Ways of Belonging: Reconciliation and Adelaide's Public Space Indigenous Cultural Markers

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Abstract

As an arguably 'post colonial' society, Australia is evolving its particular identity and sense of self, but reconciliation with its Indigenous peoples remains a significant political and cultural issue. Social inclusion or marginalisation is reflected in the construct of the civic landscape and this paper traces and contextualises public space Indigenous representation or 'cultural markers', since the 1960s in Adelaide, South Australia, the Kaurna people's land. This paper identifies social phases and time periods in the evolution of the ways in which Indigenous people and their culture have been included in the city's public space. Inclusion of Indigenous peoples in civic landscapes contributes not only to their spiritual and cultural renewal and contemporary identity, but also to the whole community's sense of self and to the process of reconciliation. This has the potential to provide a gateway to a different way of understanding place which includes an Indigenous perspective and could, symbolically, contribute to the decolonisation of Indigenous people. An inter-related issue for the colonising culture is reconciliation with the Indigenous nature of the land, in the sense of an intimate sense of belonging and connectedness of spirit through an understanding of Indigenous cultural landscapes, an issue which this paper explores. The paper also sets out suggestions for the facilitation of further Indigenous inclusion and of re-imagining ways of representation.

KEY WORDS *Indigenous issues; Kaurna; reconciliation; public space art; civic art; Indigenous cultural markers*

Introduction

Over the last decade the process of reconciliation has not been high on the present Australian Government's political agenda. Despite this lack of political leadership, much reconciliation activity continues at an institutional and grass roots level. Public space, as a space of both contestation and reconciliation, can be seen to reflect not only the more recent reconciliation process but also the evolution of the recognition and social inclusion of Indigenous people in Australia. A number of cultural geographers (Hansford, 1996; Jacobs, 1996; Dunn, 1997; Osborne, 2001; Hay *et al.*, 2004) have drawn attention to the ways in which public space representations of cultural history help shape personal and civic identity and a sense of belonging or, conversely, of not belonging. They also suggest that a change in public representations can potentially help to reshape social understandings and cultural identities. As Cameron has said (1997, vii) 'every monument tells a tale, not only of its subject but of the society that erects it.'

Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia, has a full complement of traditional monuments, memorials and statuary which has helped to

define its public space identity for over a century. However, public art over the last twenty five years or so has provided a more diverse range of public space representations and artistic expressions, including broader opportunities for Indigenous representation and inclusion. Adelaide art critic Margot Osborne (2004) suggests that 'civic art' is a more appropriate term for such works because it establishes the connection between the civic authority and the function of the artworks in embodying broad civic values. Public artworks respond to commissioning briefs which define social agendas or engage in place making. These are rarely unfettered artistic expressions. The term civic art implies a grander scale of work which may exclude other forms such as community art, low key works, commemorative plaques and the use of Indigenous language as part of other public artworks. Taken together, these large and small works provide a broader social narrative, extending the more 'official' style of commemoration, and also providing a sense of the vernacular which contributes to local character. Indigenous representations can occur in all of these forms and this research defines them inclusively as 'Indigenous cultural markers'.

Many recent civic artworks have responded to the broad themes of reconciliation and, as Jacobs (1996, 154) points out, artwork can contribute to 'the re-Aboriginalisation of place' and 'although not land rights in itself, (it) can be a meaningful re-territorialisation'. Furthermore, by not being subject to complex land rights and lineage associations, civic artwork 'offers a most democratic possibility for those groups wishing to remake their mark over land.' Consequently this adds to Indigenous cultural renewal and public identity. It also contributes to the whole community's sense of self by acknowledging the prior occupation of the Australian continent by Indigenous cultures.

Using Adelaide as an exemplar, this paper traces the evolution of Indigenous inclusion in civic space as reflective of prevailing social attitudes. Founded in 1836, Adelaide is on the lands of the Kaurna people who suffered the full impact of colonisation. Within thirty years the Kaurna population and culture had been decimated and survivors were largely relocated to mission living some distance away from the city. It is only in the last four decades or so that their descendants have returned to Adelaide in significant numbers and begun to rebuild their traditional cultural ties to country within the constraints and challenges of an urbanised region.

