

Free Way: The Hume Highway as a Spatial Narrative of Nation

Australia's most used road, the Hume Highway, is often dismissed as a conduit between Australia's two most populous cities: Sydney and Melbourne. Indeed, one tourist website has gone as far as to describe the road as nothing more than 'a quick boring route'. Characterised by linearity and mobility, roads inscribe actual and cultural space with order, purpose and meaning. By thinking of the road as a spatial narrative that consists of multiple acts of traversing, we can trace the process through which previous trajectories have inscribed meaning onto the road. As drivers, we may also think of ourselves as readers and writers of these spatial narratives. Applying this theory to the Hume Highway, this paper argues that roads not only occupy an important place in the imaginary and everyday life of Australians, they also offer a dynamic way of reflecting upon our national self.

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*Only the road ahead is true. It knows where it is going: we go too.*¹

THE ROAD TO THE IMAGINARY

Many of our roads began as native paths that were appropriated by explorers and settlers, then rapidly reinforced by pastoralists and posties. They were sites of drama and action where swagmen could wander and bushrangers delivered their charismatic and often brutal forms of justice. Federation writer Banjo Paterson's description of our early roads conjures up the rough and ready spirit of a nation coming into being:

*There is nothing very granite-like about the roads in Australia, worse luck. Ruts and loose metal, sidelings and sand drifts, washed out creeks and heart-breaking hills.*²

For Henry Lawson, the man who described the railway lines as tethering 'The Mighty Bush', our roads were places where life's completeness could be experienced:

*The roads are rare to travel
And life seems all complete
The grind of wheels on gravel
The trot of horses feet*³

Our roads were masculine spaces, places of adventure, created by nation-builders and enjoyed by lovable rogues such as Waltzin' Matilda's Jolly Swagman. Such roads, however, were also sites of escape and release. In her re-reading of our 'real' national anthem, Anne Summers suggests that although Australians have championed the swagman as the underdog, this character could also be thought of as a wayward, licentious male drifter, licensed to roam beyond the civilising forces of responsibility and matrimony.⁴ Far from women—'God's Police'—and the law, our roads were also sites of lawlessness where men could escape the moral obligations of society and the domestic closure of home.

And yet the trope of road has always been inextricably linked to the notion of home. Like the beginning, middle and end of a narrative structure, road and home appear interdependent and coterminous. They define and determine, complement and compel each other. 'Home' provides 'the road' with purpose, direction and closure, while the road offers entrance to and escape from the claustrophobic confines of 'home'.

While the road/home couplet is in no way exclusive to Australia, road and home do regularly participate and precipitate each other in our literature, as suggested in the opening lines of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*:

*A cart drove between the two big stringybarks and stopped. These were the dominant trees in that part of the bush, rising above the involved scrub with the simplicity of true grandeur. So the cart stopped, grazing the hairy side of a tree, and the horse, shaggy and stolid as the tree, sighed and took root.*⁵

White began his novel on the formation of nation by tracing an unformed spatial narrative into a clearing where his everyman character—The Man—builds a home and begins a family. The book tracks the generations issued from The Man as a way of recounting a story of nation. It is an epic literary narrative that begins with the temporary closure of a spatial narrative, a significant Australian novel where the relationship between home and the road reflects our restless quest for settlement.

Similar to the way in which a reader longs for narrative closure but suspends this pleasure through the twists and turns of the narrative, the road is a site where home is longed for, just as home has often been a place where the road is romanced. Linear and preoccupied with progress, the narrative and the road both demand mobility and transformation. Perhaps this is why writing and travel share similar vocabularies and characteristics:

Journey, journal. Navigator, narrator. Punctuation. Pit stop. Reversals. Roundabouts. Detour. Deviation. Trajectory. Forward momentum. Plot. Pace. Drive.

