‘Creative Histories’ and the Australian context

> ‘… history can indeed be creative; it can be poetic; it can be in technicolour; and it can be three-dimensional.’
>
> — Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath.[1]

This article brings together a group of history practitioners who, prompted by their experiences of creative approaches to the theory and practice of history, are exploring how the term ‘Creative Histories’ might apply within the Australian context.[2] While the term and practices of Creative Histories have gained international currency in recent years, little has been done to consider its development and relevance in Australia.[3] We begin by recognising that history is an inherently creative practice. To paraphrase the philosopher of history Marnie Hughes-Warrington: given there are always gaps in our knowledge of ‘the past’, accounting for the space between its historical markers necessarily requires leaps of imagination and working with ‘wonder’.[4]

Below we discuss a suite of interviews we conducted with ten Australian ‘creative historians’ who have worked or still work within the academy, as well as

[1] Ann McGrath and Ann Curthoys, *How to Write History That People Want to Read* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.
[2] We purposefully use ‘Creative Histories’ when referring to what we see as a sub-field within Historical Studies in an attempt to formalise this as a specific program of research. When the term appears without capitals, we are referring to the adjective or noun, such as ‘histories that are creative’ or ‘historians who are creative in their approach’.
[3] International applications are discussed below.
[4] Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History as Wonder: Beginning with Historiography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). See also: Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005).

four First Nations artists, academics and activists who each employ creativity in the ways they 'practice the past'.[5] Together, these fourteen interviews indicate that questions of purpose, poetics and politics go to the heart of Creative Histories in Australia. Although our interviewees represent a diversity of generational, professional and disciplinary positions, and work across a multiplicity of media, each recognises that creativity —testing limits, embracing uncertainty, being open to new insights— is crucial to how they conceptualise and communicate their work, be that via traditional academic media or those intended for broader public consumption. While many interviewees describe how such approaches have allowed them to give fuller expression to neglected perspectives and sources, Gomeroi historian Heidi Norman wonders if Creative Histories might provide 'a pathway' for deeper thinking about 'Aboriginal history in Aboriginal hands.'[6] Indeed, her observation that 'Aboriginal worlds already contest the discipline of history', suggests that a fuller understanding of Aboriginal Creative Histories is likely to assist efforts to decolonise the discipline in Australia. While many interviewees identify as historians, some express ambivalence, even antipathy about its limitations and legacies. Others, such as Yuin woman and museum curator, Mariko Smith, are actively testing the possibilities associated with thinking of themselves as history practitioners and creative historians.[7]

This article represents a preliminary attempt to produce a working definition of Creative Histories in Australia by outlining its development here and surveying reoccurring themes and patterns identified by our interviewees. We discuss common influences and motivations as well as several examples produced or cited by them. We also follow the example of our interviewees and give particular attention to the relationship between western traditions of history and Indigenous ways of 'practicing

[5] Interviews were conducted under UTS HREC REF NO: ETH19-4094 stipulations. The term 'practicing the past' was coined by Kiera Lindsey, 'Practicing the Past: A Manifesto', Keynote address at the *Speculating on Biography: Exploring the boundaries of biographical writing Symposium*, Central Queensland University, Noosa, 26 October 2018. She suggests the term gestures to the experimental and contingent nature of history-making, which remains 'unfinished business' and is therefore something we practice rather than perfect.
[6] Heidi Norman interview by Mariko Smith 8 February 2021.
[7] Mariko Smith interview by Kiera Lindsey 30 January 2021.

the past', while also acknowledging that there are many other topics, methods and mediums where historical research and creative practice intermingle and proliferate.

Questions & Caveats

In keeping with Norman's observations about the explosive potential of Aboriginal conceptions of time and place, recent Indigenous and settler-colonial historiography suggests that a better understanding of the theories and praxes of Creative Histories might offer a way of reaching beyond that which Catherine Hall called the discipline's own 'blind eyes'.[8] 'We will show them what we have created', insists Pacific scholar Epeli Hau'ofa; 'we will learn from them different kinds of music, dance, art, ceremonies, and other forms of cultural production'.[9]

A similar call for more expansive historical methods has been made by a group of historians publishing in *History Compass*. They initiated a conversation about the attitudinal and methodological changes required for the discipline to move beyond its own 'dogmatic secularism' and develop richer understandings of what they refer to as 'the Unbelieved', 'unknown' and 'invisible' (namely, different spiritual and magical beliefs and practices).[10] Recognising that history 'originated as a "European" project replete with the epistemologies and ontologies of the nineteenth-century North-Atlantic world', these authors insist that historians must stop 'explaining away' the

[8] Catherine Hall, 'Thinking Reflexively: Opening "Blind Eyes",' *Past & Present* 234, no. 1 (February 2017): 254–63. See also: Fiona Paisley, 'Living Empire,' in Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley eds. *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 178–93; Anna Haebich, 'somewhere between fiction and non-fiction: new approaches to writing crime histories', *TEXT Special Issue: Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions: Writing History in the Twenty-First Century, Eds Camilla Nelson and Christine de Matos*, no. 28 (2015): 1–17; Miranda Johnson, 'Writing Indigenous Histories Now,' *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 317–30. and Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

[9] Hau'ofa, 'Our Place Within: Foundations for a Creative Oceania', in *We Are the Ocean,* 93 [80–94].

[10] Luke Clossey, Kyle Jackson, Brandon Marriot, Andrew Redden and Karin Vélez, 'The Unbelieved and Historians, Part I. A Challenge.' *History Compass* Vol. 14 Iss 12 (December 2016): 594–602; Luke Clossey, Kyle Jackson, Brandon Marriot, Andrew Redden and Karin Vélez, 'The Unbelieved and Historians, Part II. Proposals and solutions.' *History Compass* Vol. 15 Iss 1 (January 2017): 1–9; Roland Clark, Luke Clossey, Simon Ditchfield, David M Gordon, Arlen Wisenthal and Taymiya R Zaman, 'The unbelieved and historians, part III: Responses and elaborations', *History Compass*, Vol 15 Iss. 12 (December 2017): 1–10.

supernatural experiences of past subjects and become more curious about the agency of these forces and the influence they have exerted upon past events and individuals.[11] Such approaches necessitate what the authors refer to as a 'true scepticism' which remains emphatically open-minded and self-reflexive in ways that represent, we think, a philosophical framing for Creative Histories in Australia.

While this assertion runs the risk of stating the obvious, most interviewees recognise that although all aspects of historical practice are inherently 'creative', the discipline also has a track record of imposing notions of rationalism upon Indigenous ways of knowing in ways that have denigrated both cultural practices such as language, dance and spiritual ritual and cultural resurgence projects. Reflecting upon the work of south-east coastal Aboriginal communities to reclaim Indigenous knowledges associated with the building of tied-bark canoes, Mariko Smith notes that where there have been settler-colonial disruptions to Indigenous cultural traditions, challenges often arise from those who insist upon assessing these practices according to distorted notions of 'authentic' Indigeneity.[12]

Recognising that the landscape of such debates remains unresolved, we take these speculations about the potential of Creative Histories as our point of departure. We consider examples where bringing conscious creative practice to historical research has already licensed fresh conversations and collaborations in ways that allow for greater flexibility when negotiating the disciplinary demands of empirical history. Might Creative Histories offer fertile meeting points between western and Indigenous history practice, which Jonathan Jones and Heidi Norman both describe as 'two different projects' with 'two different rules'?[13] If so, what is and should be the role of non-First Nations creative historians seeking to collaborate at these intersections?

