ANU was Jim Bowler, who actively sought to maintain university research interests at Lake Mungo in the wake of its World Heritage status. On 12 September 1983, Bowler sent a letter to several academics and members of the NP&WS,⁶⁸ inviting discussion on the possibility of continuing research in the region. In the letter, Bowler

⁶⁶ Jones, p.11

⁶⁷ Established 1979

⁶⁸ Prof. D. J. Mulvaney, Dr. Isabel McBryde, Dr. Wilfred Shawcross, Dr. Alan Thorne, Mr. J. Magee, Dr. Rhys Jones, Mr. Peter Clark (Mungo National Park), Dr. Jeannette Hope (NP&WS), Dr. Mike Barbetti (University of Sydney), Mike McIntyre (Vic. Archaeological Survey), Dr. A. J. Dare-Edwards (Riverina C.A.E.)

argued that unlike most other heritage regions, the listing of the Willandra Lakes was based ‘almost entirely on its scientific value’ with ‘research carried out by members of this university that has made it possible.’⁶⁹ Bowler was ‘convinced’ that the scientific values of the region ought to be a primary consideration affecting the National Parks’ Plan of Management for Lake Mungo.⁷⁰

Bowler’s opinion on the role of academics in this management process was clear: ‘Those whose work was responsible for raising the Willandra Lakes to their present status have a special responsibility to see that development of the region takes full cognisance of its scientific importance.’⁷¹ While he outlined the region as important for Indigenous Australians, Bowler argued that the ‘immense educational value of the region’ was one that should be shared by ‘the whole Australian community.’⁷² The outcome of this discussion is not immediately apparent. However, a letter from Bowler to Don Johnson, then Director of the NP&WS, suggests that academic involvement in the area continued to be hindered. Written almost a year later, the letter reiterated Bowler’s insistence on acknowledging the academy’s influence on the region’s heritage listing.⁷³

Bowler’s emphasis on the scientific, educational value of the site seemed to be at odds with the priorities of the NP&WS. An undated letter summarised a meeting between ANU personnel and officers of the NP&WS,⁷⁴ regarding the procurement of permits for excavation in the Mungo region, and the appointment of department representatives to advise academics on these

⁶⁹ Jim Bowler, Invitation to discussion from Bowler to listed academics and involved parties, 12 September 1983, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acco4.142, Box 27 Folder 295, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “Of all areas in Australia, the establishment of the Mungo National Park and, subsequently, the World Heritage Area, owes its origins almost entirely to the scientific research which established the physical and archaeological significance of the region.” Letter from J. M. Bowler to Mr Don Johnson, Director of the NP&WS, 28 September, 1984, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acco4.142, Box 27 Folder 295, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁴ Dated September 14 with no year, although likely written in the early 1980s.

processes. Three of the academics involved in the 1974 excavation of Mungo Man were made representatives,⁷⁵ and were to meet regularly with the resident Lake Mungo archaeologist 'to discuss research needs, progress and problems.'⁷⁶ Despite these appointments, the NP&WS made it clear that academic actions were to be influenced by the Indigenous peoples of the Willandra Lakes: 'The Service is very conscious of the continuing interest of Aborigines in the sites at Lake Mungo and maintains liaison with the local Aboriginal community.' Mutti Mutti tribal elder Alice Kelly again emerged as a key Indigenous representative and was given a place on the NP&WS's Mungo Advisory Committee. All proposals for work in the area would be 'subject to discussion with the local Aboriginal community.'⁷⁷

Animosity between Jim Bowler and the NP&WS remained strong throughout this period, especially concerning the potential building of a Lake Mungo Science Pavilion. In October 1984, Bowler wrote a 'progress report' on the pavilion and the response received from both the Mungo Advisory Committee and the NP&WS. Bowler outlined disagreements between him and Melbourne based archaeologist Jeannette Hope, who worked closely with the NP&WS:

[Hope] stated that the proposal would get no support from the NP&WS! This type of off-hand response is exactly what I am not prepared to tolerate. I have already written a strong letter to the Director about exactly this type of treatment from NP&WS officers.⁷⁸

Arguments against plans for a science pavilion and display centre had already been made to the NP&WS Director by landholders, the Mungo

⁷⁵ Alan Thorne for Department of Prehistory R.S.P.S, Wilfred Shawcross for Department of Prehistory S.G.S, and Jim Bowler for Department of Biography and Geomorphology R.S.P.S.

⁷⁶ "Archaeological Research, Willandra Lakes," undated letter, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acco4.142, Box 27 Folder 295, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Jim Bowler, "Mungo Science Pavilion – A progress report," 24 October 1984, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acco4.142, Box 27 Folder 295, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Advisory Committee, and Alice Kelly. While Bowler did not dismiss these protests, his disdain for the lack of academic involvement in the project was palpable when he described the NP&WS as a 'highly-handed, petty bureaucracy that has characterised the whole dismay[sic] episode.'⁷⁹ By the following March, when Bowler had made an application for funding for the pavilion from the Bicentennial Commemorative Program, the situation had developed 'into an unpalatable, sticky situation made worse by those who one might expect to help us.'⁸⁰

By the end of the 1980s, many ANU academics seemed more agreeably involved with the NP&WS. A Willandra Research Publication Workshop held on 24 June 1989 produced a document titled, 'The Mungo Statement: Towards a reconciliation.' It outlined the agreement that reconciliation between archaeologists and Indigenous Australians in the Willandra region should be embarked upon, and that Aboriginal people would have the final say on potential research.⁸¹ All attendants, including Alice Kelly, Jeanette Hope, and several ANU academics heavily involved in the Lake Mungo site,⁸² signed the Statement. Jim Bowler did not attend, suggesting that his continued insistence on the scientific value of the region may have been overcome by a more contextual desire for Indigenous recognition and the power they had begun to exert over their own heritage.

The conflict between ANU academics and the NP&WS exemplifies the increased attention Lake Mungo and its artefacts received during the 1980s, and the additionally complex public images created around them. Indigenous Australians began to play a much more prominent role in relation to the physical sites of their cultural heritage, yet there still existed contradictory

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jim Bowler, "Bicentennial Application for Mungo Science Pavilion," letter to Director of ANU Research School of Pacific Studies, 21 March, 1985, with note attached to Rhys Jones, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acc04.142, Box 27 Folder 295, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁸¹ "The Mungo Statement: Towards a reconciliation," 24 June, 1989, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acc04.142, Box 27 Folder 295, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁸² John Magee, Isabel McBryde, Rhys Jones, Alan Thorne, Harry Allen, and Wilfred Shawcross.

images of Indigeneity and humanity in the public representations of Mungo Man and Lake Mungo itself. Some sections of the public saw the NP&WS as working on a joint basis with Indigenous organisations over the management of archaeological sites.⁸³ Yet the very status of Lake Mungo as a National Park and World Heritage Area placed a problematic label over its Indigeneity and that of its artefacts. As the squabbles between ANU academics and the NP&WS demonstrate, the conceptual contradiction between Indigeneity and humanity that surrounded Mungo Man and Lake Mungo began to have tangible effects on the management and portrayal of artefacts of Indigenous heritage tightly bound into a nation-building project. These effects and the rise of the NP&WS also suggest a potential shift in public representations of Mungo Man and Lake Mungo. Indeed, Chapter Two will argue that such a shift occurred from the early 1990s onwards, developing in unexpected and increasingly complex ways, with the concept of deep time much more at the forefront.

As this chapter reveals, the early representations of Mungo Man constructed an image with three distinct strands – an emphasis on international discovery, a desire to ‘positively’ portray Indigenous Australians, and a notion of universal humanity. These strands were increasingly exaggerated throughout the 1970s and 1980s, mirrored by an increase in Mungo Man’s personification: what started off as generalised reporting on ‘remains’ or the ‘find’ soon became ‘Mungo Three’, ‘Mungo Man’ and at times, ‘The Dreamtime Man.’ Through these changing representations, Mungo Man’s international significance and status as a symbol of humanity were reinforced to the extent that he became an artefact capable of providing a proud, deep past for all Australians. Despite contradictions and complications, from the moment of Mungo Man’s discovery, his image, significance and meaning were appropriated into a positive national narrative articulated almost entirely by non-Indigenous Australians.

⁸³ S. Orr, “Wanted: People to dig up Australia’s past,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 11, 1983, p.2

Chapter Two: Deep Time

*'I sensed a deeper dreaming – a truth I knew, but for which I had no container.'*¹

*'I'm going to teach you a different kind of history.'*²

On October 20th 2015, Indigenous singer Deborah Cheetham made a powerful statement about her decision not to sing the national anthem at the AFL Grand Final. Cheetham claimed she could 'no longer sing the words 'for we are young and free,' as it discounted over 70,000 years of Indigenous culture, 227 years of colonisation and 114 years of Federation, at the very least.³ In an article written for *The Conversation*, Cheetham argued that an engagement with Australia's time-depth was necessary to achieve national maturity: 'As Australians, can we aspire to be young forever? If we are ever to mature we simply cannot cling to this desperate premise.'⁴

Cheetham's searching questions take the public investments in Mungo Man to a new level: the idea of achieving national maturity and unity through transformative deep time is one directly related to artefacts like Mungo Man. Between the late 1980s and 2015, therefore, something shifted in public understandings and representations of Australia's deep past. This chapter will chart Mungo Man's representations from the 1990s to the present day, and argue for a connection between them and the statements made by public figures like Deborah Cheetham. Representations of Mungo Man in this period still maintained and emphasised the three overlapping image threads identified in Chapter One. However, there was one substantial shift in representation: Mungo Man's Indigeneity did not appear in such explicit tension with his

¹ Jenny Bowler, "Mungo Memories," *The Griffith Review*, 19 (2008), p.182

² Clarke, in M. Johanson, "Mungo Man: The Story Behind The Bones That Forever Changed Australia's History," *International Business Times*, March 4, 2014

³ D. Cheetham, "Young and Free? Why I declined to sing the national anthem at the 2015 AFL Grand Final," *The Conversation*, October 20, 2015 accessed at <http://theconversation.com/young-and-free-why-i-declined-to-sing-the-national-anthem-at-the-2015-afl-grand-final-49234>

⁴ Cheetham.

humanity, which were instead harmonised in public texts to create a new Mungo Man. As both a symbol of humanity and a profoundly Indigenous artefact, Mungo Man could not only transform perspectives on Australian history but the very spirit of the nation itself, healing past injustices and assisting reconciliation in the present.

Cheetham's attitude also reflects a trend currently unfolding within the discipline of history. Through a recognition of and engagement with deep time, many historians are advocating for new understandings of Australian history that question and transform its temporality and representation. Cheetham's statements not only represent an informed political assertion over her own Indigenous heritage, but demonstrate a contemporary dialogue between and within Australia's academic and broader societal spheres. At the heart of this dialogue is a desire for historical and national transformation, a reshaping of the very stories we tell. As Cheetham said, 'What if the next person to sing the anthem at the AFL Grand Final were to reach beyond the Western imperial history and harness the power of 70,000 years of accumulated wisdom and knowledge?'⁵

As this suggests, Mungo Man's image and historical significance has moved beyond public texts and *prehistory*, and into the realm of academic *history* for the first time. Similarly to the 1970s and 1980s, Mungo Man's image formation in the 1990s and beyond took place in public platforms created for general readers, like *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Age* and *The Australian*. However, there was a distinct increase in discussion in more specialised and intellectual platforms. Magazines like *New Scientist*, *Australasian Science* and *Life Science Weekly* all began to engage with Mungo Man in this period, while journalists and academics alike wrote pieces for scholarly platforms like *The Griffith Review* and *The Conversation* in the twenty-first century. Debates on Mungo Man's carbon-dated 'age' also caused greater interaction between academics and public platforms, resulting in an

⁵ Ibid.

increasingly intellectual public discussion that portrayed Mungo Man as an artefact of transformation.

Whether fuelled by this public discussion or itself a motivator of it, academic engagement with Mungo Man progressed to the extent that his image and significance were integrated into historiography through the emergence of Deep Time history. What began as a shift in public representations in the early 1990s has now become a consistent narrative across many aspects of Australian society and academic scholarship. Despite a greater inclusion of Indigenous voices, this narrative continues to be articulated primarily by non-Indigenous Australians. While appearing to give more credence to Indigeneity, Mungo Man's image as a transformative healer was appropriated into a narrative with the ultimate goal of producing a proud national past for all Australians. It remains to be seen whether the current trend of Deep Time history utilises a similar process of appropriation.