Indeed, narratologist Peter Brooks' theory on the 'erotics' of narrative release and closure could be equally applied to the relationship between road and home:

It is this play of forward momentum and ultimate closure, aligned respectively with Eros (the pleasure principle) and Thanatos (the death drive) that structures the "erotics" of narrative ... [t]he paradox of the self becomes explicitly the paradox of narrative plot as the

*reader consumes it: diminishing as it realises itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making.*⁶

Substitute the reader for driver and the narrative for the road, and Brooks' description of the pleasure principle and the death drive provides a meaningful way of thinking about the role of the road in our imaginary, cultural, historical and everyday life. Home may provide us with narrative beginnings and endings, but 'the motor force' of the pleasure principle and the death drive 'make of the textual middle', that is, the road, 'a highly charged field of force'.⁷ Indeed, according to Brooks:

*We are driven to read because of our drive to find meaningful, bounded, totalising order to the chaos of life; however, that drive for order is most fulfilling after the detours or dilations that we associate with plot. If the order of closure comes too soon it can feel like a short-circuit, as if we were cheated somehow.*⁸

The narrative and the road represent our quest for meaning, home and closure, but this meaning can only be achieved by temporarily resisting closure. It is 'narrative desire' that drives us towards meaning, closure and home, but the same desire that simultaneously fuels our restlessness and our need to quest.

Repetition and re-reading are also important aspects of the narrative experience, because the act of return and reiteration reinforces the 'desire, power and danger of storytelling'⁹ and allows for the discovery and rediscovery of meaning.

Drawing on Freud's theories of transference, Brooks suggests that the act of storytelling can also be understood as 'repetition compulsion' where the wound of a traumatic tale is passed on in the act of sharing it with others. Such stories can be understood as frame narratives that offer therapeutic release by allowing the storyteller to acknowledge that 'the past is indeed past'. As past, it may now be incorporated 'with the present, so that the life's story can once again progress ...'¹⁰

VISION SPLENDID

The application of narrative theory to a methodology that sees the road as a spatial narrative consisting of multiple acts of traversing provides a way of contextualising our everyday experiences on the road. As drivers, we

can also think of ourselves as readers and writers of our spatial narratives. The act of traversing these roads represents a way of actively inscribing order, purpose and meaning onto our actual and cultural space. In retracing these narratives we might reinforce or rewrite earlier traversings. We may follow these roads for meaning, but we might also inscribe them with new codes of meaning.

For Australians, the road has long been an attractive medium for the exploration of national identity. The metaphor of the road has allowed us to enjoy a sense of forward momentum as we retrace past trajectories and attempt to understand our present. It is an actual and an imaginary site of narrative desire: a metaphor for our restlessness and our need to find home. It is a site where our feelings of unsettlement are licensed and legitimised and where we can travel towards meaning as we struggle to create place. As if the road itself could be followed over the horizon in search of the past, present and future of the real Australia ...

Our spatial narratives contain complex and layered codes of meaning that were created through an original act of traversing, then retraced and reiterated by later traversings. One of the most effective ways of engaging with these meanings is by consciously retracing a specific act of traversing, such as the road's original 'coming into being'. Such a retracing allows us to engage with the road heuristically and hermeneutically. It is also an act of narrative repetition that allows experiences of loss, displacement and trauma to be revisited, reworked and even released. But where to start? Which act of traversing?

For narratologists, the 'highly charged text' of the narrative is made so precisely because of the metaphorical power of its beginning and end. Endings and beginnings are related because they contain a set of meanings that are developed, detoured and deviated from in the narrative. These narrative beginnings serve as metaphors that contain codas, refrains and clues that permeate the main text and fuel our momentum. For our narratives to achieve closure, these codas require resolution.

Because so many of our roads began as 'native paths' that were appropriated by explorers, many of our spatial narratives contain traversings and stories that have been pushed to the margins of white settlement. As settler society expanded and the paths became tracks, then roads, and eventually highways, those original acts of appropriation and marginalisation were reiterated until these stories have been almost entirely erased.

By consciously retracing the process through which a road ‘came into being’ we may identify codas or refrains that inform the main text of the road as spatial narrative. Greater understanding of the initial creation and later acts of reiteration can tell us much about the road’s subsequent place in our national imaginary. In the act of retracing this traversing, we may also be able to re-incorporate ‘that which has been pushed to the side of the road’ and margins of these narratives.