It should be understood that part of that rebuilding is the process of Aboriginal people determining their cultural lineage through identifying apical ancestors since this enables them to determine their contemporary cultural affiliations to a specific language group or groups.

This paper also proposes that the inclusion of Indigenous narratives can provide a gateway to an alternative way of understanding place for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the urban area. Symbolically, it can provide an enhanced sense of mutual belonging for both cultural traditions. For Indigenous people, it enables them to see their cultural heritage reflected in public space, and therefore to see that they are not invisible. For non-Indigenous people it can assist in creating a more intimate understanding of the Indigenous nature of place through a better understanding of Indigenous cultural traditions. It can also symbolically represent further steps in the 'decolonisation' of Indigenous people.

Evolution of public space representations of Indigenous peoples

Prior to the 1960s there was an almost complete absence of Indigenous public representations in Adelaide (and elsewhere in Australia) reflecting what anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner (1979, 216) described as 'the great Australian silence' in terms of Indigenous social issues. A change commenced in the 1960s, coinciding with and reflecting changing social and political attitudes towards Indigenous people. This was demonstrated by

Figure 1   Study area.

the 1962 Australian government's enfranchisement of Indigenous people and the 1967 federal referendum which resulted in a constitutional change which granted Indigenous people full citizenship rights and expanded the role of the federal government in Indigenous affairs, an area which had previously been under the jurisdiction of the States.

Reflecting nearly five decades of social change, there are now numerous Indigenous public space cultural markers throughout greater metropolitan Adelaide. The more recent ones are mainly in the suburbs but several are in the city's central cultural precincts. For this research the public space is also taken to include the facades and main foyers of public buildings. As of November, 2006, over fifty markers have been located in greater metropolitan Adelaide but, since there has been no specific record keeping by local or state government, more may come to light. By decade of installation the numbers are: 1960s, three; 1970s, three; 1980s, five; 1990s, 12; 2000s to date, 29 (with two more in progress). The numbers indicate an upwards trend which can be divided into four social phases and corresponding time periods. Works that are considered significant or representative of those periods are illustrated here.

Phase 1. Initial public representation by non-Indigenous people (1960s–early 1980s; seven works)

This early phase saw the representation of Indigenous culture by non-Indigenous people with little or no Indigenous involvement in its creation. The earliest work dates from 1960 and is the *Piccanniny* drinking fountain in Rymill Park on the eastern edge of the city. Commissioned by the Adelaide City Council, it depicts a kneeling Aboriginal girl with a coolamon-like bowl on her head acting as the water container. Although an important first step, to depict an Aboriginal girl in such a subservient position would now be culturally unacceptable.

The first major work with Aboriginal content in greater metropolitan Adelaide is *The Rainmakers* (Figure 2) by sculptor Geoffrey Shedley at O'Sullivan Beach which was in 1965, when the sculpture was completed, a newly developing outer suburb of mainly public housing. It was a gift from Eugen Lohmann, Managing Director of a West German company which supplied imported housing to the Housing Trust and was commissioned 'to commemorate his good feelings for the Trust and South Australia.' (City of Onkaparinga, 2005, 8).

Figure 2   The Rainmakers, O'Sullivan Beach.

The first prominent civic artwork in the City of Adelaide to represent Aboriginal people is the 1968 Victoria Square Fountain, also called The Three Rivers, (Figure 3) and designed by sculptor John Dowie. It is a major artwork both in terms of its location in the main civic square and geographic heart of Adelaide, and in its

Figure 3   The Murray River: Aboriginal man with Ibis, Victoria Square Fountain.

commemorative function, the visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1963. The fountain uses three figures, one of which is an Aboriginal man, to symbolically represent the three main rivers which supply Adelaide's water, the Murray, the Onkaparinga and the Torrens. It also incorporates associated water fowl.