Our interviews suggest that the notion of Creative Histories has the capacity to expand understandings of *who* is a historian. While the digital revolution has

[11] Clark et al. 'The Unbelieved part III', 8.
[12] Stephen Gapps and Mariko Smith, 'Nawi – Exploring Australia's Indigenous Watercraft: Cultural resurgence through museums and Indigenous communities', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples,* no. 11 (2) (June 2015): 93-4, 99 [87–102].
[13] Jonathan Jones interview by Kiera Lindsey, 23 August 2020; Norman interview.

democratised historical research in ways that have resulted in a proliferation of public, community and family history practitioners, the current contractions of academic history suggest that history-making will continue to gain momentum and influence beyond the academy in ways that involve collaborations with those who do not have formal disciplinary training.[14] Furthermore as 'history and historians have … become a bit of a dirty word or dirty concept' in 'the First Nation's context,' as Smith notes, Creative Histories also has the potential, as Norman suggests, to acknowledge that Aboriginal people have a much longer and 'stronger involvement in creative practices that address the past, than there are Aboriginal history discipline practitioners'.[15] For Smith, for example, who does not have any 'straightforward history qualifications,' but whose work is nonetheless 'very much grounded and embedded in the past', Creative Histories is a useful way of describing her practice in ways that 'push the definition of historian beyond its narrow confines'.[16] Developing new ways of understanding such work is vital, argues Wiradjuri man and self-titled 'archival decolonist', Nathan Sentence, because many Aboriginal people devote their creative practice to working with the painful legacies of the past in the present.[17] If, as Norman observes, 'there is a greater appetite for blackfellas working in creative areas and producing works that are historically-inflected, and in some sort of dialogue with the past and the present, than there are Aboriginal historians', it is timely to consider how these coterminous approaches might not only contradict and contest, but also connect and complement with one another in ways that are assisted by a richer understanding of this term.[18] A year as 'unprecedented' as 2020 has obliged many historians to review the efficacy of their contribution to crucial conversations relating to the systemic

[14] Paul Longley Arthur presents digital histories as 'part of a spectacular new chapter in the "democratic turn" in history-making that is dominating discussion in the history field.' Arthur, 'Saving Lives: Digital Biography and Life Writing', in Joanne Garde-Handen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading eds. *Save As... Digital Memories* (Houndmills, BA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 44 [44–59]. On this linkage between digitalisation and democratisation, see also Paula Hamilton, Paul Ashton and Tanya Evans, 'Making Histories, Making Memories in Difficult Times', in Hamilton, Ashton and Evans eds. *Making Histories* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2020), 5-6 [1–7].
[15] Smith interview; Norman interview.
[16] Smith interview.
[17] Nathan Sentance interview by Mariko Smith, 9 February 2021.
[18] Norman interview.

injustice highlighted by the Black Lives Matter protests. We suspect that Creative Histories may also offer some compelling next steps and solutions here.

All the same, these interviews do raise important reservations. As colonial historian Penny Russell pondered in her interview, 'As soon as you create a sub-category such as "Creative Histories" you are signalling that you think not all history is creative and then you have to decide which history *is* creative and why'.[19] Peter Cochrane and Mariko Smith also note that the term invokes the notion of 'creative accounting' in ways that suggest factual and ethical instability.[20] Clearly, there is more to be done to define (and defend) Creative Histories in Australia—we see this article as a preliminary intervention rather than a definitive statement.

The Interviews: Approach

To ensure this approach acknowledges its intellectual influences and devises appropriate frameworks for further investigation, we interviewed academics who we identified as playing a seminal role in encouraging creativity within the conceptual and actual spaces of the Australian academy, along with practitioners who collaborate with other artists and communities to communicate their research in public media ranging from art installations, museum exhibitions and tours, cultural resurgence projects, creative-non-fiction and poetry.

While Ann Curthoys agreed to conduct her interview with the lead author on air during a radio program in mid-December 2019, the other nine academic interviews were conducted in person, via Zoom or email between October 2019 and April 2020.[21] In alphabetical order, these were Peter Cochrane, Kate Darian-Smith, Bill Gammage, Ross Gibson, Katie Holmes, Grace Karskens, Penny Russell, Peter Spearritt and Alistair Thomson.[22] Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist, Jonathan Jones, was interviewed on Zoom in August 2020, while Zoom interviews with Mariko Smith, Nathan Sentance

[19] Penny Russell, interview by Kiera Lindsey, 4 November 2020.
[20] Peter Cochrane, written response, 4 November 2019; Smith interview.
[21] Ann Curthoys, interview by Kiera Lindsey. 'Glam City', 2Ser, 18 December 2019. https://2ser.com/ann-curthoys-on-creative-histories/
[22] Due to technical challenges associated with the ZOOM interview conducted with Penny Russell, 4 November 2020; a written interview was also produced, 15 September 2020.

and Heidi Norman were conducted in early 2021. We recognise that these semi-formal interviews are not a representative sample by any means, but a purposive sampling of theorists and practitioners who have worked across the areas noted above. We acknowledge that there were many more we could have interviewed (including some we approached but who chose not to speak with us). However, as this paper is about initial frames and designations, rather than conclusive answers, we believe this range offers useful, if qualified, prompts towards a definition of Creative Histories.

Our approach to these interviews changed over time. We sent our first ten interviewees a list of ten questions as well as our initial Creative Histories definition and invited them to make a written response or participate in a recorded in-person or Zoom interview (see Appendix 1: Creative Histories Interview Questions I). Before interviewing each of the First Nations interviewees, we sent them a draft of this article and refined our questions to those focused upon their praxis, attitudes to history and creative histories and its potential to contribute to the decolonisation of the history discipline (see Appendix 2: Creative Histories Interview Questions II). We asked all interviewees to discuss the intellectual, political and social influences shaping their collaborations and what, if anything, was unique to Creative Histories in Australia.

The Interviews: Findings

Like many concepts such as ‘public history’ or ‘historical consciousness’, ‘Creative History’ tends towards the multifarious rather than the specific. Despite the proliferation of Creative Histories, and discussion of its possibilities and limits as a method and approach, a working definition of the term is hard to discern.[23] In the UK,

[23] On discussion about challenges of creative histories, see David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Mark McKenna, 'The History Anxiety,' in *The Cambridge History of Australia*, ed. Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, vol. 2 (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 561–80; Peter Cochrane, 'Exploring the historical imagination: narrating the shape of things unknown', *Griffith Review* 31 (2011): 83-97. 5. See also recent discussion on the ethics of historical speculation and imagination, such as: Donna Lee Brien, '“The Facts Formed a Line of Buoys in the Sea of My Own Imagination": History, Fiction and Speculative Biography,' *TEXT Special Issue: Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions: Writing History in the Twenty-First Century, Eds Camilla Nelson and Christine de Matos*, no. 28 (2015): 1–21; Kiera Lindsey, ‘Indigenous approaches to the past: “Creative Histories” at the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney’, *Australasian Journal of Popular*

a team from the University of Bristol hosted a 'Creative Histories' symposium in 2017 and observed that the diversity of content demonstrates 'how disparate the field is, and the extent to which, even within Creative Histories, practitioners have very different approaches, methods, and objectives'.[24] The idea that history is inherently creative has been further explored by the Bristol team in their recent *History Workshop* article, 'Creative Dislocation: an Experiment in Collaborative Historical Research'.[25]

As we considered how these ideas apply within the Australian context, our team produced a working definition which we then shared with our Bristol colleagues to stimulate discussion about how Creative Histories might differ in each country.