Such acts of revisiting and retrieval are like Freud’s theory of transference and repetitious storytelling, in that they allow for therapeutic closure. Such ‘closure’ might then also allow for the emergence of more complex and possibly shared narratives. To explore these ideas, this theory of the road as spatial narrative is applied to Australia’s most used road, the Hume Highway.

THE HUME HIGHWAY

Of all our roads, the Hume Highway is celebrated as Australia’s ‘most important road link’.¹¹ Its 894 kilometres cut a dash through some of Australia’s richest pastoral land and connect our two most populous cities, Melbourne and Sydney. Each day over three thousand semi-trailers thunder along the Hume, while annually well over ten million passengers trace its curvilinear arcs, stop at its designated rest areas or negotiate one of its many bypasses.

Because just about everyone who lives in Melbourne or Sydney has ‘done the Hume’, almost everyone has a story about it. They can recite the names of towns along the way. They did the road as kids, squirming in the back seat as Mum or Dad drove the long kilometres. They did it again as a teenage rite of passage: ‘doing Sydney with their mates’, or ‘going down to Melbourne to check out the bands’. Later they will do it again with their own kids squirming in the back seat. It is a migratory route for Melbournians chasing the Sydney sun, an escape route for those wanting to spend time in the flat grey calm of Melbourne.

The track that once wound back to ‘an old-fashioned shack’ in Gundagai is now Australia’s most used road. Similar to its own dual carriageways separated by median strips of native shrub, the Hume Highway’s history runs alongside and sometimes merges into our national narrative. It is punctuated with national icons such as Ned Kelly and the Dog on the Tuckerbox and contains many signature moments in our formation and development, such as the exploration and illegal settlement of Victoria.

Its dramas include stories of the gold rush, bushranging and the often-violent tensions between the Irish and the British. Small towns along the way still host the ghost town remains of postwar soldier and migrant settlements and testify to Australia’s propensity to push its problems, quite literally, to the side of the road. The story of the Hume dramatises the transformation of Australian society through the introduction of the motor car and highlights the fact that our population is, more than ever, south-eastern, coastal and urban. Containing so many themes, this stretch of road provides a fascinating way of retracing a narrative of nation.

PREVIOUS APPROACHES

While there are at least five written histories of the Hume, all of these tend to use the evolution of the road to chart the expansion of settlement. They are, on the whole, local histories that focus upon the punctuation of place upon the side of the road, rather than the road itself. Little consideration has been given to how the distinctive features of the road might inform the way we read and write such a history. In short, the road is a means not an end.¹²

As a distinctive genre, road history occupies an interesting place in Australian historiography. One of the world’s great road historians, MG Lay, is an Australian engineer who developed an interest in road history ‘as an escape from the day job’.¹³ Lay ran the Australian Road Research Board, or what later became known as ARRB Transport Research, before joining VicRoads in 1989 as a director. During this period, and when he was awarded international scholarships and teaching positions, Lay’s interest in historical non-fictions increased. He combined his extensive engineering knowledge with traditional historical research to provide comprehensive narratives on specific roads throughout the world as well as within Australia. While Lay’s work serves as the ultimate road compendium, and is particularly illuminating in terms of identifying patterns of social change, he does not attempt to ‘read’ the road as a narrative that inscribes meaning onto space.

In contrast, Paul Carter’s 1987 essay on spatial history, ‘The Road to Botany Bay’, suggests that the relationship between space and culture is so significant that acts of colonial exploration and mapping can be thought of as ‘writing’ space and culture into being.¹⁴ Carter sees these acts as traversings that create place by inscribing culture onto space. What remains after acts of exploration are reports, journals and maps

which ensure that the creation of place and spatial narrative is reinforced through literary devices such as naming and narrative. For Carter, exploration inscribes meaning through the creation of literary and spatial narratives that operate within the dual spheres of cultural and actual space.