In 1972 *The Sunday Mail*, a local newspaper, commissioned *The Tjilbruke Monument* (Figure 4) also by sculptor John Dowie at Kingston Park, a coastal suburb, to commemorate the memory of the Kaurna, at that time popularly thought to be an extinct people and culture:

> They went without a trace, and are today forgotten and unmourned. We at the Sunday Mail believe that was a travesty: an injustice to the memory of these proud people. That is why we launched the Tjilbruke appeal. (Sunday Mail, 1971)

Tjilbruke (also spelt Tjirbruki) is a Kaurna Ancestor Being who amongst many other deeds created a series of fresh water springs along the coast south of Adelaide (Tindale, 1997), one of which is overlooked by the monument. Journalist William Reschke had written a series of articles about Kaurna and the Dreaming and an appeal for public subscriptions was launched '... to place cairns or memorials along the route to recall the Kaurna people who did not survive the impact of white settlement.' (Reschke, 1972, 7).

Georgina Williams, Nganke Burka *Senior Woman*, Kaurna, (this refers to her knowledge and position of cultural authority) has said that, the Tjilbruke Monument is a significant marker on her journey home to country, and of her developing cultural and spiritual ties with the land of her ancestors. Like many Kaurna descendants of her generation she grew up on Point Pearce Mission, Yorke Peninsula, away from her country. The monument was a public recognition of her cultural heritage which could then be used to work towards recognition that Kaurna still existed and to bring attention to their contemporary social challenges (Georgina Williams, personal communication, 2006).

Phase 2. Initial Indigenous inclusion
(mid 1980s–mid 1990s; five works)
Although there was limited creative activity, this phase saw the initial inclusion of Indigenous people as design contributors or collaborators within a period of pan or generic Aboriginal representation. Two significant artworks were commissioned by state cultural institutions. These were the 1989 *Rainbow Serpent*, a large scale pavement work at Tandanya, the new National Aboriginal Cultural Institute in Adelaide, designed by Indigenous artist Bluey Roberts, and a 1992 untitled mural (Figure 5) at the Adelaide Festival Centre, designed by Indigenous artist Trevor Nickolls and painted by several Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

However, other types of markers also appeared in the form of two commemorative projects which were part of South Australia's sesquicentenary

Figure 4   Tjilbruke Monument, Kingston Park.

Figure 5   Untitled Mural, Adelaide Festival Centre.

in 1986. One was the *Jubilee 150 Commemorative Walk* series of plaques along North Terrace, Adelaide's premier cultural boulevard. Comprising 150 bronze pavement plaques commemorating prominent South Australians, only three of whom were Indigenous people. Nevertheless, the *Jubilee 150* prompted a concentrated re-examination and re-writing of aspects of South Australian social and political history. The 1980s were also a period of nascent cultural recognition and renewal for Kaurna descendants. Concurrent research, publications, and Indigenous activism further elaborated Kaurna and other Aboriginal history providing a basis for specific cultural identification and activities. The Tjilbruke Track Committee, comprised predominantly of Indigenous people, including Georgina Williams who, at that time, had already ascribed herself as a Kaurna descendant (Georgina Williams, personal communication, 2006), initiated the erection of marker plaques at several significant sites along the coastal section of the Tjilbruke Dreaming as part of the *Jubilee 150*. The Dreaming is a creation story setting out the Aboriginal understandings of the world and of the laws of existence. The intent of the Dreaming plaques was not only to provide recognition of their ancestors and to reveal another spirit of place but also to provide a contemporary Kaurna presence within the public space of their own lands and in the public imagination. This marks a turning point in the political and cultural understanding of Kaurna as a still extant and living people and culture. Just three years later, in a report outlining the significance of other Aboriginal coastal sites, Lucas (1989, 5) states that:

> For a number of Aboriginal people the Sellicks Beach sites (together with the other marked locations on the Tjirbruke (sic) Track) are a symbol of the past as a place of origin. This past, which can be re-created by history and archaeology, has become the means by which people orient themselves towards the future.