A Man of Transformation: The 1990s and beyond

By the 1990s, Lake Mungo had become a household name for many Australians. Television channels ABC and SBS featured documentaries on Lake Mungo and the scientific search for Australia's human origins,⁶ while the State Library of NSW held screenings of short films in their newly refurbished Metcalfe Auditorium.⁷ Author Bruce Pascoe featured Lake Mungo in his 1988 novel *Fox*,⁸ and choreographer Tess De Quincey featured 'dance & sound from the ancient

⁶ Peter Butt's *Out of Darkness* (1986), reviewed in M. Smith, "The Down Under cradle of humanity," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21, 1986, p.57, and "From Spirit to Spirit (Part 9): The fight to get back the 20,000 year old Lake Mungo skeletal remains, removed from their resting place for research," SBS Program listing, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 24, 1993, p.185

⁷ "Movies at the Metcalfe...include...'Our Natural Heritage' which depicts Lake Mungo." "What's on at the State Library of NSW," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 10, 1988, p.93

⁸ Review of Bruce Pascoe's *Fox* (1988), "Respectable, but they fail to shine," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 30, 1988, p.77

desert of Lake Mungo' in her collaborative dance *Square Of Infinity*.⁹ Lake Mungo even inspired fashion, with textile artist Kristen Dibbs creating a cream sleeveless jacket called 'Low Tide at Lake Mungo, inspired by soil erosion.'¹⁰

Above all, Lake Mungo became a prominent place on Australia's tourist map. Tours such as the 'Lake Mungo Experience' offered a 'safari into the prehistoric' with the opportunity to 'absorb ancient culture and history.'¹¹ Other companies portrayed Australia's World Heritage sites as unmissable attractions: 'The world in 80 days? What about a 13,000 kilometre whirlwind tour of Australia's World Heritage attractions in just 14 days?'¹² The first stop on this tour was Lake Mungo, a place both 'part of another world' and one in which our own 'history is constantly being exposed' by the shifting sands.¹³

While in the 1980s Mungo Man was often incorporated into Lake Mungo's archaeological catalogue, in the 1990s he became a distinguished public figure with personality, agency and an important message for Australians. In 1993, almost twenty years after Mungo Man's discovery, Canberra-based travel writers Andrew Marshall and Leanne Walker offered the Australian public this vivid image:

Imagine a land 40,000 years ago, where wombats the size of rhinoceroses and kangaroos three metres high grazed a landscape dotted with Pleistocene lakes. Motionless in this sea of windblown grasses and shimmering lakes Mungo Man stands, circumscribed on his pinpoint in time, his sun-blackened body chiselled against the glare of an empty sky; a spearpoint glistening in the light.¹⁴

⁹ J. Sykes, "Quest for meaning in a desert sunset," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 29, 1992, p.18

¹⁰ D. Jopson, "Ready-to-wear art just priceless," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 6, 1994, p.3

¹¹ "The Lake Mungo Experience," advertisement, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 19, 1992, p.55

¹² J. Woodford, "World Heritage Whirl," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 27, 1994, p.32

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ A. Marshall and L. Walker, "A strange journey back 40,000 years," *The Canberra Times*, February 21, 1993 p.23

While exploring the Lake Mungo National park, it was apparently ‘this scene that pervades one’s senses.’¹⁵ Despite the fact that his remains were still interned in the ANU laboratories, Marshall and Walker saw Mungo Man as being with them on their trip to Lake Mungo: ‘Mungo Man himself was present, timelessly frozen behind glass cabinet doors, tools and evidence of his lifestyle displayed and explained.’¹⁶

Published in the ‘Travel’ section of *The Canberra Times*, beside an advertisement for a ‘Ticket to Lake Mungo,’¹⁷ the article’s depiction of Mungo Man is characteristically poetic and emotive. Interestingly, it evoked the image of a being that was both active in the present and trapped in the past. Mungo Man was ‘circumscribed on his pinpoint in time,’ ‘timelessly frozen behind glass,’ yet he was also ever-present for Marshall and Walker, pervading their senses.¹⁸ The purpose of this time-travelling Mungo Man was soon revealed. The article argued that Mungo Man had an ‘important story to tell,’ and one that could only be ‘sensed’ by visiting the landscape of Mungo Man’s home.¹⁹ To visit Lake Mungo and to encounter Mungo Man was to take a journey into the past, ‘a journey of 40,000 years.’²⁰

Depicting Indigenous heritage as artefacts in and of the past, and encounters with them as an act of time-travel, is not a new device in Australian literature, historiography or public discussion. Indeed, non-Indigenous Australians have viewed encounters even with living Indigenous Australians as a type of time-travel, since as early as European contact in 1788.²¹ However, what differs in this 1993 image of Mungo Man is that his depiction is not of an antiquarian oddity, but as an artefact that actually transforms non-Indigenous Australian’s understandings of time and history. In the words of Marshall and Walker, ‘...we realised that what we had encountered was another way of seeing

¹⁵ Marshall and Walker, p.23

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Ticket to Lake Mungo,” *The Canberra Times*, February 21, 1993, p.23

¹⁸ Marshall and Walker, p.23

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ This process is extensively explored in Denis Byrne, “Deep nation: Australia’s acquisition of an indigenous past,” *Aboriginal History* 20 (1996): pp.82-107.

things and a new perspective of time.’²² The authors’ sensory description only emphasised their argument that encountering Mungo Man resulted in a transformation of the spirit and the senses. It led them to recommend that all Australians should visit Lake Mungo to experience it for themselves: ‘Lake Mungo has an important story to tell – take time to sense that story.’²³

Marshall and Walker’s article offers the first glimpse of a new representation of Mungo Man: he was now a transformative artefact of deep time. Clearly for Marshall and Walker, it is Mungo Man and Lake Mungo’s immense antiquity that sparked their transformative ‘journey of 40,000 years.’²⁴ This transformative function constitutes an entirely new aspect of Mungo Man’s public image, and it was one that would come to dominate his public and historical representations in the twenty-first century. An additional aspect of this new image would be Mungo Man’s power to actually heal the past through his transformative time-depth. However, the public’s first image of this time-travelling Mungo Man remained, at this stage, an artefact that did not yet encompass the ability to both transform history and heal the past.

Interestingly, Marshall and Walker’s transformative Mungo Man seemed to fade slightly in the public texts of the mid-1990s, replaced instead by an academic debate that focused public attention once more on Mungo Man’s antiquity and status as a symbol of humanity.

In March 1999, one of the ANU archaeologists who excavated Mungo Man in 1974 published a controversial paper in the *Journal of Human Evolution*. Alan Thorne and his team claimed that upon re-testing, Mungo Man’s remains had proven to be 62,000 years old, with an error ratio of $\pm 6,000$ years.²⁵ This put Mungo Man as living approximately 56,000 to 68,000 years before the present (BP), an increase of almost 30,000 years on the original estimate by

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Alan Thorne *et al.*, “Australia’s oldest human remains: age of the Lake Mungo 3 skeleton,” *Journal of Human Evolution* 36 (1999): pp.591-612

Thorne and Jim Bowler. This revised date made Mungo Man not only Australia's oldest human remains but evidence of the 'earliest known human presence on the Australian continent.'²⁶

The claim caused a stir in public discussion, and by May 1999, Mungo Man was thrust into the limelight. Articles appeared in almost all major newspapers, with many featuring front page spreads complete with a 1974 photograph of Mungo Man's exposed skeleton in situ. 'It's a date – our Mungo Man was here 56,000 years ago,' read the front-page *Sydney Morning Herald* article by James Woodford,²⁷ while Megan Saunders wrote in *The Australian* that the 'scientific revelation' brought with it 'dramatic implications' for understandings of modern human evolution.²⁸ In *New Scientist* magazine, Mungo Man was portrayed as a 60,000-year-old Australian 'pioneer.'²⁹

These representations of Mungo Man made explicit his status as a symbol of humanity and as an artefact belonging to *all* Australians: 'our Mungo Man was here 56,000 years ago.'³⁰ In a way, the reception of his new 'age' was reminiscent of public representations of the 1970s and 1980s, which emphasised Mungo Man's antiquity, humanity and international significance. With a new age that added even more depth to Australia's past, Mungo Man's integration into a positive public narrative was swift and seamless. Here, undoubtedly, was an artefact of which the Australian nation could be proud.

In contrast to the public, Thorne's academic peers met Mungo Man's new age with criticism. Unsurprisingly, Jim Bowler led the charge in a debate that rolled over into the next century, both in and out of the academy. In a reply paper published in May 2000, Bowler and John Magee argued that while Thorne's 'introduction of innovative techniques' was welcome, 'to attempt such complex laboratory evaluation, to the virtual exclusion of field evidence, courts

²⁶ Thorne *et al.*, p.591

²⁷ J. Woodford, "It's a date – our Mungo Man was here 56,000 years ago," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 21, 1999, p.1

²⁸ M. Saunders, "Science makes date with the Dreamtime," *The Australian*, May 21, 1999, p.1

²⁹ L. Dayton, "Ageing fast: An early Australian just got 30 000 years old," *New Scientist*, May 29, 1999, p.13

³⁰ Emphasis added. Woodford, p.1

disbelief.’³¹ The reply paper accused Thorne of not taking full account of Lake Mungo’s stratigraphic details and simultaneously confusing the age of Mungo Man’s bones with the age for earliest human occupation.³² In a stinging conclusion, the paper stated:

The temptation to rewrite Australian archaeology must be tempered with that degree of caution that meticulously tests laboratory results against field evidence. Failure to do so may be forgiven when such field data are inaccessible. When they are available for the asking, such an approach seems inexplicable.³³

A draft of the paper had already been sent from Magee to fellow archaeologist Rhys Jones on 8 June 1999. Attached was a typed note that revealed Bowler’s barely masked sentiments. Magee wrote to Jones:

As you can well imagine, Jim has been very pissed off about the whole shabby affair of how this article has arisen and its treatment of him and his contribution. I have tried to point out that it is counterproductive, however, to bring personal attacks into a reply paper such as this. The language that you see now is much altered from the original. My biggest worry is that any tone of personal affront will be used by others (eg Jim Allen etc etc) who have vested interested [sic] in the wider debate, will dismiss both viewpoints as just personal professional jealousy. I would appreciate your wise council on this issue.³⁴

Bowler and Magee published their reply the following May, which in turn prompted a response from Thorne claiming that the reply had provided no ‘new fact or argument that invalidate our results.’³⁵

Despite Magee’s concerns, the language of these early papers was for the most part, professional and moderate. In 2003, however, Bowler and a team of

³¹ J. M. Bowler and J. W. Magee, “Redating Australia’s oldest human remains: sceptic’s view,” *Journal of Human Evolution* 38:5 (2000), p.725

³² Bowler and Magee, pp.721-725

³³ Bowler and Magee, p.725

³⁴ Draft copy of J. M. Bowler and J. W. Magee, “Redating Australia’s oldest human remains: sceptic’s view,” sent to Rhys Jones with note attached from J. W. Magee, dated June 8, 1999, in Rhys Jones, Papers, circa 1909-2001, MS Acco4.142, Box 28 Folder 300, The National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁵ Rainer Grün, *et al.*, “Age of the Lake Mungo 3 skeleton, reply to Bowler & Magee and to Gillespie & Roberts,” *Journal of Human Evolution* 38 (2000), p.740

colleagues from Melbourne University published another study that claimed both the remains of Mungo Man and Lady Mungo were 40,000 years old, $\pm 2,000$ years.³⁶ Bowler argued that the new dates for both remains not only 'correct[ed] previous estimates' but provided a 'new picture of Homo sapiens adapting to deteriorating climate in the world's driest inhabited continent.'³⁷ It would appear Bowler was prepared with a media release to accompany the study, as articles were published in multiple newspapers on the same day as the academic publication. *The Age* described Bowler's new dates for Mungo Man's burial as a 'stunning rebuke' to Thorne's previous dates of 60,000 years.³⁸

The previously tempered, albeit firm, critiques made against Thorne in Bowler's academic publications gave way completely in the realm of public discussion. Just a few months after Bowler's 2003 study was published, Alan Thorne described the criticisms of his team's methodology as 'bullshit, straight nonsense.'³⁹ To which Bowler replied: 'If Alan thinks that's bullshit, Alan needs to be reconstructed. Alan is talking through the top of his head. He's obviously defending his backside.'⁴⁰ While Thorne received support from his team and several others, after a few years of debate, the majority of the scientific community reached a consensus over Bowler's dates of 40,000 years BP.

As the Bowler and Thorne debate faded from memory, and Mungo Man's antiquity was no longer under question, the image of Mungo Man as an artefact of sensory transformation returned. Jim Bowler was a recurring academic figure who frequently conceptualised Mungo Man's significance for the public. Ten years after Marshall and Walker first positioned Mungo Man as

³⁶ J. M Bowler, *et al.*, "New ages for human occupation and climatic change at Lake Mungo, Australia," *Nature* 421 (2003): pp.837-840.