Interestingly, Carter uses the metaphor of the road to describe the process of retracing and interpreting these literary and spatial narratives. He proposes that such acts of retracing provide an alternative to a type of Australian ‘imperial history’ which was uncritical in its celebration of white settlement. According to Carter, the legitimising impulses of these national narratives could be effectively challenged by emphasising the improvisational nature of history, storytelling and travel. Indeed, Carter argues, the act of writing spatial history should be characterised by the same open-endedness and sense of exploration that define the road. It is not surprising, therefore, that Carter’s invitation to engage with spatial history employs precisely this metaphor:

Such spatial history ... must be like a journey, exploratory. It suggests certain directions in historical texts, leaves others for others to explore. Certain historical characters loom large; others remain beyond the horizon. But like a journey it opens up the possibility of going back, of turning a private passage into a road, a road reaching more places than the traveller ever imagined.¹⁵

The association Paul Carter makes between the temporal and written narratives of history and the spatial narratives of exploration is significant in the context of Australian road history and its methodology. By suggesting that the act of retracing spatial narrative could assist with the recovering of ‘that which had been pushed to the margins’ of our formation narratives, Carter provides us with a new way of thinking about our consumption of, and participation in such narratives.

While my ‘tracing’ and ‘retracing’ of the Hume Highway attempt to read the inscriptions of the road’s ‘coming into being’ by drawing upon Carter’s practice of hermeneutical engagement with colonial texts, an interest in the contemporary status of these cultural inscriptions in the ‘here and now’ requires the mobilisation of other methodologies.

PRAXIS

By comparing the ‘coming into being’ traversing of the road with the road in the ‘here and now’, this theory explores the relationship between the road’s past and its present. Having identified codas and refrains that illuminate the road’s narrative beginning, I track the contemporary status of these tropes. In doing so, I observe the extent to which these initial inscriptions have been reiterated and consolidated or reworked and transformed.

From Hume and Hovell’s 1824 expedition literature I have identified two narrative refrains or tropes which provide a way of thinking about the road’s ‘coming into being’. The first of these—‘Intrusion’—refers to the explorer’s act of claiming and re-configuring distinct Aboriginal countries into one homogenised ‘Interior’ through acts of textual and actual marginalisation. The second refrain—‘Tug of War’—describes the way in which the rivalry between explorers Hume and Hovell inscribed a masculine class feud onto the space that was to become the Hume Highway. This tug of war inscription further marginalised the land’s traditional owners by overshadowing the initial drama of intrusion with a conflict concerned with white male opportunism.

While this tug of war was initially inscribed onto the ‘Interior’ by Hume and Hovell, it was rapidly reinforced from 1836 onwards by illegal settlers who followed in the footsteps of the explorers. In reiterating Hume and Hovell’s original inscription of masculine class rivalry and participating in the illegal settlement of Port Phillip, these men simultaneously became participants in another tug of war: Victoria’s push for independence from the NSW colony. That the achievement of independence in 1851 was followed by the development of democracy in 1854 says much about the way in which this tug of war served the needs of its key protagonists—to the exclusion of those not immediately involved such as women, the Chinese and Aborigines.

The contemporary status of these two refrains—Intrusion and Tug of War—is explored through an examination of the impact of Native Title and Cultural Heritage Policy upon the Hume Highway, as well as a reading of the Hume’s grammar, syntax and signs, observed during a recent road trip. By comparing the ‘coming into being’ with the ‘here and now’ of the Hume’s spatial narrative, we may investigate the process through which previous inscriptions and codes of meaning have been reiterated or rewritten. Such acts of repetition or reworking say much about our past and present as well as the ways we consume, participate or resist our shared narratives in the present.

COMING INTO BEING

Intrusion

In the past two decades, exploration literature has inspired a rich and diverse discourse of critical re-readings that have sought to place these texts in a range of cultural, historical, literary and theoretical contexts. While this 'reading' is indebted to these works, it attempts to engage with the exploration literature of Hume and Hovell's 1824 expedition by tracing the spatial narrative of the road through the expedition's literary narratives.

