

Complicity, Critique, and Methodology

Fiona Probyn-Rapsey

Contemporary cultural texts point towards the acknowledgment of complicity as a starting point for engagement with Others, with the world, readers, and histories that energize them.¹ Here I discuss the critical role that complicity (both as an act and as a concept) plays in drawing out the complex interrelationships between historical pasts and present. In terms of critique, the charge of complicity operates very powerfully as a critical accusation aimed at defeating the convictions of an unknowing text, and as such it has much in common with a deconstructive reading (Critchley). The issues of complicity is increasingly embedded in cultural texts that are curious about the significance of being complicit and complicity-as-being, and therefore might answer “yes, and” to the accusation of complicity.² Given this, it is important to not only “diagnose” complicity but also to rethink complicity as a methodology, as a practice and theory of ethical engagement with others and in relation to present encounters with the past.

Cultural texts, including film and literature, are useful for exploring the possibilities of complicity because they often pivot on representations which include the question of representation—the ethics, politics, and history of giving and taking account of others. Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* (2005), Kim Scott and Hazel Brown’s *Kayang and Me* (2005), and the film *Jindabyne* (Ray Laurence 2006) contain different accounts of what complicity might mean, but each presents it as an important consideration of what it means to live with history and in connection with Others. In placing these Australian texts alongside readings of complicity from literature, law and philosophy I hope to shift critical vocabulary away from seemingly straightforward accounts of resistance and domination towards a more tangled sideways reading of complicity as a condition of relations and encounters between Others.

The last decade in Australia has seen discussions about guilt, shame³ and responsibility⁴ as central to the issue of reconciliation (itself a term which rose to prominence in the early 1990s) between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Given the predominance of these terms, the question of complicity as methodology or as a better term for describing responsibility requires attention. In the 1990s, discussions of guilt in Australia stalled largely on a question of its cathartic productivity (as if quantifiable as part of our gross national product). In his now famous “Redfern Speech” (1992), Prime Minister Paul Keating said that guilt was “not a very constructive emotion” (n.pag). Keating’s speech was the closest that the Federal Australian Government came to saying “sorry” for the events of colonization, just as many other leaders around the world also made public statements apologizing for national traumas, like Clinton apologizing for slavery in the United States of America. It was a speech that called on Australians to recognize the violence of colonization, dispossession, and child stealing, and the still-present legacies of those acts. The radicalism of Keating’s speech, and the ways it was met with accusations of a so called “black armband view” of Australian history, stems from Keating’s call for white Australians (in particular) to own their part in the violence.⁵ Keating points out “the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians.” He goes on to call for the recognition of historical truths: that it “was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and then smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion.” Keating conjures up the image of the Aboriginal Australian as the “poor” Australian, asking whites to “to reach back for the poor and dispossessed” remembering that Australia did provide for “the dispossessed Irish” and the “poor of Britain.” Keating also invites the listener to imagine “how would I feel if this were done to me?”

While Keating rejected guilt as not a “constructive emotion,” for others guilt was central to taking responsibility for the past. Raymond Gaita argues that the fact that we cannot entertain the possibility of putting people on trial for crimes against Aboriginal people means that we have failed to realize the extent of that crime itself: “How can one

say that genocide had been committed, yet only ask for an apology and compensation? How can you think genocide always to be a serious crime, yet find it unthinkable to call for criminal proceedings?” (44). Richard Mulgan’s discussion of apology and reconciliation situates guilt as necessary for the legitimacy of the Australian State. He says that, “acts of atonement and apology all require for their satisfactory completion that the injured party accept the admission of guilt as in some sense wiping the slate clean and marking a new start. Only then can guilt be left behind” (189). Mulgan’s search for non-Aboriginal legitimacy seeks expiation, a washing away, a clean slate, a critical distance between then and now: “The moral horror of the colonial past can only be squarely faced if a moral distance is interposed between the colonisers, who are condemned, and their descendants, who condemn and are thereby exonerated” (192). If this is how guilt and apology operates then it seems not able to account for *present* injustice, *continuing* injustice. Something other than that which can be contained or wiped away must therefore be active.