³⁷ Ibid, p.837

³⁸ S. Cauchi, "Mungo Man's age rattles a few bones," *The Age*, February 20, 2003, accessed at <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/02/19/1045638356208.html>

³⁹ Alan Thorne in S. Grose, "Mungo Jumbo," *Australasian Science*, April 2003, p.20

⁴⁰ Jim Bowler in Grose, p.20

a vessel for a different way of viewing Australian history, Bowler made this statement in *Life Science Weekly*:

This research extends far beyond mere academic interest. The Mungo people's story is of major importance to both their present day indigenous descendants and to all non-Indigenous Australians. Non-indigenous Australians too often have a desperately limited frame of historical reference. The Lake Mungo region provides a record of land and people that we latter-day arrivals have failed to incorporate into our own Australian psyche. We have yet to penetrate the depths of time and cultural treasures revealed by those ancestors of indigenous Australians.⁴¹

This rhetoric is markedly different from that of previous decades. While Mungo Man's antiquity was reported in the 1970s and 1980s with wonder and excitement, it was now imbued with respect and a sense of white guilt. Comparing Bowler's own discourse shows the significance of the change and the different meanings attributed to Mungo Man's time-depth. Where previously he had spoken of discoveries that 'opened up a whole new era in Australian archaeology'⁴² Bowler now argued, 'The messages from the ancient Mungo people challenge us to come to terms with history and dynamics of this strange land, especially with the rights and richness of their descendants.'⁴³ The 1980s disputes with the NP&WS seem to have made their mark on Bowler, who emphatically stated that it was the cooperation and facilitation of Mungo Man's descendants, the three traditional tribal groups of the Willandra region, that had resulted in the project that successfully resolved the dating debate. For Bowler, this represented 'an important new phase' in relations between the scientific community and tribal elders: 'Science and the Australian community owe them a special debt of gratitude.'⁴⁴

This increased attention to Indigenous Australians and their sensitivities was another theme common in public texts of this period. When Alan Thorne

⁴¹ "New age for Mungo Man," *Life Science Weekly*, 10 March, 2003

⁴² Jim Bowler in, The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "Lake Mungo Man," *Four Corners* (ABC: 1975)

⁴³ Jim Bowler in "New age for Mungo Man."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

first published the controversial dates of Mungo Man's remains in 1999, journalists explicitly linked the artefact with Indigenous Australians. Megan Saunders described Mungo Man as the 'skeleton of an Aboriginal man,' who proved 'Indigenous Australians arrived on the continent at least 20,000 years earlier than previously accepted.'⁴⁵ The article even quoted Badger Bates, an 'Aboriginal spokesman from Broken Hill,' who positioned Mungo Man as proving Indigenous Australians right in understandings of their own heritage.⁴⁶ Mutti Mutti tribal elder Alice Kelly was also quoted, reinforcing Mungo Man as an 'important confirmation' of Indigenous Australians' links with Lake Mungo, and more broadly, the entire country.⁴⁷ In contrast to articles from the 1970s and 1980s in which Kelly was quoted, this article did not allow for a blurring of Indigeneity: 'You are looking at Aborigines,' she said, 'original Aborigines.'⁴⁸

As with earlier periods, this period's depictions of Mungo Man as a representative of Indigeneity were accompanied by overlapping images of him as a representative of humanity. It has already been mentioned that his status as a symbol of humanity was particularly evident during the 1999-2000 'age' debate. However, there was one important difference in the texts of this period: while Mungo Man's Indigeneity and humanity overlapped, they did not appear in explicit tension. This was due to the newfound depiction of Mungo Man as an artefact of national transformation. Rather than solely a representative of a nationalised deep past for all Australians, Mungo Man became a harmonised artefact of Indigeneity and humanity that symbolised the potential transformation of Australia's understanding of history, time and contemporary race relations.

Jenny Bowler, the eldest daughter of Jim Bowler, demonstrated the potency of the transformative Mungo Man image in a 2008 piece written for the *Griffith Review*. When she first came across photographs of Mungo Man in her father's papers as a child, Bowler described feeling as though she was 'sneaking

⁴⁵ Saunders, p.1

⁴⁶ Badger Bates in Saunders, p.1

⁴⁷ Alice Kelly in Saunders, p.2

⁴⁸ Ibid.

a look at a forbidden world.’⁴⁹ Instead of ‘boring sand and soil or aerial shots of geological sites’ she was instead confronted by slides that opened a ‘window to Australia’s ancient past.’⁵⁰ Through this window was Mungo Man. Bowler described him in detail: ‘Captured in sepia-like tones, a human skull lay exposed. A stark white profile, etched on the surface of soft sand, so hauntingly real it took my breath away.’⁵¹

It was clear that what made Mungo Man so hauntingly real for Bowler was his humanity. Despite describing him as a ‘trace of ancient Aboriginal Australia,’⁵² Bowler repeated the words of her father and described her encounter with Mungo Man as a confrontation with ‘the very presence of humanity itself.’⁵³ Bowler then linked Mungo Man’s ‘hauntingly real’ humanity with his transformative power, and the mystery of the Lake Mungo itself. While recounting a visit she had made to the site in her youth, Bowler described herself as ‘a typical teenager...feeling isolated and yearning for something.’⁵⁴ The mysterious Lake Mungo subsequently ‘sang a tune’ to Bowler and ‘captured [her] spirit.’⁵⁵ She described sensing ‘a deeper dreaming – a truth I knew, but for which I had no container.’⁵⁶ For Bowler, Mungo Man and Lake Mungo were both artefacts capable of sparking an intense spiritual experience.

Within Bowler’s description is the only contradiction between Mungo Man’s dual image of Indigeneity and humanity, and consequently, his transformative power. While his status as a representative of Indigeneity and humanity existed more cohesively than in previous decades, the spiritual ‘dreaming’ Mungo Man provoked for non-Indigenous Australians was powerful but elusive. Bowler sensed the deep truth Mungo Man represented, yet had ‘no container’ to hold or transport it. It might be suggested that Bowler, a non-Indigenous Australian, could never capture this ‘dreaming’. Yet her memoir

⁴⁹ Jenny Bowler, p.180

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Jim Bowler, quoted in Jenny Bowler, p.181

⁵⁴ Jenny Bowler, p.182

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

immediately remedied this contradiction by transforming Mungo Man, and Lake Mungo itself, into her container.

Just as with Marshall and Walker, when Bowler encountered the landscape she was instantly provided with the deeper truth and 'dreaming' she desired: 'Mungo is a sacred place. When you visit, your perception of reality expands. You can literally walk in the footsteps of ancient people, feel and sense the potent legacy of our Indigenous communities.'⁵⁷ Mungo Man was an important part of this legacy: he was an artefact that '[brought] home an undeniable truth: we all stand on top of eons of generations.'⁵⁸ Bowler mimicked her father's sentiments that non-Indigenous Australians were in dire need of a deeper historical perspective.⁵⁹ She then firmly positioned Mungo Man, an artefact with a story 'more real than any creation myth'⁶⁰ as the provider of this much-needed perspective.

Despite representing an Indigenous legacy and dreaming that was initially elusive for Bowler, Mungo Man's status as a symbol of humanity rendered him the ideal artefact to stimulate a transformation of mind and identity. For Bowler, just as for Marshall and Walker, the humanity of Mungo Man acted as a conduit for this 'dreaming.' Mungo Man and Lake Mungo as a whole were thus transformed into a 'crucible...a place where all Australians can learn, listen and share a common humanity.'⁶¹

Implicit in Mungo Man's ability to transform historical perspectives was an additional ability to transform non-Indigenous understandings and appreciation of Indigenous culture. By placing Australia's 200 years of European settlement in the larger context of 40,000 years, those who engaged with Mungo Man's antiquity would be unable to avoid shifting their understandings of history. This, for Bowler, would then lead to an appreciation of the 'potent

⁵⁷ Jenny Bowler, p.184

⁵⁸ Jenny Bowler, p.182

⁵⁹ Jenny Bowler, p.185

⁶⁰ Jenny Bowler, pp.184-185

⁶¹ Jenny Bowler, p.185

legacy of our Indigenous communities,’⁶² which could in turn lead to a process of reconciliation and healing.

In particular, Bowler’s suggestion that Mungo Man could help *all* Australians ‘learn, listen and share a common humanity’⁶³ held an implicit tone of reconciliation and an acknowledgment of the detrimental impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Australians. Writing her article in a context informed by the History Wars and decades of historical scholarship on colonial massacres, discriminatory assimilation policies and institutionalised racism, Bowler’s desire to show respect to Indigenous history, culture and peoples is evident. And yet, the role of Mungo Man in this reconciliatory process is almost as complex as his role in the formation of proud national narratives in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mungo Man had become a salve to the past, an undeniably Indigenous yet profoundly human figure that could draw together two peoples in one Australian nation. Although public texts reflected a marked increase in attention to Indigenous perspectives, the majority of Mungo Man’s representations were still articulated exclusively by non-Indigenous Australians. Unlike articles in the 1970s and 1980s, the public texts of this period made no suggestion that Indigenous Australians needed to learn that they ‘weren’t parasites in this country...[and] made choices in the realms of ideology and culture.’⁶⁴ Thus, the portrayal of Mungo Man’s transformative power was an appropriation of Indigenous heritage solely for the political and social benefit of non-Indigenous Australians. This appropriation will be explored more deeply in Chapter Three.

Jenny Bowler’s piece was published in the *Griffith Review*, described as an ‘agenda-setting’ magazine with ‘an uncanny ability to anticipate emerging

⁶² Jenny Bowler, p.184

⁶³ Jenny Bowler, p.185

⁶⁴ Derek John Mulvaney in J. Jesser, “Professor Derek John Mulvaney and prehistory: A study of heritage,” *The Canberra Times*, February 18, 1979, p.9

trends.’⁶⁵ Whether or not the magazine anticipated the sentiments expressed in Bowler’s memoir, it certainly recognised them as relevant or at least publishable for its twenty-first century audience. Indeed, Mungo Man’s transformative power remained a prominent part of his public portrayal up until the most recent and intense period of his image formation. Beginning in 2013 and continuing to the present, newspapers began to revisit the story of Mungo Man’s discovery with contemporary hopes for the repatriation of his remains. The focus on repatriation resulted in highly personalised, evocative representations that continued to promote Mungo Man’s harmonious Indigeneity, humanity and transformative power.

This was particularly evident as the fortieth anniversary of Mungo Man’s discovery approached in February 2014. On 25 February 2014, Michael Safi published an interview with Jim Bowler for *The Guardian*. In the article, Bowler described his hopes for a speedy repatriation and long-term commemoration plans, like the potential building of a mausoleum near the discovery site akin to those built in memory of fallen soldiers.⁶⁶ He hoped that Mungo Man’s remains would be laid with ‘appropriate dignity, in a place that’s in keeping with their sacred nature and their national and international significance.’⁶⁷ While Bowler emphasised that the ‘ancestral remains’ belonged with the traditional Aboriginal owners, he maintained that Mungo Man was a powerful symbol that put Australia ‘right at the forefront of the international story of what it means to be human.’⁶⁸

Mark Johanson used similarly emphatic language in his *International Business Times* article, published in March 2014. Johanson immediately framed Mungo Man as a discovery that ‘forever changed Australia’s history.’⁶⁹ He

⁶⁵ Professor Martin Betts, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Engagement) at Griffith University, “About Griffith Review,” taken from *Griffith Review* <https://griffithreview.com/about-griffith-review/>

⁶⁶ “...as we have built for Australian soldiers in Fromelle.” Jim Bowler in M. Safi, “Geologist who unearthed Mungo Man fights for 40,000-year-old remains,” *The Guardian*, February 25, 2014.

⁶⁷ Jim Bowler, in Safi.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Johanson.

represented Lake Mungo as a celestial landscape with transformative power, describing his experience of the 'lunar-like landscape of silver-blue saltbush' as a 'walk through the sands of time back to the start of Australia's human history.'⁷⁰ The article was also one of few that used the words of an Indigenous Australian to emphasise Lake Mungo and Mungo Man's transformative capabilities. Johanson quoted his tour guide, Paakantji Aboriginal Graham Clarke, who said: 'I'm going to teach you a different kind of history. I want to show you the other side of the coin, because people always grow up seeing one side and never take the time to see the world from a different perspective.'⁷¹ Jim Bowler also made an appearance in the article, arguing that, 'While Mungo Man dramatically changed the way Australians now view their own history...this has not filtered through to most of the white Australian psyche.'⁷² Apparently, Mungo Man's transformative message was still to be delivered to many non-Indigenous recipients.⁷³

One article interestingly portrayed Mungo Man as a salve to Indigenous Australians. Written in August 2015, with Mungo Man's remains still interned in the ANU laboratories, Oliver Milman portrayed him as 'adrift from his homeland.'⁷⁴ Milman argued that what had once been seen as an 'archaeological triumph' was in reality an 'emotional, often traumatic, spiritual loss for traditional owners.'⁷⁵ Kennedy, an Aboriginal man from the Willandra Lakes region, bluntly claimed that he had 'read a lot of crap about what is written about Lake Mungo,' but for him 'Aboriginal frustration won't be salved until Mungo Man returns home.'⁷⁶ This is one article that reflects an Australian public that appeared to give more credence to Indigenous perspectives.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Graham Clarke, in Johanson.

⁷² Jim Bowler, in Johanson.

⁷³ "They have an immense message to deliver. And that message has yet to be delivered." Jim Bowler, in Johanson.

⁷⁴ O. Milman, "Message from Mungo: mother of all battles to bring Aboriginal ancestors home," *The Guardian*, August 17, 2015.

⁷⁵ Milman.

⁷⁶ Kennedy, in Milman.