Throughout two key texts of the expedition, Hovell's (1824/5) *Remarks on a Journey from Lake George Lat.35°5' Long – towards Western Port* and Dr William Bland's edited version of Hovell's day book (1831), *Journey of Discovery to Port Phillip, New South Wales; by Messrs. WH Hovell and Hamilton Hume in 1824/5*, references to the traditional owners are kept predominantly to the footnotes and parentheses. While Hovell's original commentary smacks of naive admiration of the noble savage, the techniques Bland used in editing Hovell's expedition day book six years after the expedition further relegated the inhabitants of the land to the actual and textual margins of this narrative.¹

By marginalising anything that contradicted the cartographic

'One of the most telling examples of the use of footnotes and parenthesis to marginalise 'the Indigene' in these texts occurs in relation to 'a native path' that bears 'the impression of the feet of a considerable number of natives, including those of women and children'. In addition to Hovell's brief observation that 'here we saw, that it was only very lately, that the Natives had passed up the river, in the direction [*sic*] we are going' Hovell, *Remarks*, November 2 1824, Bland edits this text back and then adds to it a two-paragraph footnote that distinguishes a native footprint from that made by a kangaroo and a white man. In doing so, Bland positions the Indigene somewhere between civilised man and its local fauna, and reinforces the notion that native paths are there to be appropriated to serve the needs of colonial explorers

² 'In every direction, the grass is on fire, and by what we can see by their Signals one, to the other, their different fires, the trees which have been barked and occasionally comeing [*sic*] across their tracks, I think they must be very numerous. At all events they never shew themselves to us.' Hovell, *Remarks*, Entry: 25 November 1824 provides an example of the 'stalking Indigenes' that undermine

trope of the blank page awaiting inscription, and infusing the text with the type of anthropological objectivity expected of the explorer journal genre, it is likely that Bland's editorial techniques were designed to legitimise Hovell's expedition narrative. In his attempt to secure this authorial authority, however, Bland's version of the 1824 expedition in fact further destabilised what had already become an uncertain narrative, following the realisation in 1828 that the explorers had mis-navigated and mis-narrated their southernmost destination, confusing their final end point, Corio Bay in Geelong, with Western Port in Port Phillip Bay.

The appearance of yet another narrative twenty years after the event—Hume's controversial *A Brief Statement of Facts*, further complicated the expedition narrative by bringing out of the margins the testimonies of the ticket-of-leave men who had accompanied the original expedition. In writing *A Brief Statement of Facts*, Hume's motivation was to usurp Hovell as the leader of the expedition and assert himself as the man that opened up Victoria to the colony. By drawing upon the testimonies of the ticket-of-leave men who had accompanied the expedition as well as letters of support from Major Mitchell and Charles Sturt, Hume contradicted Hovell and Bland's previous accounts and recast Hovell as an incompetent coward who was scared to cross rivers or palaver with native groups. Through these testimonies Hume simultaneously positioned himself as the authentic Australian explorer who used native bush craft to 'read the land', relate to his sable 'brethren' and achieve significant national goals in the face of great adversity.

Together these three versions of the Hume's 'coming into being' spatial narrative create a series of divergent, crisscrossing and contradictory traversings that refuse to be unified into a single authorial narrative. Consequently, my rewriting of the Hume Highway's 'coming into being' creates a spatial page that attempts to represent this complexity. The notion of 'double linearity' describes the way in which footnotes mirror the relationship between the intruders and intruded upon within this contact drama. Just as 'the natives' of Hovell's day book journal 'stalk' the expedition party through the trees and provide the explorers with a constant sense of otherness and discomfort, the footnote of the 'spatial page' undermines the authorial certainty of the so-called meta-narrative by reminding us pictorially that the explorer's traversing was an act of intrusion and marginalisation.²

Textually, the footnote of the spatial page also refers to the explorer's act of 'footing it' and 'noting it'. It not only highlights the fact that

exploration and history share epistemological origins, it also reveals the legitimising function of the footnote within traditional historical methodology. By retrieving ‘certainties’ from the past and stabilising what is, in fact, precarious and uncertain, the historian has often used the footnote to suggest fact and authorial objectivity and conceal both subjectivity and intention.

The spatial page uses the contradictory multiplicity of voices of the footnote to ‘intrude’ upon, destabilise and contradict the meta-narrative of such history.³ While the footnotes of the spatial page of contact history are still positioned at the bottom of the page and in ‘the margins’, other possible presentations of the spatial page include dividing the meta-narrative and footnotes into parallel columns so that the page mirrors the dual carriageway of the modern road.