He goes on to assert that:

> The Washpool and Tjirbruke Spring sites at Sellicks Beach are a focus for the re-creation of symbols and the re-formation of values which derive from a specifically Aboriginal past. For their adherents, such symbols and values are thought to have a transformative power over the present and a beneficial effect on the future. They signal the revitalisation of Aboriginal culture. (1989, 8)

Phase 3. Cross cultural collaborations and individual Indigenous expression (mid 1990s onwards; 24 works)

In December, 1991 the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was appointed by the Hawke federal government to pursue a formal process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over the decade leading to the centenary of Australian Federation in 2001. This mood of reconciliation was reflected in public space by greater Indigenous acknowledgment and artistic input through cross cultural collaborations and individual expression by Indigenous artists. The works associated with this phase range from major civic artworks to small scale local and community projects with several having a specific reconciliation focus.

Grieving Mother, 1999, (Figure 6) is at the site of the former (1943–1972) Colebrook Home for stolen generation Indigenous children. The stolen generation refers to Indigenous children who were removed from their families by State and Territory governments in Australia from the early twentieth century until about 1970. In 1995, the Australian government commissioned an inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal

Figure 6   Grieving Mother, Colebrook Reconciliation Park.

Opportunity Commission into the impact of this policy, resulting in the report *Bringing them Home* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). *Grieving Mother* was created by non-Indigenous sculptor Silvio Apponyi, assisted by Indigenous artists Sherry Rankine, Tjula Jane Pole and Kunyi June-Anne McInerney. This and another work at the site *The Fountain of Tears*, 1998, by the same artists are a poignant reminder of the human and cultural tragedy of the stolen generation.

Phase 4. Specific acknowledgment and inclusion of Kaurna (mid 1990s onwards; 16 works)

Overlapping with Phase 3, which was a broad or generic recognition of Aboriginal culture, was the specific recognition of Kaurna as a distinct people and language group on whose traditional land Adelaide is located. This involved a specific collaborative input by Kaurna descendants as artists or cultural advisers. This is significant in assisting community awareness of the distinctiveness of the various Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia, their specific attachment to country and of Indigenous cultural issues pertaining to a particular place.

The works from this phase range through major civic artworks, small scale local projects, community projects, acknowledgments of significant Kaurna sites and traditional country, and the use of Kaurna language in bilingual texts. Dating from 1997 *Tjilbruke narna arra, Tjilbruke Gateway* (Figure 7) at Warriparinga, is located on one of the most significant Tjilbruke Dreaming sites available to Kaurna on the Adelaide Plains. The collaboration comprised Kaurna artist Sherry Rankine and non Indigenous artists Margaret Worth and the author. One intent of the artwork was to create a space for

Figure 7   Tjilbruke narna arra *Tjilbruke Gateway*, Warriparinga.

the Dreaming narratives to be told by their cultural custodians. It is an active space for cultural renewal and education with seasonal Spirit Fires, which burn for several days and nights. This ritual was initiated by Georgina Williams, and was held there for several years. Warriparinga, a local government reserve, is also the location of the Living Kaurna Cultural Centre, which opened on September 20th, 2002.

In 2002, the first major public artwork to acknowledge Kaurna people *Kaurna meyunna, Kaurna yerta tampendi, Recognising Kaurna people and Kaurna land* in the city itself was unveiled at the Adelaide Festival Centre. It is by non-Indigenous artist Tony Rosella and Indigenous artists Darren Siwes and Eileen Karpany.

These partially concurrent phases have produced about 40 artworks. Fourteen are in the city itself (i.e. the central area of Adelaide, which is surrounded by the city's parklands) and the remainder are unevenly spread throughout the metropolitan area as a result of numerous social, political, historical and geographic factors. Of the 17 local government areas, several appear to have none whilst one, with a high Indigenous population, has nine.

The evolution of other forms of Indigenous expression and commemoration

The form of most of the aforementioned works emanates from the Western tradition of constructed monuments and public artworks. In contrast, a strong part of a traditional Indigenous sense of self exists in the very land itself. For Kaurna, the 'monuments' were in the land already; they were not physically constructed as is the custom in the colonising cultural tradition. Rather there were, and are, multi layered meanings, or narratives, inscribed in the land itself. As Carter (1996, 63) notes, the culture's 'originary stories' are embedded in country. In contrast, the colonising culture's 'originary stories' are to be found in the constructed landscape; the monuments, the memorials and the churches. North Terrace, Adelaide's premier cultural boulevard with its numerous cultural institutions, statues and memorials (Hay *et al.*, 2004) is a case in point.