However, included in the salving of Indigenous frustration was a simultaneous salvation of non-Indigenous Australians. Even when Mungo Man was able to deliver something to Indigenous Australians, his transformative power was always appropriated in order to deliver to non-Indigenous Australians as well. For example, in November 2015, Mungo Man's remains were ceremoniously moved from the ANU to the repatriation unit at the National Museum of Australia. Jim Bowler wrote an article on the repatriation for online magazine *The Conversation*:

Mungo Man's final expression of identity with nature has something special to offer. It is one that we of rational market-based Western society have largely lost. His voice on these issues awaits his return home. For so long waiting in silence, it is a voice with messages for all Australians to hear.⁷⁷

Although depicted as a superior embodiment of everything deficient in 'rational market-based Western society,' Mungo Man's transformative image and ability were still entirely controlled by non-Indigenous Australians, for the benefit of non-Indigenous Australians. His 'special' message was both defined and silenced by non-Indigenous Australians, and thus only able to be articulated and amplified by them. While seeming to criticise 'Western society,' Bowler's article simultaneously reminded readers of the potential pride Mungo Man's repatriation could offer: 'The world is watching. This stop-over in the museum must be a short one, securing certainty for that final journey home.'⁷⁸ Therefore, despite suggestions of reconciliation with a focus on Indigenous Australians, Mungo Man's repatriation was appropriated along with his image into a positive, nationalist story: Bowler argued the day Mungo Man was resting in dignity at Lake Mungo would be 'one of national celebration for what it means to be Australian.'⁷⁹

⁷⁷ J. Bowler, "Mungo Man moves to National Museum, but he's still not home," *The Conversation*, November 4, 2015.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

This appropriation of Mungo Man was demonstrated as recently as April 2016. In an article for *The Age*, author Tom Keneally wrote, ‘One of our greatest national treasures has been neglected by governments that just don’t care. It’s time we rescued him.’⁸⁰ Once again, the power over Mungo Man, both physically and symbolically, is placed firmly in the hands of non-Indigenous Australians. Interestingly, Keneally softened the appearance of this power by arguing that it was both ‘very human and very Australian to have a treasure before us and not know what to do with it, or not even know it’s a treasure.’⁸¹ Keneally positioned himself as being ignorant of the treasure himself, until after ‘idly having visited arid Lake Mungo a few times, I got involved in the question of who is this Mungo Man?’⁸² This blasé attitude evaporated quickly, and Keneally implored readers and the government alike to take note of ‘this towering figure of human antiquity and culture.’⁸³ In his concluding paragraph, Keneally offered a portrait of a powerful Mungo Man paradoxically in need of rescuing; of an Indigenous yet profoundly human ‘treasure’ that had the distinct potential to salve the past and reconcile a nation for the future:

Now, if the traditional owners were kind enough to let us celebrate with them this great human treasure, it would bespeak the antiquity of Aboriginal occupation, and be a centre to which all humanity interested in the history of the species would feel bound to come. It would be a grand thing if we all took notice of Mungo Man, including the state and federal governments, and rescued him from his shelf. We could then return him home in a way that gives our entire community, black and non-black, a new bond and a national glory.⁸⁴

By 2016, Mungo Man had achieved an almost divine-like, seraphic status in public texts. He appeared not only as a symbolic healer of the past, but a physical centre through which ‘all humanity’ and thus all Australians could pilgrimage and be transformed. Indigenous Australians were part of this healing process, and yet their voices and historical agency were displaced from

⁸⁰ T. Keneally, “Mungo Man still lies in a cardboard box. Why?” *The Age*, April 26, 2016.

⁸¹ Keneally.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

a public discussion that focused more on non-Indigenous images and uses of Mungo Man for an ultimate goal of ‘national glory.’

Mungo Man and the Dawn of Deep History

The power and importance of Mungo Man’s depiction as a transformative artefact of deep time is further revealed by his integration into Australian historiography. As we have seen, for the first forty years after his discovery, Mungo Man’s image and narrative function were confined within the disciplinary boundaries of prehistory and archaeology. In these same years, Australia’s historians were engaged in their own revision of history, but with a focus on a more recent past. At the moment of Lady Mungo’s discovery in 1968, and then into the 1970s when Mungo Man was discovered, historians began breaking what anthropologist W.E.H Stanner had dubbed the ‘great Australian silence.’⁸⁵ In response to Stanner’s impactful 1968 Boyer Lectures, historians began putting Indigenous Australians back into narratives of Australian history.

Narratives of progressive, benign settlement were revised into accounts of invasion and a destruction of Indigenous land, peoples and culture. Charles Rowley’s *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (1970) marked this ‘awakening’⁸⁶ in Indigenous history, while Henry Reynolds’ *The Other Side of The Frontier* (1981) presented a narrative of Aboriginal resistance to settlement and brutal European retaliation. Peter Read’s government report and ensuing book *The Stolen Generations*⁸⁷ (1981) made visible Australia’s lengthy policy of Indigenous child removal and forced assimilation, seen by many scholars as an attempted genocide.⁸⁸ These seminal works sparked multiple histories throughout the

⁸⁵ Stanner argued that Australia in the twentieth century was suffering from a “cult of forgetfulness” making Indigenous history a realm over which the “great Australian silence reigns.” W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, [introduction by Robert Manne] (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2010), pp.188-189

⁸⁶ Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), p.44

⁸⁷ Full title *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883-1969*.

⁸⁸ Peter Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883-1969* (Report, 1981), p.3, accessed online at

1980s and 1990s that reinforced narratives of Indigenous dispossession and discrimination, creating an enormously productive field of Australian historical scholarship.

However, the work of pre-historians and the work of historians in this period ran parallel to each other. They rarely intersected, allowing academics like John Mulvaney the ability to boldly claim that Indigenous Australians were the first discoverers and colonisers of Australia without a corresponding impact on narratives of history. Elements of Australia's 'pre-history' were separated from its 'history,' a discipline seen to focus on a recent past empirically supported by archives.

This was even the case with the one key work that actively engaged with Indigenous antiquity. In 1975, Geoffrey Blainey's *Triumph of the Nomads* argued that Indigenous Australians were not 'helpless primitives trapped in a hostile environment' but creators of a civilization 'equal in diversity and complexity to that of early Europe and the middle-east.'⁸⁹ Published contemporaneously with Mungo Man's discovery and the boom in Australian archaeology, Blainey's work was classified as one of 'pre-history.' While this label positioned the work alongside the newly emerging artefacts that supported it, it also confined Indigenous peoples and their archaeological artefacts to a static past that simultaneously separated them from Australian 'history.'

At the time of Mungo Man's discovery then, Australian historians were focused on narratives of Australia's colonial and historical period, rather than the emerging evidence of a deeper past. It was not until the late 1990s and twenty-first century that Lake Mungo and its artefacts worked their way into written Australian history. After decades of sub-disciplines that moved away from grand narratives, broad scales and long-term trends, some historians marked a return to the practices of universal history.⁹⁰ A more recent part of

http://dmsweb.daa.asn.au/files/Recognition_of_Overseas/Reading%207_StolenGenerations.pdf

⁸⁹ A. Stanley Trickett, "Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Aboriginal Australia (review)," *History: Reviews of New Books* 4:10 (1976), p.222

⁹⁰ David Christian, "The Return of Universal History," *History and Theory* 49:4 (2010): pp.6-27.

this trend is the move towards Deep History, or Deep Time history; frameworks that incorporate evidences of the deep past to reformulate traditional narratives of Australia's history. Indeed, many recent works of Australian history have not only revisited the period of Australia's 'pre-history,' but have also employed longer chronologies, broader scales of analyses and interdisciplinary evidence.⁹¹

Despite this marked historical shift, Mungo Man does not appear specifically in many recently published works. Geoffrey Blainey's *The Story of Australia's People* (2015) dedicates several pages to Lake Mungo, yet only mentions the cremated remains of Lady Mungo.⁹² When Blainey mentions Mungo Man's discovery, he does not refer to the remains by any label: 'Bowler later discovered more bones in the windblown sand dunes.'⁹³ Lady Mungo also featured heavily in the recent works of Australian historian Ann McGrath. In a documentary made from over eight years of research and oral history interviews, and in a recent collaborative volume of essays, Lady Mungo is consistently portrayed as the discovery that 'virtually overnight expanded the human history of Australia.'⁹⁴ In McGrath's documentary, *Message From Mungo*, Indigenous Australians speak of Lady Mungo as 'their queen, their matriarch, their source of power.'⁹⁵

Mungo Man's inclusion in academic history in this period is more as a footnote to the significance and transformative power of Lake Mungo. However, the transformative Mungo Man does reveal himself in a more nuanced way. While still an emergent discipline, there are consistent similarities between Deep Time history's themes and historical goals, and

⁹¹ Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2011), Grace Karskens, *The Colony*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009), Geoffrey Blainey, *The Story of Australia's People: Part I, The Rise of Fall of Ancient Australia*, (Melbourne: Viking, 2015)

⁹² Blainey, *The Story of Australia's People: Part I, The Rise of Fall of Ancient Australia*, pp.7-9

⁹³ Ibid, p.11

⁹⁴ Andrew Pike and Ann McGrath, *Message From Mungo*, (Ronin, 2014); Malcolm Allbrook and Ann McGrath, "Collaborative Histories of the Willandra Lakes: Deepening histories and the deep past," in *Long History, Deep Time* eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Ann Jebb, (Canberra: Australian University Press, 2015), p.247

⁹⁵ Andrew Pike quoted in Milman.

Mungo Man's public representation. For example, recent works have all emphasised the necessity of an engagement with the deep past and claimed that doing so can drastically transform understandings of history and national identity. While Mungo Man as a specific artefact does not often appear, his antiquity and transformative time-depth are the main features of Deep Time history.

This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the framework relies on artefacts like Mungo Man for its empirical foundation. As mentioned in this thesis' Introduction, Deep Time history has developed through a variety of academic disciplines concerned with artefacts of the deep past: geomorphology, archaeology, conservation and heritage studies in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently, environmental and indigenous history. It is not surprising then, that a discipline based on the very fields that have previously given artefacts like Mungo Man attention should now be interested in the transformative time-depth he represents.

There is a distinct similarity between the historical claims made by Deep Time historians and the broader Australian public. However, while public representations of Mungo Man have focused exclusively on his ability to transform the national consciousness and reconcile the past, Deep Time historians have approached these claims through specific disciplinary lenses. Australian historian Tom Griffiths' is a prominent voice in the emergent discipline of Deep Time history. With his background in environmental history, Griffiths' work is markedly driven by an anxiety over climate change and a desire to pursue a tangible historical engagement with Australia's anthropogenic context.⁹⁶ He argues that for historians to achieve this, they *must* develop an intimate relationship with deep time.⁹⁷ For Griffiths, both environmental and Deep Time history are uniquely grown out of the experience of living on the Australian continent, to the extent that Australia is the ideal place for the framework:

⁹⁶ Tom Griffiths, "Environmental History, Australian Style," *Australian Historical Studies* 46:2 (2015), p.157

⁹⁷ Ibid.

We need meaningful histories of the really *longue durée* that enable us to see our own fossil-fuel society in proper perspective, and to see ourselves not just as a civilisation but as a species. Australia, with its unusually long human history, unique ecology and compressed settler revolution, offers striking parables for a world facing transformative environmental change.⁹⁸

Griffiths' emphasis on humanity and the deepening of history in order to gain a 'proper perspective,' is reminiscent of Mungo Man's public representation as a symbol of humanity and a transformative artefact of deep time.

Late historian Greg Denning also saw Australia as an ideal context for Deep Time history, believing that all peoples live in and with the deep time of their past.⁹⁹ For Denning, just as for Griffiths, writing a deep history that transformed historical narratives and perspectives becomes a matter of urgency in the present, both politically and environmentally. Denning claimed that deep time impinged upon peoples differently, and that the past belonged to those on whom it impinges the most. For Denning, this was Australia's Indigenous population.¹⁰⁰ Denning then argued that those who 'have the obligation to write the history of this bound-together Land must be committed to the humanistic ideal that understanding requires some entry into other people's metaphors about themselves.'¹⁰¹ Deep Time history for Denning then, is a political matter of transforming our historical understandings through a focus on humanism and an engagement with culturally diverse metaphors. This is an aspect of Deep Time history most effectively explored by Australian historian Ann McGrath.

With a background in Australian Indigenous history, McGrath has consistently argued for the consideration of Indigenous perspectives. In her most recent work, McGrath has focused on Indigenous understandings of time and place, and how they might be used to change history's temporality. Her collaborative work *Long History, Deep Time* (2015) considers history's

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.173

⁹⁹ Greg Denning, "Living In and With Deep Time: Public Lecture XII David Nichol Smith Conference, July 19, 2004," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18:4 (2005), p.269

¹⁰⁰ Denning, p.271

¹⁰¹ Denning, 272

temporality and how it might accommodate a 'deep time sequence'¹⁰² represented by artefacts of the deep past like Mungo Man.

While much of Deep Time history's current literature focuses on methodology and theoretical implications, McGrath's collaborative, interdisciplinary work is one of the first to implement Deep Time's transformative methods. Reflecting Denning's attitude, McGrath argues that historians should consider the deep past as it is witnessed in material and human ecology in the present: for example, in the 'ancient memory' of Indigenous peoples, and the ways in which the sense of their immense past are 'carried and held in living memory.'¹⁰³

McGrath also directly addresses issues surrounding artefacts like Mungo Man, with hopes of historical and national transformation similar to many public texts. However, McGrath is reflexive about using artefacts of Indigenous heritage to transform Australia's history. While she argues that looking deep into Australia's past can foster 'insights into the forces of human history,' McGrath also pinpoints Derek John Mulvaney as an example of an academic who has problematically used these remains to create a history 'of which he believes all Australians might be proud.'¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, McGrath argues that while 'dialogues over human remains become sites for highlighting historical hurt, they also open paths to possible redress, and for cultural and national recuperation.'¹⁰⁵

Characteristically more reflexive than many public texts of the period, these examples of academic history reveal that artefacts like Mungo Man, and the transformative time-depth he embodies, extended beyond the public sphere and were integrated into the framework of Deep Time history. With a similar emphasis on the transformative power of the deep past, these historical

¹⁰² Ann McGrath, "Deep Histories in Time, or Crossing the Great Divide?" in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb, (Canberra: Australian University Press, 2015), p.1

¹⁰³ McGrath, p.22

¹⁰⁴ McGrath, p.12

¹⁰⁵ McGrath, p.13

works position Australia as not only the ideal setting for a deep time transformation of history, but a necessary one:

To be good historians, we must challenge the presentism of our everyday assumptions, while at the same time acknowledging that our historical questions are framed within sets of intersecting cultures moulded by histories of the present, immediate and longer past...We hold out hope for new histories that can generate ripples that change the climate of history towards greater inclusion and equity. These might be connected with modern *national* futures, but also integrated into global analyses.¹⁰⁶

Throughout the 1990s and early twenty-first century, public representations of Mungo Man continued to emphasise the three threads of universal humanity, international significance, and an apparently 'positive' representation of Indigeneity. However, Mungo Man's image underwent a noticeable shift from his earlier representations in the 1970s and 1980s. Where there had once existed a tension between Mungo Man as a symbol of humanity and a symbol of Indigeneity, public representations of this period harmonised the two factors to create a sacred, transformative Mungo Man. Mungo Man became an artefact capable of healing past injustices against Indigenous Australians, transforming societal understandings of Australian history, and even assisting contemporary processes of reconciliation.