In exploring this multi- and intertextuality I am attempting to spatially re-position the marginalised, challenge the legitimising impulses of traditional historical methodology and offer an alternative way of engaging with the competing narratives of Australia’s contact history. The notion of double linearity creates a pictorial metaphor of the spatial page as a road and serves to remind

Hovell’s narrative of the expedition. Hovell’s editor Bland frequently edits out or adds further ‘gloss’ to Hovell’s reflections of Indigenous presence and contact. Compare Hovell’s *Remarks*, 4 November 1824: ‘The Native appears to be numerous; in the course of the day, their fires were seen in different directions, and their huts or camps (which are constructed in the same manner as those in the part of the country which we inhabit) have been frequently met with; they were several times hailed, but could not, although they replied, be induced to approach’, to Bland’s reworking of the same entry: ‘the timber being so very thick, where we now are, is where we heard the Native last Evening, and having called to them, when we discovered they were so near to us, they answered us two or three times, but made off as soon as they found we were Whites instead of Blacks’.

³ In my rewriting of this narrative I have drawn on all three texts but have usually chosen the account I consider most interesting. To underline and even undermine my own subjectivity, the footnotes include commentary from the other texts if this account contradicts other versions of events or adds further ‘spice’ to what I consider important actual or textual

us that although Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians ‘occupy’ the same actual space, we are yet to share the same cultural spaces.

The act of rewriting this traversing is to read between the lines of all texts, highlight the relationship between margin and meta-narrative, and write a new narrative that is specifically focused upon the road as spatial narrative. As such this spatial narrative is not a simple formation of history, but a series of contradictory narratives and counter-narratives that reveal the complexity of the cultures that inscribed their meanings onto what is now the Hume Highway.

Tug of War

The Hume Highway’s ‘coming into being’ was also informed by a controversial ‘tug of war’ between the Australian-born explorer Hamilton Hume and his expedition partner, the British-born sea captain William Hovell, Hume’s senior by eleven years. On several occasions when the expedition party met a major river crossing, Hume and Hovell broke into furious dispute. If Hovell suggested turning back to Sydney, Hume would stubbornly swim across the river—rope between his teeth—while Hovell sat on the bank ‘sulking’.

According to Hume and Hovell historian AEJ Andrews, ‘all went well’ during the expedition, ‘when both leaders arrived at the same decision, but when they did not, Hume went his way leaving Hovell to make the compromise’¹⁶ Such antagonisms between the pair often involved infantile feuds such as the infamous frying-pan incident:

I recollect Mr Hume and Mr Hovell having a dispute about which course we were to travel after we came in sight of [sic] the Snowy Mountains. After some wrangling they separated each going his own

moments. This practice highlights the subjective act of writing history. Many of the textual moments included involve contradictory commentaries that occur as a result of three different writers asserting their legitimacy in response to particular challenges. For example, Hovell fails to mention any conflicts with Hume, but frequently refers to ‘the Natives’ whose invisibility concerns him. Bland tends to edit Hume into the role of guide and to ‘gloss’ Hovell’s commentary so that it is more objective, while Hume’s *A Brief Statement of Facts* undermines Hovell by recounting fights and examples of cowardice through the testimony of the ticket-of-leave men.

course. Before they parted they had a row about who was to have the tent: they were going to cut it in two, but Mr Hume let Mr Hovell have it. Then they quarrelled about the frying-pan and broke it in pulling at it⁷

The frying-pan tug of war exemplifies the animosity between the two men that led Hume to publish *A Brief Statement of Facts* in 1855. This publication inspired a feud that continued well into the 1870s, in the form of vitriolic public letters and acerbic pamphlets, and was resolved only through the death of Hume and the rapid immortalisation of Australia's 'first local son and explorer'.¹⁸

While Hume and Hovell were equal partners and financiers of the expedition, initial newspaper reports in 1825 assigned Hovell's name with precedence. Hume took exception to this, but it was not until 1853—when Hovell made a solo appearance at a Foundation Dinner in Geelong and suggested that a memorial be erected in his honour at the Murray River near Albury—that Hume finally took action.