In Australian debates on responsibility and reconciliation there is also an emphasis on the productive nature of shame. But this too can be contained and confined teleologically to past actions. In her critique of how quickly the Australian Nation was moved from shame to pride, Sara Ahmed points out that “Shame may be restorative *only when the shamed other can ‘show’ that its failure to measure up to a social ideal is temporary*” (emphasis original 107) and that within shame “the transference of bad feeling to the subject in shame . . . can become evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud” (109–10). That is, shame can allow the subject to recognize “bad feeling” in relation to the past but then this can be “balanced” by positive, restorative feelings, such as that called for by John Howard’s “Speech on Reconciliation” (1997). Research based on public opinion surveys gathered together by Goot and Rowse suggests that the majority of Australians have no problem in recognizing past injustice, dispossession and violence (154), but the main points of dispute relate to who and what is responsible and what forms that responsibility should take. For example, questions of form include asking whether responsibility should be undertaken in a

combination of broadly defined Aboriginal complaints, or whether it should be enacted by government initiatives. This debate suggests that it is not so much a matter of telling the history of dispossession and violence of the past in order to achieve contemporary reconciliation. Rather, the focus of these debates should be on formulating what responsibility might look like today. The emphasis on guilt and shame can have a foreshortening effect on historical responsibility, critical insight, and a critical vocabulary. Guilt, shame, and complicity are measured by the extent of their reach, but important differences appear. The difference is in the structural relations that they connote: whereas guilt and shame are vertical, individualized and deep, complicity is horizontal with pervasive breadth—as in a network. The former suggests a chronological relation through time; the latter a condition of being across time itself. Complicity, rather than guilt and shame, describes the network in which Australians are located: a settler colonial state. Colonialism is a structure that reproduces complicity in oppression, rather than merely an event, as Wolfe observes, to which guilt and shame may be confined. In accounts of white privilege and responsibility, the idea of “structure” often surfaces. For instance, Anna Haebich concludes in relation to the Stolen Generations that: “in response to the question: ‘Who was responsible?’ there is the indelible impression of generalised white complicity at all levels, so that it seems naïve in the extreme to point the ‘accusing finger’ solely at government” (287). In her critique of white privilege and Australian feminism, *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman*, Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues: “white race privilege, in Australia and elsewhere, is *structurally located* and it determines the life chances of white and non-white people every day” (52 emphasis added). Janna Thompson argues that injustice (and implicitly also privilege) is transmitted along “family lines” (52), reproduced across generations, through time. Guilt and shame suggest more of an exceptional, one-off act of individual that occasions a holding to account. Complicity is a structural relationship that cannot be expiated fully because it exists in multiple, networked forms. Moreover, I would argue that it also explains, in part, why contradictory ideas about social justice (such as those identified in opinion polls discussed by Goot and Rowse) can be held simultane-

ously by Australians who are “divided,” not just from each other, but also “in their own minds” (171). Complicity highlights the complex involvement of individuals at multiple and connected levels of community, government, and kinship. Seemingly contradictory ideas about responsibility and social justice are embedded in the idea of complicity. Complicity connects us to others, ideas, structures, and not least of all that which we might hope to keep at a distance through critique, through the distance of time, and through apology.

Complicity is commonly recognized as a legal status that draws individual responsibility into line with others or a collective (Kutz 176). It connotes juridical culpability but is also used in the sense of “answerability” and “response-ability” (Oliver 7), rather than guilt for direct actions. The term has both negative associations and means negative associations. In cultural critique these include the observations that postcolonial critics are complicit with global capitalism (Ahmad 364); feminists are complicit with patriarchy (Grosz 342) and that white feminists are complicit with white domination (Moreton-Robinson 11). Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil* situates complicity as a feature of modernity itself: “complicity is not determined by a relation to law but is a moral criterion of judgement” (293). She finds contemporary Western subjects in danger of failing to exercise independent moral decisions and judgements in relation to others: “his [Eichmann’s] inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else” (49). Her definition of thoughtlessness is closely linked to complicity, as well as the sense that the western subject is no longer in command of his own deeds.⁶ Such thoughtlessness might be a factor in relation to Goot and Rowse’s observations, based on Donovan’s opinion poll, that a high proportion of Australians “cared too little about reconciliation to express a view on it” (168). Arendt’s work situates complicity as something that one can escape through the moral imperative of the spectator who can judge (56, 63). In Arendt’s reading the judging spectator is always evaluating critically and is therefore not complicit. Here it is *critique* itself that saves the spectator from complicity with evil, an assumption that does not always hold true. In a