This image of Mungo Man proved more pervasive than his earlier images: not only were public texts of this period convinced of Mungo Man's transformative capabilities, an engagement with his time-depth was often represented as a necessary pathway to national redemption. Similarly, almost forty years after his discovery, Mungo Man and his time-depth were incorporated into Australian historiography. Recent works of Deep Time history or Deep History, while not focusing exclusively on the artefact of Mungo Man itself, promoted notions of a transformative and often necessary engagement with Australia's deep past.

¹⁰⁶ McGrath, pp.25-26

While appearing to give more credence to Indigeneity, Mungo Man's revitalised image as a transformative healer was appropriated into a public narrative with a similar goal of producing a proud past for all Australians. As Deborah Cheetham's comments from 2015 have proved, the knowledge of, and engagement with, Australia's deep past is having tangible effects on discussions of national history and identity in the present, in both academic and public spheres.

Chapter Three: Interpreting The Meaning of Mungo Man

‘Aboriginal history is the battleground of Australian history.’

So far, this thesis has argued that since his discovery in 1974, Mungo Man’s public image has been constructed almost exclusively by non-Indigenous Australians and appropriated into a narrative saturated with nationalist meaning. In the 1970s and 1980s, Mungo Man was publicly represented as an internationally significant, universally human artefact that could provide a proud, deep past for the Australian nation. From the 1990s to the present day, public representations harmonised Mungo Man’s dual identities of Indigeneity and humanity in order to present him as a transformative artefact capable of reshaping history, healing the past, and assisting reconciliation in the present and future.

This chapter offers an interpretive frame for these shifting representations. How do we explain the cultural investment in and appropriation of Mungo Man? What is the context for these shifting representations? Why does Mungo Man have so much potency for non-Indigenous Australians? On a foundational level, Mungo Man has held considerable meaning for the academy. From prehistory to Deep Time, scholars either working in archaeology or history have found in Mungo Man new ways of interpreting Australia’s past. They were not alone. By the 1990s, Mungo Man had become a distinguished public figure. As he did so, Australian society underwent fundamental social and political change. Part of this was about Australia’s post-war identity, and the transition from imperial patriotism and the search for a ‘real’, ‘new nationalism.’² Another part of this were the

¹ Anna Haebich, “The Battlefields of Aboriginal History,” in *Australia’s History: Themes and Debates*, ed. Martyn Lyons and Penny Russell (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005), p.1

² “...the ferment about refashioning the national image from the early 1960s to the 1980s represented not so much the stirring of a more ‘authentically’ Australian

Indigenous politics around civil and land rights, and the societal revision of Australian history. Mungo Man's representations are therefore as equally bound by academic investments and disciplinary structures as by societal changes. We can explain his changing representations by charting the dynamics of these contexts.

The interpretive frame of this chapter takes each of these strands; archaeology and Deep Time history, and the broad social and political changes in Indigenous politics and history, to explain the non-Indigenous investment in, and appropriation of, Mungo Man. Through an examination of the discipline of archaeology, significant moments in the assertion of Indigenous rights, and a broad public re-imagining of the Australian nation, this chapter will further unpack the meanings behind Mungo Man's complex representations.

The Mungo Man in New Archaeology

Above all else, Mungo Man was an artefact of intellectual import. The first investment in Mungo Man was made by the Academy who discovered him and those who sought to interpret him for the wider world. Mungo Man's discovery came when Australian archaeology was taking shape as an academic discipline. With the advent of radiocarbon dating in 1950 and the economic prosperity of the 1960s, by the 1970s Australian archaeology had become the domain of young, motivated intellectuals with a baby-boomer attitude of confidence in their abilities and the future.³ Discovered amid this disciplinary boom, it is unsurprising that Mungo Man and the time-depth he represented were positively portrayed as evidence of a past of which Australians could be proud. As archaeologist Sarah Colley argues, 'Lake Mungo placed Australian

nationalism as a response to the relatively sudden collapse of Britishness as a credible totem of civic and sentimental allegiance in Australia." James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire*, (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2010), pp.6-7

³ Sarah Colley, *Uncovering Australia: Archaeology, Indigenous people and the public* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p.4

prehistory on the world map, whereas before Australia could be dismissed as something of an archaeological backwater.⁴ Throughout this period, Mungo Man was consistently represented as one of Australia's most significant archaeological finds. He was characterised for the public by a discourse that emphasised his antiquity and unique Indigeneity in order to prove his international significance. This representation fostered a sense of pride for the nation and simultaneously solidified the authority of archaeology.

However, while Mungo Man's unique Indigenous culture was used as a means of putting Australian archaeology on the map, almost all of this period's representations included a conceptual contradiction between Indigeneity and humanity. In one respect, this contradiction reflects the influence and rise of New Archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s. Radiocarbon dating techniques 'freed' archaeologists from relying solely on excavation and the seriation of artefacts in order to examine historical change.⁵ This led to experimentation with methods that ultimately allowed archaeologists greater ability to reconstruct social organisation and account for variability in the archaeological record.⁶

New Archaeology combined these new methods with the traditional goal of scientific, empirical study, and created a discipline that pushed research to be socially relevant. This relevance was defined in broad 'processual terms' and aimed to deliver 'universal laws of cultural process.'⁷ Chronological control remained a primary focus; only artefacts thought to be diagnostic of time were recorded and studied, and past cultures were defined by the presence or absence of certain cultural traits.⁸ As a result, the discipline of New Archaeology often made broad assumptions about what the past, its social organisation and its inhabitants had been like.

⁴ Colley, p.6

⁵ Amber L. Johnson, "Processual Archaeology," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, ed. Deborah M. Pearsall (Elsevier Inc., 2008), p.1894

⁶ Johnson, p.1894

⁷ George P. Nicholas and Alison Wylie, "Archaeological Finds: Legacies of Appropriation, Modes of Response," in *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, ed. James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk, (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), p.14

⁸ Johnson, p.1894

This shift within the discipline of archaeology not only provides an explanation for Mungo Man's public image as a symbol of universal humanity, but also for the tensions between it and his image of Indigeneity. Part of the New Archaeological principle of socially relevant research was that research ought to benefit *humanity*, to form rationally credible knowledge that transcended culture-specific interests and instead enriched a common heritage.⁹ This attitude was reflected by many of the archaeologists who helped excavate Mungo Man's remains. For example, archaeologist Rhys Jones told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'The salient fact that emerges from a global perspective is how similar were the lives, the artefactual remains, the casual byproducts of all us humans on all continents...We have a common future and we have a common past.'¹⁰

Professor Derek John Mulvaney was quoted in a myriad of the public texts that conceptualised Mungo Man in this period. Then Chair of Prehistory at the ANU, and a supervising archaeologist on both Mungo Man and Lady Mungo's excavation, it is unsurprising that many journalists interviewed Mulvaney in this period. Yet Mulvaney's standing in the archaeological world stretched beyond even this context: he was quickly becoming one of Australia's most recognised archaeologists, later dubbed the 'founding father of Australian archaeology'¹¹ and the 'new man in the New Archaeology.'¹²

Being the new man in New Archaeology undoubtedly influenced Mulvaney's representation of Mungo Man. Historians Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths argue that although Mulvaney used his research to impress the importance of Indigenous history, he was also staunch in his belief of a

⁹ Emphasis added. Nicholas and Wylie, p.14

¹⁰ R. Jones, "Exploring landscapes of the past," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 1, 1988, p.11

¹¹ Greg Denning, "Sea People of the West," *the Geographical Review* 97:2 (2007), p.292 and John Mulvaney, *Digging up the Past* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011).

¹² Tom Griffiths, "In Search of Australian Antiquity," in *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public*, ed. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997), pp.52-56

universal culture and a commitment to world heritage.¹³ While attempting to highlight Indigenous culture, Mulvaney frequently described Mungo Man as part of a shared Australian past. Emphasising his antiquity and significance for Australian history, the universally human Mungo Man 'became a measure of human unity, a way of escaping from racial discourse, and of locating a common, global past.'¹⁴

Another common aspect of the New Archaeological representation of Mungo Man was a portrayal of 'primitive' Indigeneity. As argued in Chapter One, Mungo Man's first on-screen representation attributed his cultural identity and significance to a twentieth-century re-enactment that presented Mungo Man as primitive and aggressive. The program used labels that transformed Mungo Man into 'The Dreamtime Man,'¹⁵ repositioning this image onto an entire population of Indigenous Australians. This not only eliminated the potential cultural and tribal differences of Australia's Pleistocene peoples, but also extended the primitive portrayal onto Indigenous Australians in the present.

A similar image was constructed by Mulvaney in 1979, when he described Mungo Man as a tool that could provide depth to Indigenous Australians' sense of racial heritage and engender 'new pride' in their own identity.¹⁶ This description branded Indigenous Australians out-of-touch and uneducated about their own culture: 'Unfortunately, Aborigines seeking a cultural identity don't really know what their cultures are.'¹⁷ Even when appropriating Indigenous heritage in an apparently mutually beneficial way,

¹³ "Mulvaney's advocacy of 'universal culture' and 'world heritage' sprang from his belief in the importance of education in fundamental, shared human values." Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, "The Making of a Public Intellectual," in *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997), p.17

¹⁴ Griffiths, "In Search of Australian Antiquity," p.44

¹⁵ The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "Lake Mungo Man," *Four Corners* (ABC: 1975)

¹⁶ Prof. Derek John Mulvaney in J. Jesser, "Professor Derek John Mulvaney and prehistory: A study of heritage," *The Canberra Times*, February 18, 1979, p.9

¹⁷ Ibid.

New Archaeological representations of Mungo Man often perpetuated damaging historical stereotypes of primitiveness.

Throughout the 1980s, Mungo Man's public representation continued to be influenced by archaeologists like Mulvaney and the principles of New Archaeology. However, the 1980s brought with it further changes within academia that questioned archaeology's authority over antiquity and caused a shift in the public representations of Mungo Man. By the end of the 1980s, academia all over the Western world began to be influenced by theories of postmodernism, poststructuralism and what is often referred to as the 'linguistic turn.' With a central characteristic of 'decentredness,' these postmodernist theories asserted, 'there is – there can be – no one privileged position from which to view the world, or from which to draw any meaningful conclusions about it.'¹⁸

Combined with broader trends in the field of history that questioned materialist accounts of causality,¹⁹ these frameworks had a profoundly destabilising affect on the practice of New Archaeology. Despite the positive aspects of New Archaeology's humanistic outlook – namely that a deep, shared heritage could measure human unity and provide ways of overcoming racial stigma – the developments of postmodernism and poststructuralism left no discipline un-interrogated. Griffiths argues that New Archaeology's focus on a deep human past was then seen as problematic for the very reason it tethered Australian archaeology to the world:

It generalises a local story into a global one; it draws boundaries between the ancient past and the custodial present; it sketches historical, migratory connections between Aboriginal people and other humans, and ultimately finds Australia's human beginnings elsewhere.²⁰

¹⁸ Beverley Southgate, *Postmodernism In History: Fear of Freedom?* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.11

¹⁹ Judith Surkis, "When Was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy," *The American Historical Review* 117:3 (2012), pp.702-703

²⁰ Griffiths, "In Search of Australian Antiquity," p.44

These academic developments brought issues and inconsistencies to light within archaeology and history, disciplines no longer able to voice their claims with the same degree of certainty. While Mungo Man's antiquity could be supported by carbon dating, the integration of his humanised image into a narrative of Australian history began to be questioned.

Indigenous Rights and Reimagining the Australian Nation

Disciplinary changes within the academy presented a challenge to New Archaeology and troubled Mungo Man's representation as an internationally significant, universally human artefact. However, nothing challenged this representation more than the seismic shifts in Australian society that occurred from the 1970s to the 2000s, with Indigenous political and historical claims at their core. Powerful public demonstrations of Indigenous rights occurred in the same context as significant revisions to Australian history, leaving national identity in a state of flux. By the time the Australian nation was celebrating its bicentenary in 1988, these shifts began to impact the representation of Mungo Man. Amid widespread reconsiderations of Australian identity, the old image of Mungo Man was no longer viable. After the contentious debates of the History Wars on the one hand, and a national discourse of reconciliation on the other, Mungo Man emerged through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century as a transformative healer of the past.