In contrast to the 1820s, when Hume had been forced to 'take a back seat' to Hovell, by 1855, when Hume published *A Brief Statement of Facts*, the Australian-born explorer was able to successfully usurp Hovell as expedition leader. While Hovell's camp made numerous attempts to defend the aging sea captain's reputation, the tide of public opinion had turned in Hume's favour and by 1872 the ex-Governor of Victoria, Charles LaTrobe, wrote to Rusden:

There is no portion of your pamphlet that has given me greater pleasure than your vindication of Hamilton Hume, to be the real head and heart of the expedition overland which he and Hovell took in 1824–5, and entitled as such to all the credit accruing from the adventure. Captain Hovell could never be considered from first to last but as a drag upon it. I am sure that no bushman could come to any other conclusion.¹⁹

The shift in Hume and Hovell's public profile between the 1820s and 1870s can be understood in the context of the dramatic transformation of class relations in the colony during this period. At the heart of the rivalry between Hume and Hovell were class tensions between old world/new world, Exclusivist/Emancipist, Stirling/Currency Lads that were also at the heart of what *The Edinburgh Review* described as

a 'baneful atmosphere' in the colony during this period.²⁰ During these turbulent times a new class of 'respectable' men began to emerge, as men from previously impenetrable class boundaries began to challenge each other over issues of rights and representation.

Colonial historian Kirsten McKenzie draws a connection between this new class and the development of Australian democracy. For McKenzie, this emerging class benefited most from this turmoil because they were able to mobilise new strategies concerned with language, legislation and respectability. In contrast to previous acts of class resistance, expressed through peasant uprisings or aristocratic pistol duels, these men

built up their claims to political representation through mutual association, economic endeavour and the defence of reputation. In the push for representative government, the links between good name, fair fame and credit had political resonance.²¹

By examining Hume and Hovell's 'tug of war' literature in the context of these larger social tensions, we can see how the explorers' tug of war epitomises the class rivalry that would result in the illegal settlement of the Port Phillip District. Defence of reputation, a desire for proper representation and proof of respectability as demonstrated through mutual association with Major Mitchell and Charles Sturt can all be detected in Hume's *A Brief Statement of Facts*. As such, this document—written in 1853 and published in 1855—is very much in keeping with the spirit of Victorian democracy that was drafted by a constitutional subcommittee in 1854.

Not only did Hume 'open up' Victoria through his act of 'discovery', but his successful negotiation of previously dismissive colonial class structures suggests that he performed an emblematic role during this period of dramatic class transformation. By thinking of Hume in this manner we can understand why the British sea captain William H Hovell fell from grace, and why what was known as the 'Great South Road' or 'Sydney Road' eventually became known as the 'Hume Highway'.

Australian democracy has often been celebrated as the creation of opportunity by those and for those previously excluded by the rigid class structures of the NSW colony. A retracing of the Hume Highway's 'coming into being' spatial narrative suggests that this democracy employed its own exclusionary impulses. Beyond the legal boundaries of

the Nineteen Counties of the NSW colony, early overlanders and settlers created opportunities for themselves through illegal acts of possession and dispersal. While this new democracy created opportunities for the previously excluded, it further excluded and marginalised those beyond both the class structures of the NSW colony and this emerging democracy. Indeed, while the traditional owners of the land were at least nominally protected by the legal obligations of the NSW colony, the early settlers who pushed beyond the policed frontier were without legal obligations, and therefore accountable only to themselves.

In retracing the traversing of the Hume's 'coming into being' it is apparent that the beginning of this spatial narrative was characterised by an exploratory act of appropriation and intrusion. This intrusion pushed the traditional owners to the margins of this narrative and homogenised their distinct countries into one claimed 'Interior'. From the late 1820s onwards, however, a tug of war within colonial society inscribed onto the road a drama of masculine rivalry that was based upon white self-interest and expressed through acts of lawlessness, which further excluded and marginalised these traditional owners. As this class rivalry reached critical mass with the settlement and independence of Victoria, the tug of war refrain of this narrative was inscribed and reiterated in a way that simultaneously overshadowed the previous drama or refrain of intrusion.