> Australian Creative History definition: An experimentation with form and function, method and medium that pushes disciplinary and generic boundaries for the purpose of problem-solving, politics or greater public engagement.[27]

The Bristol team, who have been mapping the scope and scale of Creative Histories for some time, then responded with their own definition:

> Bristol definition: Working with the archive in ways that experiment with method and medium to push disciplinary or generic boundaries for the

Culture 9(1) (March 2020): 83-102; Lindsey, '"Deliberate Freedom": Using Speculation and Imagination in Historical Biography,' *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Programs* 50 (2018): 1–16; and Penny Russell, 'Almost Believing: The Ethics of Historical Imagination,' in Stuart Macintyre ed. *The Historian's Conscience*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 108–9, who writes: 'However creative, literary, imaginative, moral and politicised history may be, it established a relationship of trust between writer and reader. In that implied contract, history is not fiction: historians make stories, but they do not make them up'. Other discussions include Jerome de Groot, *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions* (Milton Park; New York: Routledge, 2016); David Harlan, 'Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History,' *Rethinking History* 7, no. 2 (2003): 169–92; Stefan Berger, 'Narrating the Nation: Historiography and Other Genres,' in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts*, ed. Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 1–16.

[24] Robert Bickers, Tim Cole, Marianna Dudley, Erika Hanna, Josie McLellan, William Pooley, and Beth Williamson, 'Creative Dislocation: an Experiment in Collaborative Historical Research', *History Workshop Journal*, vol 90 (Autumn 2020): 274 [273–96].

[25] Bickers et al. 'Creative Dislocation', 273.

[27] Australian Creative Histories Roundtable definition, UTS 15 August 2019.

> purpose of crafting the past in ways that allow for deeper truths, aesthetic pleasures and more engaging histories.[28]

Despite our initial collaborative attempts to define the field of Creative Histories and agree on its scope with our Bristol colleagues, writing this article has suggested that the *differences* between these two definitions might be as important as our 'common ground'. First, the political edge in the Australian definition was taken up by many of our interviewees. All four First Nations interviewees expressed a preference for it because the emphasis aligned with what motivates their practice. The focus on problem-solving also resonated with how they use non-traditional sources such as landscape (which Jones, refers to as 'Country', and compares to a 'filing cabinet' with 'drawers and drawers waiting to be pulled open'), as well as Community Elders (who Smith described as 'living archives').[29] These preferences point to interesting, albeit tentative, possibilities about how and why those in settler-colonial societies such as Australia may be particularly drawn to a Creative Histories practice. Indeed, we largely read the turn towards the creative in Australia as a response to empirical

[28] University of Bristol Creative Histories Workshop, 19 September 2019. This definition was developed during a workshop facilitated by Kiera Lindsey, during which the Bristol team responded to the Australian working definition developed 15 August 2019.

[29] Jones interview; Smith interview; Sentance interview; Norman interview. In Australia, the term 'Country' has been used by First Nations' people in reference to their ancient and ongoing links to traditional lands. Nyikina woman, Anne Poelina, describes Aboriginal Country as 'a living ancestral being, one that 'gives life and has a right to life'. Anne Poelina, "Our Nyikina Story: Australian Indigenous People of the Mardoowarra," *Cultural Survival*, June 2013, Michelle Lim, Anne Poelina, and Donna Bagnall, "Can the Fitzroy River Declaration Ensure the Realisation of the First Laws of the River and Secure Sustainable and Equitable Futures for the West Kimberley?," *Australian Environment Review*, April 2017, 18–24. See also Bill Gammage, 'People felt intensely for their country. It was alive. It could talk, listen, suffer, be refreshed. Country was not property. If anything it owned'. Bill Gammage, *Biggest Estate on Earth*, (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2012), 142. The term had gained increasing currency since *Return to Country: the Aboriginal homelands movement in Australia* (Canberra; Government Publishing Services, 1987). See more recently, and in chronological order, Elspeth A Young, Jocelyn Davis and Richard Munro Baker, *Working on Country: Contemporary indigenous Management of Australia's Lands and Coastal Regions*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jon C Altman and Sean Kerins, *People on Country: Vital landscapes, Indigenous Futures*, (Sydney: Federation Press, 2012); Marcia Langton, *Welcome to Country: A Travel Guide to Indigenous Australia*, (Sydney Hardie Grant 2018); Bruce Pascoe and Vicky Shukuroglou, *Loving Country: A Guide to Sacred Australia*, (Sydney: Hardie Grant, 2020).

history's occlusion of Indigenous knowledges, sources and perspectives for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[30]

In considering the notion of Creative Histories, Ross Gibson cites Greg Dening's assertion that 'any history writing that is worth doing or reading is inherently creative', because 'vast tranches of data are being gathered, filtered, synthesised and put to work as evidentiary fuel for the propounding of a persuasive narrative'.[31] However, 'to account for the absences' and 'develop fictive techniques, as well as aesthetic techniques that give rise to propositions worth considering', it is also necessary, he observes, 'to adopt an approach that is premised upon both the utter OTHERNESS of the past' (capitals in Gibson's response), and the importance of remaining openminded and unconventional in historical practice:

> I am not very interested in historical method that delivers an authoritative and conclusively convincing 'last word' on a topic. I'm interested in work that keeps the inquiry endlessly open. … Constant attentiveness to the peculiarities and mysteries of residual evidence; constant scepticism about the implantation of my own worldview on the past; constant respect for the moments of bewilderment that the past generates. In that bewilderment the lessons probably lie. Difference is a teacher.[32]

Such work is, Gibson believes, likely to be 'produced via sensibilities and techniques that reach out past conventional text-bolstered, speculation-averse historiographical methods', and could, he suggests, be usefully thought of as 'Unconventional History-writing'. Gibson's approach has much in common with Jonathon Jones's description of Aboriginal traditions which consciously 'leave the door open' when it comes to working with 'stories that are just fragments now and perhaps not meant to be more'.[33] And yet, as Gibson (who has previously collaborated with Jones) observes,

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[30] Bain Attwood, 'Denial in a Settler Society: The Australian Case.' *History Workshop Journal* 84, no. 1 (Autumn 2017): 24–43.
[31] Ross Gibson, written response to questions, 9 October 2019.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Jones interview.

working so inconclusively is not easy, when 'most history is', he observes, concerned with 'eliminating doubt and proving its own methodological premise'.[34]

For Peter Cochrane, who worked as an academic historian before 'switching to fiction', successful creative practice is most evident in writing that reconciles 'style with subject' and 'poetics with historical vision'.[35] Like Gibson, Cochrane acknowledges that narrative can be highly effective in conveying 'argument by stealth' to allow, as the Bristol definition suggestions, 'for deeper truths, aesthetic pleasures and more engaging histories'.[36] Despite such pleasures, Penny Russell cautions against the assumption that history becomes '"more creative" as it becomes more narrative [driven]'.[37] 'The greatest historians', she qualifies, 'are great because they are gifted creative writers who invent the style that works for the purpose' and conversely, 'historical representation that employs art or drama or fiction may easily be less creative in its interpretation — and even in its delivery than one that sits within the covers of a so-called academic book'.[38] Reflecting upon her own experiences, Russell observed that much of her creativity resulted from pursing 'specific historical problems' and responding to moments of 'serendipity' that led to 'much following of curiosity'. Like the University of Bristol team, she also noted the value of 'creative dislocation'; of 'veering from intended goals' and exploring 'unexpected byways' which sometimes occasion 'a lot of madness to the method'.