Langton (2002, 253) elaborates on this issue when discussing a land claim by the Cape York Land Council (in northern Queensland) to the Aboriginal Land Tribunal:

> Under Australian law, physical modifications to the land, such as expressed in monuments, roads, fences, and the like (referred to in

legislation as 'improvements') are treated as tangible proof of relationships with land. But what of peoples whose presence in the landscape leaves no such traces, no such marks, or where meaningful associations are not through such marks?

She further explains (2002, 254) that 'people's ancestral links with places can be read not through material inscriptions such as monuments, but an engagement and inscription of the senses.' In traditional structures, places are memorialised through meanings that are culturally inscribed in the land itself, through Story or Dreaming, through kin relationships, and through the collective cultural memory, rather than through physical inscriptions placed in that landscape. Such places of cultural memory become 'site markers of the remembering process and of identity itself.' (Taylor, 2000, 27, cited in Langton, 2002, 255) This presents a very different and more complex challenge than that provided by the Western tradition when determining appropriate forms of contemporary commemoration and it suggests that a cross cultural synthesis which draws more strongly upon Indigenous cultural tradition is required.

Despite the contribution of the Indigenous cultural markers located in urban public space, and despite more than a decade of reconciliation initiatives, most aspects of Indigenous cultural tradition remain 'invisible' in the public space of Adelaide, not only to the coloniser but also to contemporary urban Indigenous peoples. Whilst artworks provide tokens or signs here and there, the totality of the constructed landscape overwhelms the underlying Indigenous cultural meaning inscribed in the land itself. As such, there is not an overtly strong Indigenous 'public self' or self representation provided in Adelaide's constructed civic space or through its urban design. This raises the question of whether Western based forms of public commemoration are the best means for Indigenous expression. Some other forms of public representation may need to be imagined to bring attention to the inscribed landscape meanings rather than just utilising the form of the 'constructed monument'. This requires a cultural framework or what I call a 'cultural framing' that facilitates an appreciation of the Indigenous landscape beneath the 'skin' of the Western constructed landscape.

This cultural framing should ideally be more culturally relevant and accessible to Indigenous people, in order to assist with their re-identification with country and to act as a mnemonic for an oral tradition. For instance it could incorporate 'places' in the urban area with supporting artefacts where the stories can be told by the cultural custodians. These places could also act as performative spaces to reinforce meaning as do the ceremonies often associated with colonising monument, such as war memorials. There could also be a mechanism whereby non-Indigenous people could be helped to recognise the values and ways of understanding the relationship to country embedded in the hunter/gatherer cultural landscapes, of custodianship and an inter-dependent relationship rather than just possession. This is not as Jacobs (1996, 149) cautions, to conflate Aboriginality and Nature in a romanticised or deep eco-spiritual sense, or to maintain the 'enduring colonial construct which places Aboriginality in Nature.' Rather it is to enable learning at a physical and metaphysical level from another knowledge tradition, a tradition which has hitherto been classified as inferior within the colonising construct, and to assist in the process of reconciliation with both Indigenous people and the Indigenous nature of place, since the two are inextricably interwoven.

An example can be provided by the cultural and physical landscape of the Mount Lofty Ranges, the backdrop to the city of Adelaide. Does one see only a European colonising landscape or does one also see the Kaurna meaning, the body of Yurebilla, the giant kangaroo formed in creation, whose ears form the two peaks (Figure 8) now named Mt Bonython and Mt Lofty (Ross, 1984, 7). To understand the story of Yurebilla, the Kaurna landscape narrative or

Figure 8   Mt Bonython and Mt Lofty, the ears of Yurebilla.

'originary story' is to have a window into other social and landscape values. The physical landscape acts as a powerful mnemonic for oral cultures and it is an integral component of narratives that dictate social and ecological behaviour. In that sense, Indigenous creation narratives can be understood as ecosystem thinking, and not just as anthropocentric thinking. In particular, they provide a way to understand landscape not just as economic resource but also as a life force.