popular use, critics deploy the term complicity in order to distinguish a grey zone from their own black or white side. In these instances, complicity is used as a kind of charge or accusation that is meant to shift the critic over to the so-called other side, where they are as bad as the thing that they critique. In this sense, it traditionally operates as a critical trump card, delivered by the critic as they stand somehow outside the game that they have triumphed over. But in some senses complicity no longer works as a critical trump card. It situates the critic as just another player, her cards being signs of her membership of a community of players all different winners, losers, witnesses, bystanders, participants linked by the possibility of utilizing “responsibility-in-complicity” (Sanders 12), but not necessarily the political motivation to take their own complicity into account.

More recent readings of complicity and different understandings of the role of critique suggest that its very usefulness as a term is that it draws on the inter-subjective nature of being in relation to Others. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida suggests that avoiding complicity is impossible and that the point is to try to avoid the worst:

I am responsible to the other as other, I answer to him, and I answer for what I do before him. But of course, what binds me thus in my singularity to the absolute singularity of the other, immediately propels me into the space or risk of absolute sacrifice. There are also others, an infinite number of them, the innumerable generality of others to whom I should be bound by the same responsibility, a general and universal responsibility. (68)

Structural positions effect the capacity to “do justice” (Butler 621) to Others (but not *all* Others, in their infinite proliferation, see above), and the inability to bracket complicity in relation to particular actions like performing critique means that recognition of complicity is an always already condition of our responsibility to others. Complicity, in this sense, forms the grounds for ethical engagement. Within postcolonial studies, Gayatri Spivak indicates that it is also a position that has yet to be fully realized “in order to act” in a resistant and “response-able” way

(370). Complicity highlights the individual's proximity to the problems of colonialism in this case, rather than separation from it.

In his study of the relationship between South African intellectuals and apartheid, Mark Sanders argues that complicity means, "not washing one's hands but actively affirming a complicity, or a potential complicity, in the 'outrageous deeds' of others. Once cultivated, this sense of responsibility would, in the best possible worlds, make one act to stop or prevent those deeds" (3–4). Taking his cue from the discussion of moral responsibility in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which introduced the term "little perpetrator," Sanders points out that the "projection of complicity through an owning of the 'little perpetrator' is, however, the ethico-political response available to anyone" (4). His reading of complicity in the work of South African intellectuals finds that complicity represents a "foldedness" with Others:

Whenever justice is invoked, as it always is, in the name of a specific cause, there will be the risk of doing injustice. This aporia imposes itself not only when the intellectual assumes a notional complicity with the perpetrator of crimes but also when he or she affirms a 'foldedness' in human-being when particular loyalties threaten to bar the general realization of that foldedness. (6)

Sanders found in his study of the intellectual and apartheid a paradox that "while supporters [of apartheid] disavowed or sought to limit foldedness with the other, opponents, though striving to minimise acting-in-complicity with the agents of apartheid and its policies, tended to acknowledge, affirm, and generalize responsibility in complicity" (9). That is, in order to contextualise responsibility it was necessary to acknowledge complicity, a proximity rather a distance to the thing that is opposed: "opposition takes its first steps from a footing of complicity" (Sanders 9).