Such ideas align with a more recent contribution from Will Pooley, of the University of Bristol team, regarding the two working definitions of Creative Histories cited above. Concerned that these previous offerings privilege motivation over method, he suggested a third definition whereby 'creative histories bring creative practices into conversation with historical research to provoke new methods, develop

[34] Gibson, written response.
[35] Peter Cochrane, *The Making of Martin Sparrow* (Sydney: Penguin, 2018); Cochrane, 'Switching to Fiction', *Sydney Review of Books,* 13 July 2020, viewed 17 November 2020, https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/switching-to-fiction; Cochrane, 'Exploring the Historical Imagination', 90.
[36] Cochrane, 'Stories from the Dustbin', *Griffith Review* 18 (Autumn 2008): 79 [71–81].
[37] Russell, written interview.,
[38] Ibid.

alternative generic conventions, and suggest new questions.'[39] For Pooley, 'Anything does *not* go. Art inspired by history is not creative history. Art in conversation with historical questions is creative history'.[40] Pooley is concerned with approaches and definitions that emphasise one side of this 'conversation' over the other. Much of the 'experimentation and genre-busting' elements of Creative Histories are not, he claims, 'home-grown' within the discipline, but come from a dynamic interplay with many disciplinary practices and creative impulses. As such, he cautions, we need to avoid approaches that simply 'plunder new ideas'.

Although many working within the Australian academy have embraced 'historical imagination', experimented with form, and consciously employed a variety of literary techniques in their writing, we were curious that so many interviewees explicitly acknowledged both Greg Dening and the cultural theories which gained prominence during the 1980s, including the work of scholars such as Andrea Dworkin and Mary Daly, Stuart Hall and Graeme Turner, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi K Bhabha. Several interviewees also observed that the last decade has been shaped by a 'retreat into empiricism' which has done much to discourage experimentation within the discipline. We were also struck by the fact that, without prompting, many of the younger generation of creative historians acknowledged how the senior interviewees had inspired their praxis, which is largely based beyond the academy. By highlighting these and other patterns, we hope to discern broader methodological patterns of disruption and consolidation while teasing out the transforming edges of the discipline and how it might engage with questions about decolonisation.[41]

Exemplars

Our interviewees were invited to nominate elements of their own work and that of others that might reasonably be described as Creative Histories. Of particular interest

[39] Will Pooley, 'Three Definitions of Creative Histories', 19 December 2019, viewed 12 May 2020, https://creativewitchcraft.wordpress.com/2019/12/19/three-definitions-of-creative-history/.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Kate Darian-Smith, interview by Kiera Lindsey, 3 December 2019; Katie Holmes, interview by Kiera Lindsey, 11 December 2019.

was the proliferation of work by First Nations artists and academics nationwide who centre Indigenous voices and stories in ways that subvert the colonial legacies of history practice and Australian society more generally. Here we mention a few exemplars that can be loosely organised according to the categories of space, screen and text, which are the focus of our current project.

In 2019 the Sydney Living Museums commissioned Jonathan Jones to undertake a major art installation to accompany the opening of the newly refurbished Hyde Park Barracks (HPB) on Macquarie Street in Sydney.[42] With its rational Georgian proportions and solid red brick structure, the Barracks maintains a commanding presence in Sydney's Central Business District, and stands as a symbol of Governor Lachlan Macquarie's determination to impose order upon both European settlement and the ancient land of the Gadigal people.[43] Jones's site-specific project, *untitled maraong manaóuwi* included a dramatic installation of red and white crushed stones that were laid throughout the courtyard and merged the image of the emu footprint in situ and as Eora people traditionally depicted it throughout their country with that of the English broad convict arrow.[44] As visitors walked across the courtyard they participated in the erasure of that installation in ways that invited them to consider, Jones explained in his program notes, 'Australia's layered history and contemporary cultural relations' while reflecting upon 'the role of memory and history' in determining 'how and why we preserve sites of cultural significance'.[45] This installation also included a curated programme of performances, workshops, storytelling and Artist's Talks intended to further unpack how certain stories

[42] 'City of Sydney and Sydney Living Museums to install new public art installation', *Australian Leisure Management,* 23 December 2019, viewed 12 May 2020, https://www.ausleisure.com.au/news/city-of-sydney-and-sydney-living-museums-to-install-new-public-art-installation/

[43]Kiera Lindsey, 'Indigenous approaches to the past: "Creative Histories" at the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney', *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 9(1) (March 2020): 83-102; Heidi Norman, '*untitled (maraong manaóuwi)*, Jonathan Jones', *History Australia*, vol 17, no.2 (June 2020): 395–7.

[44] Sydney Living Museums ed. *untitled maraong manaóuwi, 21 February – 15 March 2020,* information brochure.

[45] Ibid., 4.

determine the various ways that places like the Barracks need to be understood as complex sites of 'creation and destruction, remembering and forgetting'.[46]

In his interview Jones expressed his concern with the way western history practices 'deny the landscape,' which he considers fundamental to Aboriginal ways of practicing the past.[47] He also acknowledged that while Aboriginal practices are 'rigid' in this regard because they do not allow for experimentation with that archive, there is, nonetheless, considerable scope to exercise creativity in how the land is experienced and remembered:

> in the Aboriginal model you do have these fundamental building blocks of truth that sit in the landscape, constantly reminding you … you can't go around, you can't go past, you can't ignore them, you can't shield your eye from them, you have to acknowledge them, but its potentially how you move around them, and how you move through, physically move through the landscape that becomes the creative act of remembering.[48]

Jones' creative reconception of the Hyde Park Barracks drew attention to it as a space of complex and contested shared histories in ways that are also indicative of the sort of First Nations-led Creative Histories initiatives described by Sentance, who asserts that if Australia and its history is to be decolonialised, First Nations people must be 'the front-runners in their own projects'.[49] There is nonetheless scope, Sentance believes, for 'shared vision and shared goals' in which non-Indigenous people 'take a backseat role' and contribute because it is 'a good thing to do, rather than for kudos, or material benefit'.[50] For Jones, Ross Gibson is a striking example of someone who does precisely this by working in ways that allow 'the two worlds to do their own thing and then finding the right moments to cross over'.[51]

[46]Ibid., 5-6.
[47] Jones interview.
[48] Ibid.,
[49] Sentance interview.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Jones interview.