Civic art: some suggestions as to where to from here

Whilst Indigenous inclusion in the 'high ground' of cultural precincts is to be commended, to provide some balance, commemoration could also occur in other forms which may be of greater relevance to Indigenous people. This requires a comprehensive dialogue with Indigenous peoples as to what are the appropriate forms of public space inclusion, an issue which has yet to be fully explored. Part of this will consist of asking, and listening, to the answers to questions such as: what are Indigenous concepts of place making? Could commemoration be an action or a process rather than an artefact, or could it be a combination of both? This further raises issues about commissioning and the creative process, and about the location, conceptual base and material form of Indigenous 'civic art' or public commemoration. Possible ways forward include:

1. Giving Indigenous people greater control over public space outcomes by implementing commissioning processes that are determined by Indigenous people. One way is to consider commissioning processes that are inclusive, collaborative and consultative, rather than competitive as at present, since the latter have the potential to divide Indigenous communities and artists.
2. Debating whether utilising Western based forms of representation and commemoration are the most appropriate or whether locations and forms stipulated by Indigenous groups should be utilised. For instance, the protection and custodianship of culturally significant sites as part of commemoration may be a more appropriate approach. The Tjilbruke Dreaming sites provide a relevant example.
3. Establishing more spaces for interaction and considering a broader range of projects that may be of smaller scale but may have capacity building potential. Large scale iconic projects

can involve significant investment of financial and social capital which can cause expectations to be set too high, thus increasing the likelihood that the outcomes may disappoint.
4. Enabling projects where non-Indigenous skills are used in facilitation rather than in collaboration, with creative ownership retained by Indigenous individuals or communities. In an arts project all collaborators have 'equal' input and ownership. That is, non-Indigenous collaborators influence ideas and outcomes and also have creative 'ownership' over the Indigenous forms of expression that are utilised. Facilitation would assist and support Indigenous artists where public space art skills are needed but would not contribute to the project's creative ideas and expression.

Whilst there have been many successful collaborative projects in Adelaide there has not yet been full Indigenous control over both the commissioning and the creative processes. There is yet to be a civic artwork or a public commemoration fully determined by Kaurna people. This is one of the next steps required in moving towards full Indigenous self determination and self representation, another step in the ongoing reconciliation process.

Conclusion

There is an irony in that Indigenous people are generally excluded from the colonising cultural landscape whilst the colonisers are generally excluded from the 'Indigenous cultural landscape', and in particular from their inscribed landscape meanings and spirit of place. A mutually inclusive sense of belonging is required for both cultural traditions. This can be progressed by developing an enhanced ability to read and speak each other's symbolic languages to create a common language of belonging. Perhaps translating symbolic language into one's own idiom from either cultural heritage, as has been happening through the development of the Indigenous cultural markers discussed above, is a precursory step to an openness and an understanding which can lead to a lasting sense of mutual belonging. This would be assisted if the non-Indigenous cultural mythos can also evolve to include the land or country and not just the constructed environment. This would also assist in the development of a synthesis of meaning and expression within a cultural landscape that is convergent rather than, as at present, a binary of the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous.

A more intimate cross-cultural sharing and sense of belonging does however require a more generous level of reciprocity than that shown to date by the coloniser and a redressing of unequal power relationships. For instance, a sense of belonging is often equated to land ownership, something which has been denied to Kaurna collectively at a political level and has been made difficult individually by socio-economic structures. Land is the core capital of culture; it provides for the inter-generational transfer of both material and cultural wealth; it is part of identity and belonging and, as such, it is a continuing underlying issue.

The use of Indigenous cultural markers is just one of many strategies in a range of socio-economic and sociopolitical initiatives required in order to progress reconciliation. Public representation facilitates Indigenous peoples' incorporation into a more intrinsic part of the collective memory and contributes to the whole community's sense of self. But my concluding point is that Indigenous cultural markers and the challenge of evolving new ways of expression are not just a means of recognising Indigenous peoples. They are also an education about ways of seeing, and of understanding other codes and conventions inherent in the Indigenous cultural landscapes. They are part of overcoming a culturally mediated blindness and of incorporating Indigenous concepts into place making and commemorative processes for the benefit of all.

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