Accounting for legal accountability in actions that "fall outside the paradigm of individual, intentional wrongdoing" (1), Christopher Kutz argues that turning to complicity is a way of dealing with shifts in structures of collective work life, business and legal networks, all

of which challenge atomistic versions of autonomy and agency. Kutz argues, “with respect to the collective harms that threaten our global age, all individual actions are essentially insignificant” (15). He argues that while it might “seem odd to turn for help to the counterideal of complicity,” he finds that complicity “teaches us what it means to act together, when acting together goes badly” and that the “hidden promise of complicity is the conception of community upon which it draws: a world where individuals shape their lives with others, in love mixed with resentment, and in cooperation mixed with discord. Such a world is no utopia, which suggests that it can be made real” (259). Guilt and expiation, proverbially washing one’s hands by pointing an accusing finger—these are utopian, and do not consider how we are all touched differently by complicity. These differences are important and while complicity may draw on a community it is crucial to stress that this community raises the question of community itself, deferring it, or at least rendering it a “fractured community,” as Linnell Secomb describes. In other words, complicities are not equivalent; being complicit as a colonizer, as migrant, as Aboriginal, as man, woman, queer, classed, these are all differently negotiated and mobilized. For instance, Kim Scott’s consideration of his descendant’s complicity has different political meanings to the complicity considered by Cassandra Pybus in *Community of Thieves* (1991). Both, however, situate complicity in terms of response-ability.

Kate Grenville’s portrait of Australian settler culture in *The Secret River* (2005) draws on complicity to contextualize its critique of that culture. Its account of William Thornhill and his wife Sal draws an image of how complicity with historical injustice lies at the heart of the domestic, the familial and the everyday. In the Hawkesbury Region of New South Wales, William Thornhill participates in a massacre of Aboriginal people whom he believes are responsible for the death of a neighbour. Thornhill’s participation, consent, and apparent free will are represented in paradoxical terms where at first there is the banal evil group: “the men closed in around him and there was a sound of agreement from many throats. It was not the voice of any one man but the voice of the group, faceless and powerful” (297). Thornhill’s participation is then individu-

alized agency, the reader is told, “he was choosing it, of his own free will” (301). At the massacre site, Thornhill is lucid *and* paralyzed by the horror of what occurs and this expresses itself in the failure of his fingers to do what is ordered of them: “he was aware of issuing orders to his finger to pull back on the trigger, but nothing happened” (307). While Thornhill appears split between himself and the group of men “closed in around him,” he is also split in relation to his non-responding hands and his mind’s witness. The simultaneity of this apparently individualised agency within the collective highlights the shifting/shifty nature of complicity.

In the novel gender and race intersect in complicitous relationships. Sal, the white wife of William Thornhill, expresses the disquiet of the accomplice: “*I hope you ain’t done nothing*, she said at last. *On account of me pushing at you*” (emphasis original 323). That is precisely the justification that motivates him to join the throng of white men who were bristling for revenge attacks: “unless the blacks were settled, Sal would leave Thornhill’s Point. It was as stark as that” (298). Sal’s response to Will is for him to expiate the guilt, without acknowledging what it was that he had done, “here Will, give your hands a wash, she said. Her voice was ordinary enough, but she would not look into his face” (323). What remains is unspoken between them, his guilt and her complicity now form the grounds of their shared history. The reader learns, “whatever the shadow was that lived with them, it did not belong just to him, but to her as well: it was a space they both inhabited. But it seemed that there was no way to speak into that silent place. Their lives had slowly grown around it, the way the roots of a river-fig grew around a rock” (324–25). The washing-of-hands does not provide any expiation; his guilt seems only one half of the story when the whole domestic scene is constructed around the dispersal of the murdered. The complicity of Sal and her refusal to acknowledge the massacre in favour of being-at-home marks the grounds of her responsibility as central to her “at-home-ness.” Grenville draws this image of complicity as the routine, banal evil that Arendt identifies as contemporary society’s trap. It also figures as the “failed historicity” of postcoloniality (Ahmad 10), a past that is not, cannot, be fully breached.