Several interviewees cited Grace Karskens' *The Real Secret River: Dyarubbin* project, in which she is working with a team of Darug researchers, educators and artists, as well as linguists, geologists, archaeologists and local historians from the Hawkesbury and Macdonald River region of New South Wales. Their focus is a list of over 170 Aboriginal names for places along those rivers she found in the archives and the act of relocating these geographically in 'the hope they will come back into use'.[52] The project is deeply interdisciplinary in that it involves history, archaeology, linguistics, geology and digital mapping, with the explicit intention of 'recovering the Aboriginal history and cultural/spiritual dimensions of these rivers'.[53] The project's conception is also innately political in that it consciously sets out to 'decolonise historical practice', as Karskens explains:

> Decolonising our practice means more than recognising and recovering Aboriginal history whenever we write Australian history. Our histories need to be researched and written collaboratively with Aboriginal people, particularly when working at a regional level, or dealing with family history.[54]

While Karskens is this project's initiator, her processes have been collaborative throughout, and the intended outputs span media ranging from 'online essays (Dictionary of Sydney), digital maps, a booklet, academic papers', two exhibitions and a suite of academic essays. The research itself will also be used in future training programs, school workshops and dual naming projects. Here is a Creative Histories practice that is working with the archives according to the Bristol definition, but then combining documentary and oral sources, with those associated with country and community, and communicating them via digital, textual and curatorial methods and media. This project is also concerned with surfacing 'deeper truths' about the Darug history of those rivers and actively intent upon great public education and engagement.

[52] Grace Karskens, 'Life and death on Dyarubbin: Reports from the Hawkesbury River', *Griffith Review* 63 (2019): 102–106; Karskens, 'Exploring Dyarubbin', *SL* Vol 12 No. 3 (Spring 2019): 14–17.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

Karskens, in turn, identified the *Living with Fire* project, led by Christine Hansen, Tom Griffiths and Peter Stanley, as a compelling example of Creative Histories due to the way it worked with a community to record their history of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, before producing both a film and 'public-facing book'.[56]

Similarly, Heidi Norman admires the 2006 feature film *Ten Canoes*, directed by Rolf de Heer and Gurruwiling man Peter Djigirr, for how it combined Aboriginal storytelling with filmic technique, using black and white celluloid for contemporary scenes and those in colour for the distant past to signal Aboriginal conceptions of time.[57] In so doing, *Ten Canoes* experimented with what both the Australian and the Bristol team describe as 'method and medium' While this allowed for distinctive 'aesthetic pleasures' as suggested by the Bristol team, it also offered a unique solution to the 'problem' of engaging audiences, who are typically immersed in western notions of linear time, with alternative Aboriginal temporalities.

The above examples refer to art, museum exhibitions, film and digital medias, but there are extensive examples of Creative Histories proliferating textual media. In his 2003 series of poems, *Archive Box*, for example, Tony Birch used 'a call and response' structure to consider 'the voices of the frontier, the coloniser and indigenous' in ways that undermined the authority of the archival documents and institutions which controlled the lives of Aboriginal women living on Victorian reserves.[58] In contrast, Sentance uses humour in his poetry, prose, memes and blogs with the explicit intention of talking about history and racism in playful but 'sharp ways'.[59] Bruce Pascoe's celebrated *Dark Emu* was cited by many for its conceptual creativity, and the way it invites readers to adjust their perspective of explorers'

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[56] Karskens interview; Peter Stanley, *Black Saturday at Steels Creek,* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2013); Christine Hansen and Tom Griffith, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek*, (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012).
[57] *Ten Canoes*, directed by Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr, 2006. On the film's interweaving of time and technique, see Wendy Gay Pearson, '"Once upon a Time in a Land Far, Far Away": Representations of the Pre-Colonial World in *Atanarjuat, Ofelas,* and *10 Canoes*', in Pearson and Susan Knabe eds. *Reverse Shots: Indigenous Film and Media in an International Context* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 149–50 [143–71]; Lyn McCredden, '*Ten Canoes*: Engaging difference', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* Vol 6 No. 1 (2012): 45–56.
[58] Tony Birch, 'The Trouble with History', in Anna Clark and Paul Ashton eds. *Australian History Now* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2013), 241–7 [232–50].
[59] Sentance interview.

journals by just 'a few degrees', so that they might perceive 'a vastly different world'— a world, which he insists, reveals a 'much more complicated Aboriginal economy' than we have previously been encouraged to believe.[60] Norman cited Maria Nugent's work on Botany Bay for the way it creatively 'reads against the colonial archive' and 'into silences' with oral histories and art work.[61] More recently, a collaboration between a Bulgan Warra man, Harold Ludwick, and a non-Indigenous writer, Craig Cormick, resulted in the co-authorship of *On a Barbarous Coast,* which offers a fictional alternative to the 1770 Endeavour Expedition which interweaves First Nations and European perspectives in ways that are both dialogical and disruptive.[62]

Influences

Just as the Bristol Creative Histories team observed a broad sweep of 'radical traditions', intellectual ideas and actual events underpinning the development of a Creative Histories practice worldwide, those we interviewed acknowledged a diversity of influences shaping how and why they combine creative praxis with historical research.[63] Some, like Kate Darian-Smith, believe their thinking about history is partly generational, in that it can be traced to the way social history, feminism and postcolonial theories intersected during the first decade or so of their career. They observe that this mix challenged capital 'H' History and capital 'A' authority, and made their thinking particularly philosophical.[64] For Darian-Smith and several other interviewees, these influences encouraged a degree of relativity that made them particularly receptive to what Gibson described as 'a plurality of "truth stances"'.[65] It was this that led to the sort of interdisciplinary experiments which flourished within academic historical practice for several decades from the 1980s.[66]

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[60] Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the birth of agricultur*e, (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014), 2–3.
[61] Norman interview; Maria Nugent, *Botany Bay: Where histories meet* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005).
[62] Craig Cormick and Harold Ludwick, *On a barbarous coast: what if there was an alternative ending to Captain Cook's story?* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020).
[63] Bickers et al., 'Creative Dislocation', 275.
[64] Darian-Smith, Interview.
[65] Gibson, written response to interview questions.
[66] Darian-Smith, interview; Ross Gibson, written response.

Many of this generation, including Darian-Smith and Alistair Thomson, spent extended periods overseas where they were exposed to cultural studies scholars whose work was not immediately concerned with history, but nonetheless made significant interventions into historical approaches and debates.[67] Such influences can be detected among 'creative historians', like Mariko Smith, who produces work in public contexts such as museum exhibitions which consciously sets out to create 'a platform to multiple voices rather than just a single authority' in order to decentre the whiteness of these institutions and allow for more contestation and 'loose ends'.[68]

Feminist and gender studies were particularly important to Katie Holmes, who was motivated to 'flip the hierarchy of significance' and not only focus upon previously neglected female voices, but, encouraged by historians such as Patricia Grimshaw, also write about women in ways that resisted what Holmes perceived to be a particularly masculine preoccupation with objectivity and nationhood within historical practice at the time.[69] In addition to attending to the individual, intimate and domestic stories of these women, Holmes chose to weave her own subjective reflections into these accounts. She developed a creative, autoethnographic approach which she still uses in her environmental history work today, coupled with issues stemming from her 'internal life' and interest in psychoanalysis. Holmes also notes that some of the most creative history she has produced or admired began with acts of conceptualisation that were innately disruptive, because they sought to respond to subjects, sources and stories in ways that were consciously political.