The contradictions between Mungo Man's representations of Indigeneity and humanity, and the later shift to his depiction as a sacred artefact of transformation, are mimetic of the increase in Indigenous political activism and the control Indigenous Australians began to assert over the sites and artefacts of their cultural heritage. By the time Mungo Man was discovered in 1974, the Australian public had witnessed a succession of powerful Indigenous protests: the 1963 Yirrkala Bark Petition, Charles Perkins' 1965 Freedom Rides, the Wave Hill walk-off in 1966, the 1967 Australian Referendum, and the erection of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972. In 1972,

Gough Whitlam was elected Prime Minister, a leader rapidly associated with progressive social reform. In 1975, Whitlam formally handed back 3300 square kilometres of land in the Northern Territory to Vincent Lingiari and the Gurindji people whose claim began in the Wave Hill walk-off almost ten years prior. The rising voices of Indigenous Australians were thus presenting substantial challenges to Australian law, dominant public narratives, and societal understandings of history and national identity.

Indigenous activism also compounded the disciplinary revision of archaeology and history. As canvassed in Chapter One, the disagreements between ANU researchers and members of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NP&WS) over the use of the Mungo region in the 1980s are another example that the rights and responsibilities of the archaeological discipline were being severely reconsidered. No longer was it assumed that 'scientific experts' were the ones who could make the best use of archaeological artefacts and remains, especially of Indigenous cultural heritage.²¹

Yet, the establishment of national parks also meant that, at the very moment Indigenous people were asserting their rights, representations of Mungo Man remained trapped within non-Indigenous constraints. Tim Bonyhady argues that national heritage and the national estate were concepts specifically introduced by the Whitlam government and defined in law by the 1974 Australian Heritage Commission Act.²² The Heritage Commission was the first Federal authority to manage Australia's natural and cultural heritage, tasked to work with 'the State, local governments, voluntary groups and members of the public for the protection, conservation and presentation of the National Estate.'²³ A committee decided on potential sites based on three

²¹ Nicholas and Wylie, p.15

²² Tim Bonyhady, "The Stuff of Heritage," in *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997), pp.146-147

²³ J. Bryant, "The National Estate: A kind of whole-earth catalogue," *The Canberra Times*, October 5, 1974, p.9

components: outstanding world significance, outstanding national value, and regional or local significance.²⁴

Mungo Man was an artefact that ticked all of these boxes, making him an ideal representative of a seemingly progressive project that could represent Indigeneity while maintaining the dominance of a universal humanity. His public representations in the 1970s and 1980s were heavily influenced by this paradoxical desire to both highlight and diminish Indigeneity. As argued in Chapter One, even while Indigenous Australians gained more control over their own cultural heritage, the integration of their cultural sites into this nation-building project left control firmly in the hands of non-Indigenous Australians. Lake Mungo's integration into a National Park in 1979 meant the site and its internationally significant artefacts were appropriated into a project and discourse that primarily excluded Indigenous Australians.

This period's paradoxical representation of Mungo Man, and the changing understandings of Indigenous heritage and Australian history, climaxed in the 1988 bicentenary of Australia's settlement, one of the largest and most complex public negotiations of Australia's national identity. Many historians have viewed it as 'an exercise by the state in the production of nationalism.'²⁵ Social anthropologist Andrew Lattas described the event as an investment in culture that was also a process of investiture:

...a process through which the state conferred ceremonial honours upon itself by mediating the relationship of the people back to their 'history', back to those primordial truths of origin that have created the fiction of a national identity and the mythic space of nation.²⁶

Preparations for the bicentenary began almost a decade prior, and with a theme of 'Living Together,' Lattas' critique does not appear far off the mark. When

²⁴ Bryant, p.9

²⁵ Andrew Lattas, "Aborigines and contemporary Australia nationalism: primordiality and the cultural politics of otherness," in *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society*, ed. Gillian Cowlshaw and Barry Morris (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), p.223

²⁶ Lattas, pp.223-224

then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser made a statement to parliament in 1979, he explicitly linked the bicentenary with a celebration of universal human origins and nationalist identity:

Deep in any human community is a consciousness of its origin and identity and its hopes and resolutions for the future – a consciousness to which it will want to return and dwell upon at particular moments in its history. The marking of a bicentenary is one such time. It will be a time for calling to mind the achievements throughout this country and by people over two centuries. It will be a time to reflect upon our developing and changing national identity as a united community transformed in a remarkable way by the migration programs of the years since World War II.²⁷

While Fraser referenced a changing national identity, he made no mention of the recent developments regarding Indigenous Australians. By concentrating on two centuries of Australian ‘achievements’ and post-war migration, Fraser focused instead to a recent past. Not only did this ignore the deep time represented by artefacts like Mungo Man, it also silenced the findings of revisionist Australian histories. As outlined in Chapter Two, the 1970s and 1980s saw a breaking of the ‘great Australian silence’²⁸ where Indigenous Australians and their relations with European settlers were finally written into history. While these histories did not engage with Mungo Man or Australia’s deep past, they presented a challenge to Australia’s fragile identity similar to the Indigenous political claims of the period.

At the time of the Bicentenary, further cracks appeared in conceptualisations of Australia’s national identity. As historians James Curran and Stuart Ward argue, even at the early stages of the bicentenary’s planning, there was a noticeable tension between a consciousness of the nations origins on the one hand, and its ever-changing identity on the other.²⁹ So too were there tensions in this period’s representations of Mungo Man, caught between

²⁷ Malcolm Fraser, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, April 5, 1979, p.1626

²⁸ W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, [introduction by Robert Manne] (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2010), pp.188-189

²⁹ Curran and Ward, p.231

a fascination with the human origins he represented, and his undeniable Indigenous connections. While Mungo Man hung in the balance, the bicentenary championed reconciliation. The Australian Bicentennial Authority's (ABA) General Manager explicitly described a 'yearning for a national unifying experience after the divisions of recent years,'³⁰ while ABA Chairman John Reid saw the event as a 'golden opportunity for every one of us to realise a true sense of purpose and national identity.'³¹

The theme for the bicentenary changed several times throughout preparations: from 'Living Together,' to 'The Australian Achievement,' and back to 'Living Together.' The indecision reflected a larger dilemma of what exactly the bicentenary ought to commemorate. As Curran and Ward argue, 'politicians and officials became wedged between a past that seemed no longer relevant and a present and future that seemed difficult to invoke in any meaningful way.'³² On the one hand, the bicentenary held unavoidably negative meanings for Indigenous Australians, while on the other were those Australians who hoped 1988 would mark a resolution of conflict and the beginning of a new national identity.

Interestingly, it was the universally human time-depth represented by artefacts like Mungo Man that constituted one aspect of this reconciliation project. As the bicentenary's planning progressed, the ABA stressed it would celebrate 'all the people who have settled in this land over many thousands of years,'³³ while then Prime Minister Bob Hawke affirmed its celebration of 'the entire history of human habitation on this continent.'³⁴ As part of this human history, Mungo Man was an artefact that could therefore challenge traditional historical narratives and simultaneously assist their resolution.

As the bicentenary came and went, it was this restorative function that became the dominant characteristic of Mungo Man's representation in the

³⁰ David Armstrong, in *Courier-Mail*, March 6, 1982.

³¹ John Reid, ABA Press release, 23 July 1984, cited in Curran and Ward, p.232

³² Curran and Ward, p.233

³³ ABA cited in Curran and Ward, p.234

³⁴ Bob Hawke, speech at the launch of the Australian Bicentennial Stamp Series, Sydney, 7 November 1984, M3851/1, Box 3, Items 13-18, National Archives of Australia.

1990s. By the early 1990s, Mungo Man's public image had transformed into that of a mystically sacred, profoundly indigenous artefact. As argued in Chapter Two, Mungo Man's newfound sacred image carried with it an important message for contemporary Australia; one of intellectual and spiritual transformation. In one respect, an engagement with Mungo Man and the antiquity he represented would transform the way non-Indigenous Australians understood the timeline of history and their place within it. By forcing Australians to re-contextualise and re-examine Australia's troubling colonial past, this engagement would also help heal past injustices and assist reconciliation in the present. As the twenty-first century dawned, Mungo Man had become, in the public eye, a healer of the past.

Although this image of Mungo Man was constructed in a period seemingly liberated from the disciplinary traps of New Archaeology and traditional history, the complexities of the Bicentenary reveal the ongoing difficulty the Australian public had in articulating its national identity. The 1990s and early 2000s were equally turbulent periods, as the public continued to deal with the fallout of revisionist histories and increasing Indigenous activism. The representation of Mungo Man as a sacred healer can be seen as part of the national desire for a new, unified identity with less troubling origins. Where Mungo Man's dual identities of Indigeneity and humanity had once complicated national pride, public texts in the 1990s onwards harmonised these two threads to foster a renewed sense of national unity.

As with earlier periods, this shift in Mungo Man's image represents the ever-growing power of Indigenous activism, which climaxed in the 1990s with two landmark decisions in Indigenous Land Rights: the Mabo Decision in 1992³⁵ and the Wik Decision in 1996.³⁶ The *Mabo* decision recognised Aboriginal law and custom as a source of law for the first time in Australia's history. The 'first

³⁵ *Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)*, decided 3 June 1992, rejected the doctrine of *terra nullius* in favour of common law doctrine of Aboriginal title.

³⁶ *Wik Peoples v The State of Queensland*, decided 23 December 1996, ruled that statutory pastoral leases did not extinguish native title rights, the two of which could co-exist under specific terms.

step in a new direction,' *Mabo* led to the 1993 Native Title Act³⁷ and the 1996 *Wik* decision.³⁸ Despite the establishment of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act* in 1976, the resultant 'patchwork of legislative regimes,'³⁹ and colonisation's disruption and destruction of tribal groups made it nigh impossible for many Indigenous communities to prove a continuing connection with lands they sought to claim. Passed amid these fastidious processes, both the *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions reveal the rising political agency of Indigenous Australians and the national stage on which these assertions took place.

The discoveries at Lake Mungo played a role in Land Rights. Although Indigenous concepts of land and heritage are vastly different to those of Western 'scientific' analysis, Indigenous groups used the radiocarbon dates of archaeological finds like Mungo Man as evidence of their continuous occupation.⁴⁰ While this may have been more common in south-eastern Australia where communities retained fewer ties to their traditional lands, archaeologist Sarah Colley argues that Indigenous people across Australia 'incorporated knowledge gained from archaeology into public statements about the significance of their culture and history.'⁴¹

While Indigenous activism climaxed in the *Mabo* and *Wik* cases, another contextual influence on Mungo Man's shifting representation was the debate around Indigenous history now known as the History Wars. As previously mentioned, revisionist histories published throughout the 1970s and 1980s drew attention to Australia's violent colonial past and posed a threat to national identity in the present. To accept these narratives, or even engage with them critically, required a serious reconsideration of historiography. As a

³⁷ Defined as "the communal, group, or individual rights and interests over land or waters held under traditional law by Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders." Peter Butt, Robert Eagleson and Patricia Lane, *Mabo, Wik & Native Title (Fourth Edition)*, (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2001), pp.96-97

³⁸ Pearson, pp.216-217

³⁹ Noel Pearson, "Mabo: towards respecting equality and difference," in *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society*, eds. Gillian Cowlshaw and Barry Morris, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), p.215

⁴⁰ Colley, p.122

⁴¹ For example, 60,000 years for first human settlement in the Northern Territory. Colley, p.123

result, these works provoked the History Wars, a sustained and contentious debate in which historians, politicians and the general public became polarised in a fight for Australian identity.⁴²

Beginning with attacks on historian Manning Clark in the 1970s and moving through the immigration debate of the 1980s, Indigenous history became the primary subject of the History Wars in the 1990s and 2000s. A critical body of left-leaning historians⁴³ revealed troubling narratives of Indigenous history and the frontier in particular. Ignited by Henry Reynolds' figures of at least 20,000 Aboriginal deaths from frontier violence,⁴⁴ Keith Windschuttle directed the conservative rebuttal, arguing the 'facts' revealed nothing resembling 'frontier warfare, patriotic struggle or systematic resistance of any kind.'⁴⁵

Despite their differing arguments, both 'sides' of the History Wars saw at its heart a fundamental revision of Australian identity. For Windschuttle, the debate over Indigenous history was not even about Indigenous Australians, but ultimately about 'the character of the Australian nation.'⁴⁶ Prominent historian Geoffrey Blainey coined the phrase 'black armband' for the critical view of Australian settlement, which allegedly deprived young Australians of their sense of national pride and identity.⁴⁷ Blainey's phrase was widely adopted, reiterated famously in 1996 by then Prime Minister John Howard: 'The 'black armband' view of our history reflects...a disgraceful story...I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic

⁴² "...at stake is not merely a series of interventions in a minor academic skirmish, but a contest to define national identity and the policy implications that flow from it." Patricia Grimshaw, "The Fabrication of a Benign Colonisation? Keith Windschuttle on History," *Australian Historical Studies* 35:123 (2004), p.123

⁴³ Led by Henry Reynolds, Ann McGrath, Robert Manne and Lyndall Ryan.