Jindabyne (2006) is similarly structured along gender and racial lines. Based on the Raymond Carver short story, “So much water so close to home,” this film details the consequences to three white men who, not wishing to interrupt their fishing trip, do not report finding the body of a murder victim. In *Jindabyne*, the murdered woman is Aboriginal and the ramifications of the men’s inability to respond with a sense of urgency or outrage appeals to the great silence of the domestic/national scene (as in *The Secret River*) over colonial violence. The local newspapers report the men’s delay in reporting the crime and the men themselves become the subject of intense scrutiny. The words “white hate crime” are scrawled across the garage where Stewart works. The policeman points out the stupidity of their actions but does not prosecute, choosing instead to merely shame them in his office. Kane’s reaction is to protest that it was not him that murdered the girl, as if that constitutes the limit of his responsibility. The film focuses on Kane’s wife, a white woman Claire played by Laura Linney, and her attempts to make sense of her husband’s seeming lack of reaction to the violence. She attempts to make amends for her husband’s complicity and her own, for through her association with him she too is implicated. Claire seeks out an acknowledgement of that complicity, to make him good again, and to make the recent lapse seem a temporary, individual moment of transgression, though the chilling nature of his silence and moral torpor that allows it, suggests that it is not so easily confined to a single event as much as a structure of silence, non-recognition. Two of the men evade blame by arguing that they are simply being scapegoats for the real murderer. Another simply leaves town with his family. Rocco punches Stewart in defence of his own Aboriginal girlfriend, a punch that might be read as an attempt to break free of his association with Stewart and the “white hate crime” that joins them. Claire visits the Aboriginal relatives of Susan, the murdered girl, tries to raise money for her funeral, attends the funeral, and finally convinces the white men to do so also. While it appears that their attendance at the funeral and their apology brings *them* relief (they are reunited), their presence is received in different and opposing ways by Susan’s relatives and friends. Their presence relieves the whites from a crushing affiliation with the murderer and

white hate crimes, but it leaves the question of ongoing responsibility open. It defers expiation, a moving forward into pride. This indicates that where complicity is concerned there is always a question as to how responsibility can be “taken” and who measures it. This is because an account of “our” responsibility is never “ours” alone (Probyn 39).

In both these texts, *Jindabyne* and *The Secret River*, the complicity of white Australian women is significant. It substantiates the points raised by Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s critique of white women in relation to Australian discourses of race and gender; white women are complicit in maintaining blindness to racial privileges attached to whiteness. Moreton-Robinson links the complicity of white women in Australian imperialism to the shape of contemporary Australian feminism. She states, “white feminists benefit today from the historical events that shaped and continue to shape the nature of power relations between them and indigenous women” (69). While I agree with most of the points that her reading raises, I take a different view of their/our complicity and what comes of it. In her assessment of white feminist academics who teach about race and cultural difference in Australia, including critical whiteness studies, Moreton-Robinson writes, “there is no imperative for them to acknowledge, own and change their complicity in racial domination” (148). Rather than there being no imperative, I argue that the imperative is the recognition of complicity. That is, awareness of complicity is, can be, the very starting point of white feminist engagement with racial domination. At the launch of Moreton-Robinson’s *Whitening Race* in August 2005, Wendy Brady raised the issue of complicity as that which colonialism *wants* in its white settlers—it wants us to become complicit with it. In other words, the failure of our interventions, our resistance and rupture is something which colonialism seeks. But if complicity is structural as well as a matter of individual intentions, then it is not something that can be easily sidestepped. If it is thought of in terms of a condition of response-ability then it is also not a matter of avoiding it, but speaking it, as Moreton-Robinson and Brady’s work suggests, and Sanders, Spivak, and Derrida also suggest. White feminist responses to complicity are varied. There is outright rejection, desertion of a fraught field of inquiry, a refocusing on cultures of masculinity, as well as confes-

sions and inquiries into whiteness and racism itself, where the writer effectively owns this history personally, biographically, and politically. All of these responses tell us something about the nature of complicity and its capacity to drive intellectual work and relationships with others. My response here is to think through what might be salvaged from complicity, how it conditions responsibility. This is, as I hope to have shown, a response to thinking about complicity not simply as something to confess in the hope of expiating, moving then to pride, but as a structural aspect of the continuing effects of living in a settler colonial country like Australia.