Ann Curthoys also cites feminist and gender studies in conjunction with post-colonial thinking as crucial to the development of a practice that encouraged her to employ the idea of *ego histoire* (incorporating the author's own life story) in works such as *Freedom Ride*.[70] Darian-Smith, Holmes and Curthoys each observe that when they began using the first-person voice in their work, it was considered highly

[67] Thomson, interview by Kiera Lindsey, 22 November 2019.
[68] Smith interview.
[69] Holmes, interview.
[70] Jeremy D. Popkin, '*Ego-histoire* down under: Australian historian-autobiographers', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 38, Iss.129, (2007): 106–23; Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002).

unconventional in history writing; nonetheless, it proved useful in negotiating their own complex and often shifting subjectivities. Such strategies are now employed by many, including Smith and Sentance. Smith, for example, produces work that is 'very much informed, directed, and guided by her 'Indigenous, or First Nations standpoint' as well as her 'life experience as someone from the Yuin nation … who identifies as female, and has a very multicultural background' that combines 'Japanese heritage, Anglo-Australian heritage, as well as Aboriginal heritage', and therefore 'challenges a lot of people's perceptions … and definitions of Aboriginality just by existing'.[71] However, while younger generations have clearly benefitted from this previous ground-breaking work, they also wrestle with new questions. Reflecting upon the creativity he brings to positioning himself in his museum tours, Sentance observes that even the careful process of positioning can 'recenter' rather than destabilise whiteness in ways that then neglect more pressing questions associated with 'what it means to live on dispossessed and stolen land'.[72]

Although Aboriginal history may be 'a different project' with 'different rules' to the histories traditionally produced within western traditions, as Jones and Norman both suggest, storytelling is central to both in ways that suggest potential intersections and meeting points. As Curthoys recently observed, she has devoted considerable theoretical and academic attention to exploring how history can be, and has been, enriched by both empirical and literary traditions.[73] Karskens' work is also intent upon writing 'seamless and intertwined' narratives that invite readers to explore 'the past's own present'. As she reflects:

> The people I talk to in public lectures, people who contact me about my books, are hungry for true stories. They want to understand the big picture, to stand in the shoes of people long gone, to re-experience the dilemmas they faced, the choices they had to make, the joys and frustrations, the terror, the relief. They want to revisit, to be immersed in lost worlds.[74]

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[71] Smith interview.
[72] Sentance interview.
[73] Ann Curthoys, Interview with Kiera Lindsey 'How to Write History', *Australian Centre for Public History Hour*, 2SER, 22 April 2020.
[74] Ibid.

Story is important to Karskens and others because of its capacity to evoke the past in ways that stimulate both imagination and empathy. It is also, Penny Russell observed, both 'inherent in, and indeed essential to, any act of history writing', because creativity is always required to find 'the most appropriate, most revealing, most engaging voice and style for the task at hand'.[75] However, while some history narratives are predicated upon 'objectivity' in ways Smith considers potentially distancing and depersonalising, Aboriginal storytelling practices are, she claims, typically subjective and interconnected in ways that make the past not only relatable but also deeply grounded in both community and Country.[76] Indeed, our four First Nations interviewees each acknowledged that storytelling, be that in 'song, dance … metaphor' is innately connected to both.[77] For Jones, these storytelling traditions allow for latitude within a set of practices that are otherwise, 'enormously rigid' because they are 'set into the landscape' in ways that 'create this mainframe for the history and stories and knowledge to sort of sit on, or within'.[78] There is, nonetheless, a 'really interesting juxtaposition' associated with this rigidity and the flexibility of 'good storytellers or really good dancers' who, he says, 'take that knowledge and history and then tell it in a really interesting way' which is imbued with both local vernacular and personality.[79]

Reflecting upon the Land Rights Act in NSW, which was set up with 'a masculine orientation towards creating entry-points into the economy' for Aboriginal people, Norman notes that in locations such as Tualladunna in North-western NSW, the reclamation of Aboriginal land has been accompanied by multiple methods of re-telling stories that re-establish connection to Country.[80] Norman also distinguishes between the ways story functions within community and the impulse for Aboriginal 'truth-telling as a cultural … and political phenomenon' which she traces from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in the 1990s and the 2017 Uluru Statement from

[75] Russell, written interview, 15 September 2020.
[76] Smith interview.
[77] Sentance interview.
[78] Jones interview.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Norman interview.

the Heart.[81] In these contexts, she notes, the impulse to tell 'our story' and develop 'a shared sense of history' functions as something of 'a plea' from Aboriginal people to have their historical experiences acknowledged and understood by the broader community with the hope that this will then result in political change.[82]

Although many of those we interviewed trained as historians, some recognised the potency of story such that they preferred to think of themselves primarily as writers. For Holmes, this attribution licences her desire to communicate with a broad audience in ways that satiate her abiding 'love of language' and deep interest in how, and why, we tell stories.[83] Holmes described why she continues to be 'drawn to literary forms' in both her writing and research. Describing stories as 'in the DNA of all culture and intrinsic to our breathing and being', Holmes quoted Rhys Isaac's idea that 'history is the stories we make from the stories we find,' before insisting that 'historians have a crucial role to play as 'story archaeologists' and 'creative writers' who help to 'imagine different kinds of possible futures'.[84] Such work has urgency within the context of environmental histories, where she and others are working with communities to 'encourage the imagining of different types of future'. These alternatives also need to be 'embedded', she suggests, in neglected histories of 'care, stewardship, justice' that empower us to recover these practices in the present and for the future.[85] These comments embody some of the ways that Aboriginal approaches to country, community and story have already stimulated greater experimentation within western history practices in Australia. At the very least, several interviewees share Holmes's view that creativity is crucial for historians because contemporary

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[81] Norman interview. For an overview of the Council's 1990s history, see Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, R*econciliation: Australia's challenge: final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament* (Canberra: Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000). For the significance of the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, see Shireen Morris, *A First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution* (Sydney: Hart, 2020), 37–8.
[82] Norman interview.
[83] Holmes, interview; Darian-Smith, interview.
[84] Holmes, interview, and Rhys Isaac, cited in Alistair Thomson, 'Life Stories and Historical Analysis', in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire eds. *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 102. [101–17.]. More recently Isaac has also been cited in Yves Rees & Ben Huf, 'Training historians in urgent times', *History Australia*, vol 17 no. 2 (2020): 276. [272–92]
[85] Holmes, interview.

culture is now 'at the crossroads' such that we need to draw upon 'all the cultural forms … literary … dance or visual … to chart a better future'.[86]

These comments echo a strong thread of interdisciplinarity that ran through the interviews. It is apparent that in addition to cultural and literary theory, and Dening's influential ethnographic histories, many interviewees have been profoundly influenced by other disciplines and subsets of practice (social history, cultural history and so forth) that emerged during their careers.[87] Some were quite overt about consciously 'cherry picking' such influences. Jones, for example, gleefully describes his practice 'as all over the shop', while Sentance explicitly refers to his approach as 'postmodernist'.[88] In contrast, Smith identifies specific disciplinary influences that include museum studies and visual sociology, and Norman spoke of the 'comfort' she derives from working with historical frameworks as she thinks about causation, 'slippages and disruptions' within the cross-disciplinary contexts of her professional life.[89]

Likewise, Karskens acknowledges the influence of archaeology in her work, and Holmes cites psychoanalysis, while Curthoys, Darian-Smith, Holmes and Alistair Thomson, each outline how oral history and memory studies reconceptualised their thinking about evidence and their work as historians.[90] For Holmes, histories of emotions ignited her interest in the emotional lives of those she interviewed, which in turn led to a deeper awareness of how her own subjectivity could be 'both productive and creative' within this work, as well as its limitations.[91] Darian-Smith recalled the academic scepticism she experienced in regard to the oral histories she conducted for *On the Home Front* (1990); and how this raised important questions about evidence and authority which then coincided with the national events associated with the *Bringing*

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[86] Ibid.
[87] For Dening's especial influence, see Tom Griffiths, 'Greg Dening (1931-2008', *History Workshop Journal* 67 (Spring 2009): 292–6; Meg Foster, 'Drawing the historian back into history: creativity, writing, and *The Art of Time Travel*'', *Rethinking History* Vol 22 No. 1 (2018): 146 [137–53].
[88] Jones interview; Sentance interview.
[89] Smith interview; Norman interview.
[90] Karskens, written response; Holmes, interview; Curthoys, 'How to Write History'; Darian-Smith, interview; Thomson, interview.
[91] Holmes interview.