⁴⁴ Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1981), pp.98-99

⁴⁵ Keith Windschuttle, "The Fabrication of Aboriginal History," *The Sydney Papers* 15:1 (2003), p.26

⁴⁶ Windschuttle, p.29

⁴⁷ "We deprive them of their inheritance if we claim that they have inherited little to be proud of." Geoffrey Blainey, "Drawing Up A Balance Sheet Of Our History," *The Quadrant* July/August (1993), p.11

achievement.’⁴⁸ By demonstrating that the very existence of the Australian national subject was ‘predicated on the dispossession, expulsion, and where necessary, extermination of the Indigenous peoples,’⁴⁹ revisionist history had turned a debate between academics into an unavoidable political contention over Australian national identity.

A crucial factor that exacerbated the controversy were the complex moments of national remembrance that surrounded it: the 1988 Bicentenary, the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, and the 2001 centenary of Australian federation. As previously argued, the 1988 Bicentenary was a nationalist event caught between a public desire for a more inclusive national narrative, and clear anxieties over Indigenous inclusion in celebratory nationalism. Despite the Howard government’s campaign heavily promoting inclusivity, conservative voices claimed the 2001 Federation centenary was equally unsettled: many Australians were unsure of whether the Centenary should even be acknowledged, let alone celebrated.⁵⁰

The year 2000 held a more positive public memory. The Sydney Olympic Games and the Reconciliation Bridge Walk, or Corroborée 2000, were reinforced as events of ‘cross-cultural healing and reconciliation’⁵¹ Contentions could still be seen, however, in the mixed reception of Indigenous athlete Cathy Freeman, the unofficial “face of the Games.”⁵² When writing to editors of newspapers, commentators used terms like “a token gesture...disappointment...shame”, while others complained, “sport and politics within the Olympics were separate issues.”⁵³ Sparking a discussion sustained

⁴⁸ John Howard, “The Liberal Tradition: The Beliefs and Values Which Guide the Federal Government” (Lecture given at Robert Blackwood Hall, Monash University, VIC, November 18, 1996).

⁴⁹ A. Dirk Moses, “Coming to Terms with Genocidal Pasts in Comparative Perspective: Germany and Australia,” *Journal of Aboriginal History* 25 (2001), p.104

⁵⁰ Helen Irving, “Celebrating Federation,” *The Sydney Papers* 10:2 (1998), p.35

⁵¹ Maryrose Casey, “Referendums and reconciliation marches: What bridges are we crossing?” *Journal of Australian Studies* 30:89 (2006), p.137

⁵² Toni Bruce and Emma Wensing, “‘She’s not one of us’: Cathy Freeman and the place of Aboriginal people in Australian national culture,” *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2009), p.90

⁵³ Bruce and Wensing, p.94

enough to earn the title ‘The Freeman Debate,’⁵⁴ the mixed public support reflected explicit connections between Indigeneity and publicly contested notions of history.

By the time Mungo Man was re-emerging on the national stage in 1999 with his newly argued time-depth, the Australian public was deeply enthralled in the History Wars. Not only had many historical works become intricately involved in government policy,⁵⁵ the debates also marked a period of hostile public discussion wherein someone with a ‘different’ view was not just incorrect but a ‘bad person.’⁵⁶ Historian Peter Ryan argued it was a lapse of both taste and tactical judgment for commentators to label their opponents ‘warriors’, and overshadow what should have been scholarly debate with the obfuscatory metaphor of ‘war’.⁵⁷ The resulting air of tension inexplicitly marred Indigenous history and Australia’s colonial past as wearisome, antagonistic subjects.

Mungo Man emerged as a sacred healer of the past at the height of this public (and private) division: on the one hand were those Australians desirous of reconciliation and a more inclusive national identity; on the other, were those who had grown weary of debate and longed for an end to discussion. The persistence of Mungo Man’s image in public narratives in the early twenty-first century attest to the power of his imagined ability to transform historical understandings and heal the past. As an artefact of Indigenous and human history that did not belong to Australia’s controversial colonial period, the public and historians alike could move beyond the History Wars by focusing on a less turbulent period for Australia’s national origins.

⁵⁴ Bruce and Wensing, p.93

⁵⁵ One notable example is historian Henry Reynolds, whose 1987 book *The Law of the Land* provided the majority of evidence used by the High Court in the historic overturning of *terra nullius* in 1992, the “most fundamental re-examination of land rights since European colonisation.” Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p.15

⁵⁶ R. Allsop, “Triumph of the Iconoclast Who Sparked the History Wars,” *The Weekend Australian*, March 6, 2010

⁵⁷ Ryan was called “a coward, mad, a dirty pool player, bitchy, knocking, a cannibal, and – yes – a *pornographer*.” Peter Ryan, “Is The Uncivil War Over?” *Quadrant* 50:10 (2006), p.96

Mungo Man, Sacred Spirituality and the Primordial Other

Amid this fervent desire for a new national identity, several academics analysed the public mood and drew explicit connections between it and the cultural cache of Indigenous heritage. After decades of apathetic attitudes towards Indigenous Australians, the insistence on an engagement with Mungo Man's Indigeneity in the 1990s implies more than just a nation attempting to reconcile its past. Indeed, the work of Professor David J. Tacey suggests that the 1990s representation of a transformative Mungo Man was part of a greater spiritual crisis within the nation itself.

Writing in 1995, Tacey argued that Australian society was in great spiritual need. A longing for freedom from the non-rational, enacted by the Enlightenment, modernism and then postmodernism, had left the majority of the western world 'out of touch with the real spiritual needs of our time.'⁵⁸ Tacey claimed that no high culture has ever attempted to live without a meaningful relation to the sacred, and thus secular Australia must overcome its spiritual crisis by restoring a relationship to the sacred.⁵⁹

For Tacey, this restoration would be achieved through a connection with a sacred 'other' existing outside the egotistical, humanised idea of self dominating secular Western society:

A world-view based on the human element alone lands us squarely in the prison of the rational ego, where soul and spirit are banned, repressed, and ignored. Ironically, our secular 'humanism' has made us less than human, because a large part of the mystery of being human includes the needs and desires of that within which is *other* than human, that inside us which is archetypal, nonrational, and religious.⁶⁰

Interestingly, the humanised New Archaeological discourse that surrounded Mungo Man and sought to unify the nation in the 1970s and 1980s achieved the opposite effect for Tacey. Where once national unity could be forged through

⁵⁸ David J. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* (North Blackburn: HarperCollins, 1995), p.2

⁵⁹ Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, p.1

⁶⁰ Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, pp.2-3

universal humanity, for Tacey, this unity would only be achieved through a humanity that included its necessary relation to the sacred.

The clearest way to reform a relationship with this sacred 'other' was through an engagement with the peoples, places and artefacts that most embodied its characteristics of primordial nature and spirituality. On the one hand, Tacey presented the Australian landscape as an overwhelming embodiment of the sacred.⁶¹ On the other hand were Indigenous Australians. As the most 'continuous sacred tradition on earth,' Australian Aboriginal culture was one that inhabited sacred space and possessed sacred values, truths and visions.⁶² Consequently, Tacey positioned Australia as the ideal setting in which to engage with primordial nature and spiritually: 'by virtue of their historical and geographical conditions, [Australians] are close to primordial reality almost by default.'⁶³

Curran and Ward argue that the public's hope that the bicentenary would formulate a new national identity was at times articulated as if Australia's very existence depended on it.⁶⁴ Tacey suggested similar stakes: a national re-engagement with the sacred was 'necessary for Australia's psychological health and cultural stability.'⁶⁵ First writing in 1995, Tacey's argument is perceptible in many of the public texts of the period, and particularly in their representations of Mungo Man. The depictions of Mungo Man as a profoundly Indigenous, sacred artefact therefore reflect not only an Australian nation adjusting its historical narrative and national identity, but a nation desperate to rediscover and redeem its spiritual identity.

This is a powerful concept with a logical path toward reconciliation. For a nation still publicly negotiating its national identity amid the tense atmosphere of the History Wars, it is unsurprising that many public texts

⁶¹ "In Australia, the landscape carries our experience of the sacred other. For two hundred years the majority of Australians have shielded themselves against the land, huddling together in European cities...But the landscape obtrudes, and often insinuates itself against our very will." Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, p.6

⁶² Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, p.8

⁶³ Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, pp.4-5

⁶⁴ Curran and Ward, p.232

⁶⁵ Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, p.12

reflected this notion and engaged with artefacts that could bring about this transformation.

While his belief in the necessity of transformation was clear, Tacey explicitly stated that the invigoration of Australia's 'dreaming soul' should not come from a consumption of Aboriginality.⁶⁶ And yet this moderation and reflexivity does not appear in the public's representations of Mungo Man. Mungo Man is unreservedly positioned as a vessel through which non-Indigenous Australians and the nation as a whole can be redeemed. Although part of this redemptive process involved repatriation, there was a level of benefit for non-Indigenous Australians that render the public's appropriation of Mungo Man problematic. Tacey himself came under fire from critics who saw his work as 'right-wing political propaganda, an attack on Aboriginal integrity and on the indigenous land rights movement.'⁶⁷ Aboriginal Studies scholar Mitchell Rolls argued that behind rhetoric aimed at establishing his disapproval of appropriation, Tacey 'actively encourages the process.'⁶⁸

Regardless of the verity of this claim, these discussions and critiques did not appear in public texts. When journalists were reflexive in their discussions of Mungo Man, Indigenous heritage and Australian history, it was often in regards to the past wrongs of Australia's colonial period, rather than on any potential issues with their current use of Indigenous heritage. For a society desperate to reconcile its publicly unsettled history and mend relations with its contemporary Indigenous population, it is unsurprising that the promising image of a transformative Mungo Man was left un-interrogated.

Reflection on these processes continued to come from the academy. First writing in 1990, and then again in 1997, social anthropologist Andrew Lattas argued that the entire concept of a white Australian alienation from its spiritual self was a highly political, state-sanctioned exercise of national

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ David Tacey, "What Are We Afraid Of?: Intellectualism, Aboriginality, and the Sacred," *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 25 (1998), p.189

⁶⁸ Mitchell Rolls, "The Jungian Quest for the Aborigine Within: A Close Reading of David Tacey's *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*," *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 25 (1998), p.171

selfhood. Lattas saw this concept as becoming an increasingly popular theme in Australian public, political and intellectual discourse since the bicentenary.⁶⁹ Unreservedly suspicious of the political conditions governing this theme and discourse, Lattas linked the narrative to the emergent environmental movement and the changes within history, archaeology, and Indigenous activism. European colonisation was now viewed as an 'attack on the environment...a spiteful, destructive act' in turn 'mythologised into a stain which define[d] the nation's personality.'⁷⁰

Similarly to Tacey, Lattas recognised reconciliation with the primordial Indigenous 'Other' as the publicly positioned path to national redemption. The issue for Lattas, however, was that the entire concept of a national 'identity crisis' became a vessel through which nationalism itself was mediated, to the extent that 'the continual questioning of who we really are is the essence of Australian nationalism.'⁷¹ This then allowed politicians and intellectuals to form a discourse that gained its power and authority by positioning Australians in a void that only they could fill.⁷²

The role of Indigenous Australians and their heritage in this nationalist process was clearly defined as embodiments of the scared close to the unconscious truths of humanity:

...our imaginary relationship to Aboriginal culture is used to structure our relationships back to ourselves, through a process which involves our projecting our truths onto Aborigines so as to make them objectify and give back to us the imaginary otherness through which we figure our removal and alienation from ourselves and the truths of humanity.⁷³

⁶⁹ Lattas, p.226

⁷⁰ Lattas, p.227

⁷¹ Lattas, p.231

⁷² "This interior world of nothingness is a system of meaning which authorises certain discourses and modes of representation that claim to be able to deliver the spirituality we lack." Lattas, p.254

⁷³ Lattas, p.246

Artefacts of Indigenous heritage like Mungo Man were thus trapped in this process of appropriation and projection, caught up in a discourse saturated with meaning for non-Indigenous Australians.

While Lattas was suspicious of the discourse Tacey perceived as imperative, the issue pertinent for understanding the representations of Mungo Man lies with the function and depiction of the primitive or primordial 'other'. As Lattas indicated, the concept of the primitive, and its characteristics of primordial spirituality and Indigeneity, was fundamental to national redemption:

The primitive here is means of giving depth to ourselves, of imposing a subjectivity and an interiority upon us. It gives us a way to ward off the horrifying suspicion and accusation that we are composed simply of surface images which are not grounded in some sense of primordial interiority.⁷⁴

Therefore, Mungo Man's ability to transform history and the nation's spirituality was inextricably linked with his ability to embody primordial Indigeneity. This indicates one reason why the 50,000-year-old Mungo Man makes such an ideal vessel for the redemption of the Australian nation: the more primitive and primordial an artefact is, the more sacred and transformative a role it can play for non-Indigenous Australians.

The appropriation of this primordial depth works in a similar way to the primitivity present in Mungo Man's representations of the 1970s and 1980s. Although reshaped from a primitive savagery to the more positive primitive spirituality, the depiction of this Indigenous 'Other' still perpetuated a historical stereotype of Indigenous Australians as the embodiment of 'sacredness' that also positioned them firmly and timelessly in the past. A redemptive power determined almost exclusively by the ability to embody and express the primitive has perilous implications for contemporary Indigenous Australians: A nation whose historical and spiritual redemption relies on the appropriation of a primitive Indigenous 'Other' can never fully recognise or

⁷⁴ Lattas, p.254

integrate a non-primitive Indigenous 'Other' into its concept of national identity.