Kim Scott and Hazel Brown's *Kayang and Me* (2005) raises the question of what to do with ancestors who helped the whites and imprisoned their own people, in this case other Noongars in Western Australia. Brown is an elder of the Wilomen Noogar of Australia's West Coast. She is also Scott's auntie, or *Kayang*. The book is based on what Hazel *Kayang* [Hazel-auntie] has told Scott about their family history. Brown positions the complicity of their relative, Bobby Roberts, as both his fault and the fault of whites simultaneously:

I hate the white man who put the gun in my grandfather's hands, so they could get control over Noongars, and gave him the chains, so he could chain them up . . . He was happy, they gave him leggings. But they weren't even proper leggings, only half of one leg. But he was too silly to know that. (47)

Scott is impressed by his *Kayang's* capacity to "confront, rather than avoid unpleasant facts" (48) when he admits, "I'd prefer all my ancestors to be heroes" (81). He points out that "it's a problem for us: what to make of such an ancestor?" (48). Scott takes the opportunity to think through his ancestor as "brutal, opportunistic," "isolated and fearful" with "no alternative to cooperation" (53) and as someone who "saw himself as their equal" (53) with an "appreciation of innovation and strategic thinking" (54). Taking account of Bobby Robert's complicity operates here as a way of understanding not only Scott and Brown's different relationships to the past but also complicity as a part of colonialism: "I think indigenous experience can encompass both pride and

shame, and can even include complicity in processes of colonisation” (Scott and Brown 208). Moreton-Robinson’s work also indicates the simultaneous, but differently weighted “resilience, creativity and strength of Indigenous women and the *continuity* of colonialism in discursive and cultural practices” (31 emphasis added).

Scott’s understanding of complicity in colonization raises the question of the conditions necessary for complicity to be admitted, spoken of. To raise the issue of complicity raises the spectre of disloyalty, not only that of the ancestors. For white readers, Aboriginal complicity in this context might be read as compromise, shared history, and even a welcome point of commonality. But it is just as likely to be an invitation to “decolonise the mind” (Brady and Carey 270). In Scott’s account, the recognition of complicity with whites is precisely not an invitation to share this history as a point of commonality: “after a shared history overwhelmingly characterised by the damage done to Indigenous people and to the land, I don’t think it’s right to suddenly talk sharing and caring” (257). Instead, the ramifications of this “shared history” that includes complicity is to call for “some sort of ‘gap’ between indigenous and non-indigenous societies, a moratorium, a time of exclusion to allow communities to consolidate their heritages” (258). Scott clearly points out that complicity, though forming part of that “shared history” is not the grounds for more “sharing and caring” but rather a condition for separation.

Grenville’s approach to white complicity in *The Secret River* supports this. The novel suggests that white complicity manifests in a kind of caring-and-sharing humanitarianism that is also a pointed reminder of ongoing complicity. In the years after the massacre, Sal attempts to “look after” one of the survivors of the massacre, Jack, a witness and a victim of the shootings. Sal gives him food, old clothes and a “patch of ground for him, fenced it nicely, and gave him tools and a bag of seed” (327). Grenville writes, “Sal had taken him [Jack] on as something of a project. A penance, it had occurred to Thornhill” (327). Jack rejects their offerings. A “civilising” project is “penance” in the Thornhill’s terms. But penance does not include a recognition of Jack’s claims to the land “*This me, he said, My Place*” (329 emphasis original). If responsibility is assessed in Jack’s terms as his claims to the land, to sovereignty,

then Sal and Thornton's humanitarianism, where they share food and clothes and give him a patch of ground to farm, constitutes their on-going complicity. Here the living together, the sharing and caring in relation to patch of ground, food and clothes, dramatizes incommensurability in proximity.