Them Home Report (1997) and gave discussions about the legitimacy of oral testimony broader political urgency.[92]

Although Karskens is now an academic historian, she began her professional life as a freelancer and has maintained her 'commitment to public history' ever since.[93] Likewise, many interviewees recognised the relationship between creative practice and their applied or public history work, with many specifically acknowledging the work of those who were active with the Sydney History Group at Macquarie University during the 1970s, based within the University of Technology Sydney's Australian Centre for Public History during the 1980s and 1990s, or working within various Professional Historians Associations.[94] Even those interviewees who were less receptive to the utility of Creative Histories as a term, such as Bill Gammage and Peter Spearritt, observed that as their work has been consciously concerned with communicating with a wider public than their academic colleagues, be that via published books and websites, on radio and television, or in museums, it has necessarily involved a degree of creativity and innovation.[95]

Like Jones, Smith also reflected upon the way Aboriginal sources demand creative forms of 'conceptualising and communicating'.[96] Because there are often only selected stories and certain information that can be shared with broader audiences,

[92] Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); *Bringing them home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). Compare also with the NSW Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme process for claiming stolen wages, where historical government records needed to corroborate with claimants' accounts of work in Stolen Generations institutions were often missing or non-existent, so Statutory Declarations formalising claimants' oral testimonies would form the main evidence for some claims.
[93] Karskens, written response.
[94] Darian-Smith places the work of the Australian Centre for Public History (then co-directed by Prof Paul Ashton and Prof Paula Hamilton) in the context of other innovative and interdisciplinary programmes at Australian universities. Darian-Smith, interview. Karskens also noted the importance of both the Sydney History Group at Macquarie University and the Professional Historians Association of NSW as a major force, written response and later email, 4 September 2020.
[95] Bill Gammage, written response to interview questions, 9 December 2019; Peter Spearritt, written response to interview questions, 8 November 2019.
[96] Jones interview; Smith interview.

Elders typically insist that 'knowledge is treated as a privilege rather than a right'.[97] This in turn requires those working with omissions, gaps and silences to develop enticing ways of stimulating audience curiosity and receptivity to alternative ways of thinking. As Norman notes, Aboriginal people have already produced an 'incredible body of creative work that is fully cognisant of the fact that for history, the history of this place to be comprehended, it has to be in a format that is comprehendible … intelligible, or legible, to a wider and popular audience'.[98]

For Holmes, the creativity of her practice lies in the alchemy of 'bringing together all these strands', then finding unique ways to work these with other possibilities offered by histories of emotion and environmental history, her sources and self, to create something distinct.[99] Yet, as many interviewees acknowledged, such work typically involves a high degree of skill and craft, as well as a receptivity to relativity and comfort with uncertainty that is less valued than it was when they began their careers. Indeed, several noted that over the past decade, factors such as the History Wars, funding guidelines and the oft-cited mantra 'publish or perish' have resulted in the discipline undertaking what several referred to as a 'retreat into empiricism'.[100] These elements, coupled with a contraction of the university context has resulted, many suggested, in historians becoming increasingly risk-averse and unwilling to engage in creative experimentation. Nonetheless, we wonder how recent federal policies and the COVID context, might accelerate this process and compel some historians to reorient themselves within the public domain, where that spirit of risk taking is reignited in new ways.

Conclusion: Defining the Australian context?

In this article we have explored three working definitions of 'Creative Histories' and considered how these apply to the exemplars our interviewees cited and, in some cases, produced. We began by acknowledging that creativity, wonder and imagination are each inherent to historical practice, before drawing a distinction

[97] Smith interview.
[98] Norman interview.
[99] Holmes, interview.
[100] Holmes, interview; Darian-Smith, interview.

between everyday and eminent creativity and tracing how 'the cultural' and other 'turns' have been accommodated into the discipline thanks to the efforts of many including those we interviewed. Together, these exemplars and interviews suggest there are many different media, methods and motivations employed by practitioners reflecting upon their position, the uncertainty of their authority and sources, as they conceptualise and communicate their work.

The forces that have stimulated these alchemic interactions include social, political and economic events ranging from anniversaries and protests, to policy initiatives and distinctive episodes associated with the ideological tug-of-war now commonly referred to as the 'Culture Wars'.[102] While many interviewees observe a pattern in academic history over the past decade or so that represents a shift from experimentation to empiricism, it may well be that the continuing contraction of the Australian tertiary sector drives a new focus on public contexts which better accommodates a spirit of experimentation and collaboration. If so, it is likely that the notion of Creative Histories will gain increasing resonance and relevance.

Already, much of the history-making that pushes disciplinary and generic boundaries in Australia is produced by First Nations artists and activists in public contexts. Although these 'practitioners of the past' may not identify as historians, they are nonetheless particularly interested in 'crafting the past' in ways that are intent upon revealing 'deeper truths' and suggesting 'new questions' which connect the past to the present. While these factors correspond with the Bristol definitions, each of the First Nations interviewees nonetheless insisted, albeit in different ways, that their practice is innately political and often explicitly intent upon decolonising not only history but also contemporary Australian society more generally.

Although we agree with our Bristol colleagues that a broad sweep of 'radical traditions', intellectual ideas and actual events underpins the development of a

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[102] Anna Clark, 'The History Wars', in Clark and Ashton eds. *Australian History Now* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2013), 151–66. For cross-cultural perspectives, see Tony Taylor and Stuart Macintyre, 'Cultural Wars and History Textbooks in Democratic Societies', in Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever eds. *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 613–35; Jim George and Kim Huynh eds. *The Culture Wars: Australian and American Politics in the 21st Century* (South Yarra: Palgrave Macmillan Australia, 2009).