Paradoxically, this leaves the nation unable to complete its transformation, as the desire for a holistic and inclusive national identity hinges on the reconciliation and recognition of past discriminations and the lived realities of contemporary Indigenous Australians. Lattas' fear of a national identity that perpetuates itself through constant reformation seems doomed then to eventuate, simultaneously hindering the material and political advancement of Indigenous Australians in the present.

Mungo Man's appropriation into this redemptive narrative becomes even more problematic when placed in the broader context of Australian colonisation. For many members of the Australian public, the latter half of the twentieth century saw a 'widespread reappraisal of Aboriginal life and culture'⁷⁵ that seemed to represent an extraordinary and mostly positive shift in public attitudes. However, heritage historian Denis Byrne argued that this period's societal adoption of Indigenous heritage was radical only in a limited sense.

Writing in 1996, Byrne traced a white Australian appropriation of Indigenous heritage and culture as far back as European settlement. Byrne argued that Indigenous Australians engaged in 'transactional relationships' with settlers that resulted in the flow of Aboriginal products and knowledge.⁷⁶ The Europeans saw these transactions in the context of curiosity and science,⁷⁷ an aspect explored extensively by historian Tom Griffiths in his 1996 work *Hunters and Collectors*.⁷⁸ While settlers had few qualms about their appropriation of Indigenous culture, the equivalent exchange of European objects and knowledge into Indigenous hands was seen as both a 'symptom of

⁷⁵ N. Parker, "Changing images of Australia's identity: Landscape: 'a cluster of vertical lines'," *The Canberra Times*, July 27, 1985, p.2

⁷⁶ Denis Byrne, "Deep nation: Australia's acquisition of an indigenous past," *Aboriginal History* 20 (1996), pp.82-84

⁷⁷ Byrne, p.84

⁷⁸ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

primitiveness and a cause of cultural collapse.’⁷⁹ This, Byrne argued, was due to imperialist concepts of ‘authentic Aboriginality’:

Whatever chaos and confusion might be seen to have entered the lives of the natives, there was, in the minds of these observers and collectors, no question as to the authenticity of the people themselves as true representatives of the strange land.⁸⁰

Therefore, when Indigenous Australians began or attempted to adapt to the realities of colonisation, their colonisers increasingly lost interest in them: ‘The Aborigines were seen to have lost or to be fast losing that quality for which so many Europeans was the only excuse for being a native, the quality of being authentically primitive.’⁸¹

It is now widely recognised that European settlers viewed Indigenous Australians as a dying race: a primitive species that would not, and could not, survive the sweeping progress of colonisation. If Indigenous Australians were seen to not only survive colonisation but actively adapt and innovate within its constraints, the legitimacy of the European coloniser was therefore threatened. To rectify this, Byrne argued, European settlers continued to ignore the Indigenous population while simultaneously embracing their archaeological and artefactual commodities. ‘Genuine’ Indigenous culture was thus confined safely to archaeological sites, whose physical traces constituted a ‘more authentic manifestation of Aboriginality than the acculturated persons of the living Aborigines themselves.’⁸²

When examined in this larger context, the public representations of Mungo Man as both an internationally significant symbol of humanity and as transformative healer of the past, are evidence not only of problematic portrayals of primitive Indigeneity but also as the most recent examples of an appropriation of Indigenous culture steeped in the legacies of colonialism. As Byrne argued, the national identity of colonial Australia was being defined in a

⁷⁹ Byrne, p.84

⁸⁰ Byrne, pp.82-83

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Byrne, pp.87-88

context of Social Darwinism and ethnographic archaeology to which the image of a primitive Aboriginal was key: 'White Australia became locked into maintaining its construction of the traditional-static Aborigine partly because the stability of its own identity depended upon it.'⁸³

The public representations of Mungo Man reveal the difficulty the Australian nation has had in destabilising this dependence. Despite the multitude of social and political changes that occurred in the latter half of the twentieth-century, the issues Byrne identifies similarly surrounded the public representation of Mungo Man. While developments within the disciplines of archaeology and history, and the substantial achievements of Indigenous Civil and Land Rights movements caused a shift in Mungo Man's public image, both depictions of an internationally significant human artefact and a transformative healer of the past represent an ongoing appropriation of Indigenous heritage that is complex and problematic.

Despite an academic interrogation into Australia's appropriation of Indigenous heritage in the mid-1990s, the works of Lattas, Tacey and Byrne do not appear to have influenced public texts or their representations of Mungo Man as a sacred healer. Perhaps the History Wars had left public platforms unwilling to engage with works of historical or anthropological criticism, or perhaps there was simply no opportunity for a dialogue between them. Nevertheless, the works of Tacey, Lattas and Byrne provide a useful contextual lens through which to view the representation and appropriation of Mungo Man.

⁸³ Byrne, p.91

A Man of Deep Time

As argued in Chapter Two, the image of Mungo Man as a transformative artefact of deep time persisted through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, where his antiquity and significance were integrated into Australian historiography for the first time. While still an emergent discipline, works of Deep Time history have already reflected similar attitudes to the public's espousal of deep time and the transformative power of its artefacts.

Despite this goal of transformation, and Deep Time's empirical dependence on artefacts of the deep past, Mungo Man has not been utilised in academic texts in the same way as in public texts. Mungo Man as a specific artefact did not often appear: instead, his antiquity and transformative time-depth are the main features of scholarship that approached the concept of transformation through specific disciplinary lenses. Including works from environmental historian Tom Griffiths and indigenous historian Ann McGrath, recent texts have been much more reflexive in their use of Indigenous heritage in particular, and in their understandings of the pitfalls of cultural appropriation and representation in general. As academics whose careers encompassed the tumultuous public debates and national negotiations of the 1990s, it is unsurprising that both Griffiths' and McGrath's scholarship should involve a reflexivity and informed analysis similar to Lattas, Tacey and Byrne.

Deep Time history remains an emergent field, the exact function and capabilities of which are still being explored. However, current works suggest that the framework can avoid becoming yet another device for the misappropriation of Indigenous heritage. By not focusing specifically on the artefact of Mungo Man, scholarship can escape the potential trap of over-personification and misrepresentation that so commonly accompanied Mungo Man's public image.

This is not to say that Mungo Man is not being made to do considerable work for the discipline of Deep Time, and by extension, the nation. The emphasis on the necessity of engaging with the deep past reveals a clear and consistent disciplinary investment in the artefact and his powerful antiquity

that deserves attention moving forward. However, unlike the public and early archaeological representations of Mungo Man, the integration of Mungo Man into deep time scholarship does not appear to be the next progression in Byrne's long history of troublesome national appropriation. The work of Ann McGrath on Lady Mungo is one example of a productive method of historical engagement with deep time artefacts: by conducting oral history interviews, McGrath's documentary *Message from Mungo* allowed the image and significance of Lady Mungo to be conceptualised in the words of Indigenous Australians themselves.

Similarly, while many Deep Time historians advocate for an engagement with Australia's human antiquity in order to transform national understandings of history, they do not advocate for an engagement with the 'sacred' or 'spiritual' Indigeneity that has so plagued past representations of Mungo Man, and Indigenous peoples and heritage in general. Many Deep Time scholars do not conceal the fact that they desire a deeper, more inclusive historical narrative for Australia. Indeed, it is often positioned as one of the most beneficial elements of the framework, and yet, this transformative function comes not from the object or artefact of Indigenous heritage itself, but from the knowledge it represents. Thus Mungo Man's antiquity can be productively appropriated into historical frameworks when dissociated from the personified cultural artefact, with a more achievable and ultimately less damaging national transformation for Australia.

By examining the public and recent academic representations of Mungo Man and charting their dynamic contexts, it is clear that his discovery came at a crucial moment for an Australian nation redefining and revising its national history and identity. The forty years since Mungo Man's discovery have seen some of the broadest and most pervasive disciplinary, social and political changes, all of which affected his shifting public representations. Changes within the disciplines of archaeology and history, and developments in Indigenous Civil and Land Rights, have been particularly influential in the shift from and development of the universally human, internationally significant Mungo Man, and the profoundly spiritual, Indigenous healer of the past.

Consistent throughout these changes has been the appropriation of Mungo Man's image and meaning into a narrative of Australian history and the subsequent quest for a proud national identity. Mungo Man's shifting representations can be mapped onto the very public, yet academically influenced negotiations of Australia's ever-turbulent national identity throughout the twentieth-century. If, as historian Anna Haebich argues, 'Aboriginal history is the battleground of Australian history,'⁸⁴ Mungo Man has proved an important and powerful participant. Considering his integration into recent historical turns, and his continuing utilisation in public discussion,⁸⁵ understanding the investments in and complexities behind Mungo Man's representations can lead to a better understanding of the current position of academic history, public notions of national identity and the productive potential of disciplines like Deep Time History.

⁸⁴ Haebich, p.1

⁸⁵ The most recent example in April 2016 in T. Keneally, "Mungo Man still lies in a cardboard box. Why?" *The Age*, April 26, 2016.

Conclusion

Mark Johanson's 2014 article in the *International Business Times*, cited at the beginning of this thesis, demonstrates the cultural purchase of Mungo Man forty years after his discovery. This thesis has shown that throughout these forty years, Mungo Man became far more than just an ancient human skeleton: he was a vessel through which non-Indigenous Australians sought to come to terms with themselves, their national history and identity, and their place in a global human history.

This thesis has charted the complex and shifting images of, and investments in, Mungo Man from 1974 to the deep time present. By unpacking early and more recent academic engagements, as well as a myriad of public representations, this thesis has demonstrated that from the moment of discovery, Mungo Man's image, significance and meaning were constructed and appropriated into a proud historical narrative almost exclusively by and for non-Indigenous Australians.

First and foremost an archaeological discovery, Mungo Man's unearthing came at a critical point in the development of the discipline. He quickly became a significant global discovery, a means of putting Australia, its archaeology and the scientists who discovered him on the world map. While Mungo Man helped to articulate a human history that predated imperial beginnings in 1788, disciplinary constraints meant that in this early period, he remained trapped within *prehistory*. Despite these constraints, Mungo Man had a powerful impact on the Australian community and its publicly articulated narratives of history and identity.

In the 1970s and 1980s, public texts consistently emphasised three image strands to present Mungo Man as evidence of a deep and internationally significant past, which was used in turn to foster a sense of national pride. This pride was complicated, however, by explicit tensions between Mungo Man's humanity and Indigeneity. These tensions increased in the 1980s, as Mungo Man was explicitly incorporated into a nationalist project through the

establishment of the Lake Mungo National Park, as well as the increasing role Indigenous Australians began to play in managing the sites of their cultural heritage. By the end of the 1980s, there were the beginnings of a perceptible shift in Mungo Man's public representation and his integration into national, historical narratives.

This shift mirrored broader changes that were occurring across Australian society, in the realms of academia and politics, with Indigenous history, identity and rights at the core. As Australia moved towards its 1988 Bicentenary, cracks had begun to appear in the nation's understanding of its past, particularly in relation to Indigenous people. While Mungo Man's significance was being inscribed in archaeology and prehistory, some of the nation's historians had begun a serious revision of Australian history, combing the archive to recover Indigenous peoples and their previously concealed history of interaction with British settlers. Narratives of benign, progressive settlement were no longer viable for a twentieth-century Australia undergoing historical revision and witnessing powerful public displays of Indigenous political agency.

In this dynamic context, the archaeologically influenced image of Mungo Man became equally insupportable. By the 1990s, Mungo Man emerged as both a profoundly human and distinctly Indigenous artefact that could aid the transformation of Australia's history, and indeed the very spirit of the nation itself. Mungo Man's new transformative image was championed as being able to heal Australia's past, reconcile its turbulent national identity in the present, and lead to a more inclusive historical narrative in the future.

With a distinct increase of discussion in more specialised and intellectual platforms, engagement with Mungo Man in the 1990s progressed to the extent that his image and significance were finally integrated into historiography through the emergent discipline of Deep Time history. What began as a shift in public representations became, by the twenty-first century, a consistent narrative across many aspects of Australian society and academic scholarship.

While increased political activism in the twentieth century gave Indigenous Australians some control over the sites and artefacts of their heritage, the public narrative surrounding Mungo Man remains one articulated primarily by and for non-Indigenous Australians. The problematic stereotypes of primordial and primitive Indigeneity that lay at the heart of Mungo Man's past representations, and their place in a longer pattern of cultural appropriation, reveal the difficulty the Australian nation has had in destabilising the dependence of its identity on such representations.

Even now, under new historical interest, Mungo Man is still being made to work for the non-Indigenous community. With its lineages in global and environmental history, Deep Time history celebrates Mungo Man's planetary significance, with the perspective he lends the present precisely the one 'we' need for our futures. However, this emergent discipline may represent the beginnings of a more productive engagement with Australia's deep past. By avoiding an engagement with the specific artefact itself, recent works instead focus on the transformative knowledge Mungo Man represents. The significance of deep time artefacts can therefore be productively appropriated into historical frameworks when dissociated from the personified cultural artefact, with a more achievable and ultimately less damaging transformation for Australia.

A study of Mungo Man's public representations and investments is a study of developments within and intersections between Indigenous politics, Australian archaeology and history, and public perceptions and uses of Indigenous heritage and history. By unpacking these contexts, this thesis presents a useful case study for understanding some of the dominant themes and narratives currently operating in Australian academic and public spheres, with its own contextual contribution to the developing discipline of Deep Time history.

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