While in this essay I bring Grenville's work and Scott's work together, I do not do so in order to suggest that they and the histories they write are joined by complicity but that complicity also stands between them. Complicity demonstrates that we are circumscribed in attempts to do justice to *all* Others, and yet awareness of complicity also adheres at the centre of the desire to *do* justice. While I have pointed out that the thing about complicity is that it points to a critic's proximity to colonialism rather than separation from it, this is not to say that therefore the critic gains proximity to all Others through her/their mutually registered complicity in colonialism. They may well be further separated by it, rather than joined together in a kind of community of the complicit. This follows Ahmed's discussion of an "ethical communication" that necessitates "a certain way of holding proximity and distance together: one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across" (157).

Complicity operates in these cultural texts to structure a relationship to the past that connects with the present. Complicity functions differently to guilt in that it has a different relationship to history and teleologies of progress. Again, Derrida's work is useful to contextualize this, as well as Wendy Brown's account of hauntology in relation to politics without history, without conviction. In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida reminds us that the spectre appears at the death or the end of something, to remind us of its ongoing presence (4). Rather than being scared of ghosts, Derrida harnesses their potential in terms of hauntology—the thing that represents the demise of something also signals its continuation in a different form. Complicity articulates such a phenomenon; the failure of expiation and guilt to do justice to the structure of colonialism and the limited guarantees of critique. Complicity takes on a spectral presence reminding us of links with the past and the present and responsibility to the future. Complicity, like hauntology, can in this sense

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be described as a methodology. Wendy Brown describes hauntology in the following terms:

The phenomenon remains alive, refusing to recede into the past, precisely to the extent that its meaning is open and ambiguous . . . To be haunted by something is to feel ourselves disquieted or disoriented by it, even if we cannot name or conquer its challenge. Thus logic of haunting is thus a logic in which there is permanent open-endedness of meaning and limits of mastery. Paradoxically, these features of haunting will turn out to constitute the site of intellectual and political agency within 'hauntology.' (152–53)

The capacity of complicity to disorient and unsettle also constitutes its political agency.

Complicity can disable oppositional conviction oriented critique because of the complex interrelationships it brings about, the feeling of not being able to move because of the ramifications of always treading heavily in the problem itself, rather than stepping beyond it. Complicity can also drive oppositional critique, in an ongoing project to alter the grounds of political affiliations with whiteness, class privileges, gender bias, and so forth. The metaphor that drives this is movement itself, or, more specifically, progress; the idea that political activity has to be seen as progressive or to make progress in order to be valid. Brown argues that the loss of progress under hauntology allows a sitting still and a percolation of new and alternative stories that are sometimes disavowed in the relentless desire to keep moving forward, away from the problem that has been identified. Taking stock of Nietzsche's statement that "convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies" (483), Brown takes issue with the rise of conviction in place of the loss of reason. She writes, "transcendent ideals in politics—convictions—are, precisely refusals to allow history and contingency to contour the existing dimensions and possibilities of political life. In this sense they constitute repudiation of politics, even as they masquerade as its source of redemption" (94). As a methodology, complicity does not assume that the "solution" will also not come up with a whole host of problems. Complicity suggests that

critical and cultural horizons are not settled (Probyn-Rapsey n.pag.). In postcolonial feminist terms this means that, “the future is a question mark and a mark of questioning” (Ahmed 183). In contemporary Australian culture, the future of shared histories and reconciliation also remains a question mark and a mark of questioning that is motivated by the spectre of complicity.

Notes

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- 2 See also Drucker for her discussion of the ways that contemporary art admits its complicity with popular culture and in doing so bypasses or imbibes much modernist art criticism.
- 3 See Mulgan, Gaita, Augustinos and LaCouteur, Williams, and Probyn.
- 4 See Goot and Rowse.
- 5 Historian Geoffrey Blainey is credited with introducing the term “black arm-band” in 1993. His view was subsequently taken up by PM John Howard in 1996 and again in 1997.
- 6 Thanks to Charles McPhedran for highlighting this link in Arendt’s work between thoughtlessness and complicity.

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