Creative Histories practice worldwide, we have tried to determine if there is anything distinctive about Australia's colonial-settler context.[103] For Heidi Norman, who is uniquely placed as an Aboriginal historian frequently collaborating with, and writing about, such practitioners and projects, it is most useful to think of the Australian contexts in terms of 'contestations'.[104] In addition to the 'difference between the metropolis and the colony', she notes

> the contest of antiquity … a contest of environment, of country, of landscape, and environmental loss, and the ideology of progress, … a contest of tradition and modernity that goes with any Australian history… the real challenge in a place like Australia is how limited Australian history has been. It's really not just Aboriginal history, which sort of has a start date in the 1980s in terms of more formal stuff, but Australian history as a standalone area, which is always linked to the Empire. So, what really makes creative histories in a place like Australia is the challenges … the differences in how history is done …

While such contestation stimulates creativity, the nature of these discordant histories and temporalities is something many interviewees considered especially stimulating because it requires them to wrestle with different ways of bringing 'deep time' and 'post-Invasion time' into a conversation with the present.[105] The complexity associated with multicultural and First Nations identities also demand conscious negotiation, Sentance observes, for it frequently stimulates 'a different humour' between 'broader Australian culture' and the 'very specific type of humour' which exists 'among blackfellas' which is consciously disruptive and playful.[106] There are also significant implications associated with recognising country and community as living archives

[103] Bickers et al., 'Creative Dislocation'.
[104] Norman, Norman, '*untitled (maraong manaóuwi)*, Jonathan Jones', 395–6; Norman, Jennifer Newman, Diane Losche and Gillian Cowlishaw, '*First Cow*, a film directed by Kelly Reichardt, based on the novel The Half-Life by Jonathan Raymond'. *History Australia*, *17*(4) (2020): 757–8; Norman, Heather Goodall, and Belinda Russon, ''Around the Meeting Tree': Methodological reflections on using digital tools for research into Indigenous adult education in the networking Tranby project', *Archives and Manuscripts*, Vol. 47 Iss. 1 (2019): 53–71; Norman and Amy Thomas et al. *Black Stories Matter*, produced by Allison Chan, podcast, 5 episodes, 11 November to 21 December 2020. https://impactstudios.edu.au/podcasts/bsm/
[105] Jones interview; Sentance interview.
[106] Sentance interview.

that have maintained their potency and authority, albeit sometimes as fragments, and despite being persistently denigrated by the 'dogmatic secularism' of western epistemologies and ontologies. These elements combine with Aboriginal conceptions of time to challenge narratives of progress and infuse historical consciousness with what Sentance describes as a sense of 'time immemorial' that extends well beyond human history and notions of linearity.[107]

As we acknowledged in our opening, we have chosen here to focus upon the intersections between western and Aboriginal history practices and in so doing neglected other important elements associated with multiculturalism and regionalism that warrant proper consideration. The exemplars discussed, nonetheless, suggest that some of the most exciting history-making in Australia is already predicated upon the sort of 'true scepticism' proposed by the 'Historians of the Unknown', which involves bringing together and remaining receptive to both 'sacred and secular frameworks'.[108] Such practitioners are not only curious about uncertainty and mystery, but also, as Gibson suggests, somewhat unconventional in the ways they strive to remain 'open' to different ways of working and thinking.[109] In so doing, they seek 'to leave the door open' and, as Jones observed of Gibson's practice to allow 'the two worlds to do their own thing until they find the right moments to cross over'.[110]

While such approaches have the potential to heal the deep wounds caused by the systemic denigration of Aboriginal people, practices and perspectives, it may be necessary to expand the definition of who is an historian to ensure Aboriginal approaches and authority receive greater recognition and respect. Given that the notion of 'creative historian' appealed to our First Nations interviewees and 'Creative Histories' provoked Heidi Norman to suggest it might 'provide a pathway' into deeper understanding of Aboriginal approaches to the past, this seems promising.

So, are we now in a position to offer a definition of 'Creative Histories' in the Australian context? Or is this something that requires further nuancing by other creative historians working in different geographies, media and methods? Probably.

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107 Ibid.
108 Clossey et al., ''The Unbelieved and Historians, Part II. Proposals and solutions.', 2.
109 Gibson interview.
110 Jones interview.

In this preliminary paper, we know we have left much untouched. We have not, for example, given much attention to music, theatre or dance, let alone how distinctive geographies and vernaculars produce unique problems, politics and publics. There is considerable scope to expand this enquiry in these and other directions that acknowledge Australia's cultural and geographical diversities. At the very least, we hope this investigation has suggested 'new questions' about the intersections between creative practice and historical research in Australia. While the motivations and implications differ in each definition, all three nonetheless concur that the process of bringing creative practice into conversation with historical research has the potential to push disciplinary and generic boundaries in exciting ways. It may well be, as Norman suggests, that a hybrid of all the three definitions is fruitful, and that some are better suited to specific examples.[111] In opening up discussion on this term, we hope to encourage collaborative conversation and further stimulate creative experimentation about the many ways we currently 'practice the past'.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our interviewees.

This work has been conducted according to UTS HREC NO: ETHC19-4094 stipulations.

Two of the six authors are currently beneficiaries of ARC Funding: DE180100379 and FT140100081

We also thank Dr Shane Greentree for his excellent editorial suggestions.

[111] Norman interview.

APPENDIX ONE

CREATIVE HISTORIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PART ONE

1. Could you talk about some of the ways you think you have been particularly CREATIVE in your history work?

2. What do you think of the term: 'Creative Histories'? Would you like to refine this definition, or offer another description/explanation for this type of work? Do you consider yourself a 'Creative Historian'?

3. What were the specific problems, politics, scholarly, historical and creative ideas that influenced/inspired your work? What was your method and medium and how did you develop it? Did your approach raise fresh methodological or ethical problems, and if so, how did you reconcile these?

4. How do you think this sort of work contributes to 'history', 'creative practice', 'the academy', perhaps even society more generally? What do you see as the most important challenges and opportunities associated with this field?

5. Who was your primary audience? How was your work received within the academy and without? Has reception to your work (or others) changed over time? If so, can you identify some of the conditions at work?

6. Do you think the Australian context for 'Creative Histories' differs from others international environments? If so, what are the Australian-specific conditions that encourage (or discourage) this sort of work? Do attitudes and practices vary across institutions? Sub-genres or specific areas of history?

7. How do you think academic and general public perceptions have changed since you began doing this sort of work? Do you think the Australian academy is more or less receptive than these international contexts? Could you elaborate with reference to national and international scholars and scholarship?

8. We recognise your leadership has been crucial to encouraging other scholars and scholarship. Can you identify and discuss some of the work you have been involved with as a supervisor or mentor and discuss any patterns or points of interest? Please feel welcome to identify up to five researchers you think we should consider in this area (these can be HDR, ECR, established academics).

9. We have noticed an increasing number of mature-aged postgraduate students doing this sort of work in ways that require co-supervisions across history and creative writing. What is your experience of supervising, co-supervising and examining these sorts of interdisciplinary Creative Histories projects? Would you be interested in contributing to a conversation about this?

10. Could you identify one or two Creative Histories projects in Australia or elsewhere that most excite you and elaborate on the way these have engaged with content and/or productively pushed the boundaries of disciplines, genres, the academy or something else?

APPENDIX TWO:

CREATIVE HISTORIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PART TWO

1. Do you identify yourself a Capital 'H' historian or something else?

2. How do you use terms like 'history' and 'the past' in your practice?

3. Who is your work for and how does this shape your creative practice?

4. There is a lot of discussion about the need to decolonise the discipline and practice of history. What do you think about this? Do you think of the decolonising of history as a disciplinary preoccupation or something that needs to be done by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners?

5. Are there any examples from your own work or which you admire by others that illustrates some of the ways creative practice is successfully challenging previous assumptions or understandings of the past, 'history' as a discipline and historical practice more generally?

6. Does your creative practice allow you to challenge assumptions and attitudes? Experiment with new possibilities? Reach new audiences? If so how and what and why?

7. What do you think of the concept of 'practicing the past'? Does this suggest another way of renegotiating some of these perceived problematics?

8. What about 'creative histories'? What do you like or dislike about this term?

9. I invite you to reflect upon three definitions (previously provided) about creative history and how these relate to your own work or those you admire?

10. Do you think there is anything unique about the Australian context and the way you and others are using creative practice when engaging with the past?