THE HERE & NOW

Two distinct practices are used to track the contemporary status of the refrains of 'intrusion' and 'tug of war'. Firstly, the impact of Native Title and Cultural Heritage Policies upon the road is examined through government reports and community interviews; and secondly, observations of the road's distinct grammar, signs and syntax are observed from a recent road trip along the Hume. As research of the 'here and now' is still in process, this article offers some initial findings and reflections.

Since the Environmental Effects Act of 1978 and increased funding from the federal government's New National Highway Program, VicRoads has depended upon Environmental Impact Statements and community consultation to ensure that their road designs meet a wide range of community needs, including those of Indigenous communities whose traditional country includes sections of the Hume Highway. During the development of the Seymour Bypass in 1982, the first archaeological surveys in the area of the Goulburn River identified



FIGURE 1 The Hume Highway in the 'here and now'

several Aboriginal artefacts including a midden and canoe trees. As a result of these findings, the road's design and direction were adjusted. In 1990, at the site of one of Victoria's first massacres near Faithfull's Creek, research identified a former corroboree site, which resulted in a shift in the alignment at the Balmattum Siding Road.²²

While these examples document positive advancements in the restoration and rewriting of the Hume's spatial narrative, a recent interview with VicRoad's Environmental Officer Chris Reeve suggests that, up until the mid-1990s, such recommendations were usually the result of scientifically motivated research. In most instances, VicRoads' environmental and archaeological studies occurred without community consultation, and Indigenous 'relics' were credited with historic and scientific value rather than cultural significance.²³ Indeed, as late as 1996 priority was placed upon the archaeological value of such relics.²⁴

According to Reeve, the minor impact of Native Title and the emergence of Cultural Heritage Policy have been integral to traditional-owner groups playing a more active role in the design and development of the road. While native title claims exist on almost all major freeways in Victoria, there has been none along the Victorian corridor of the Hume—with the exception of the unsuccessful Yorta Yorta claim, which included sections of the freeway from Euroa to outside Benalla. This is probably

because, as Tony Birch puts it, those most in need of Native Title are least likely to achieve it, due to the difficulty of proving a continuous relationship with the land after extensive periods of estrangement.²⁵ This would suggest that because the Hume was one of the first overland trajectories in Victoria, its Indigenous inscriptions were also some of the first to be erased. In other words, the ‘tug of war’ refrain erased the previous coda of intrusion.

In contrast to Native Title Legislation where traditional owners lack the power to resist the construction of infrastructure on Crown Land, Cultural Heritage Policy involves a seven-step process and consent must be obtained from traditional owners before a road is built. Victorian amendments to the Cultural Heritage Act provide for:

*blanket or automatic protection for all ‘relics’ including sites, artefacts and human remains (prior to 1834) relating to the past Aboriginal occupation of Victoria, both before and after the arrival of Europeans. All Aboriginal relics are protected by the provisions of this Act regardless of whether they have been formally recorded or are located on Crown or freehold land.*²⁶

Cultural Heritage Policy has also resulted in a shift in Reeve’s original duties. In contrast to the 1990s when his position was exclusively devoted to the intricacies of Native Title legislation, his current role in 2004 is concerned with ‘community consultation, on site visits, the development of protocol and the drafting of ‘broad agreements’ between VicRoads and traditional owners.’²⁷ Where Native Title has failed, these new consultative processes represent efforts on behalf of government departments such as VicRoads to consult with community stakeholders—although, as Reeves acknowledges, these new consultative processes also recognise that failure to appropriately incorporate traditional owners into the democratic process can expose VicRoads to costly delays in the development of major road projects.²⁸

In the case of Native Title along the Hume, the refrains of ‘intrusion’ and the ‘tug of war’ suggest that Australian democracy continues to legitimise white rights at the exclusion of those already pushed to the side of the road and to the actual and textual margins of our national narratives. In contrast, the new consultative processes and protocols developed by VicRoads in response to Cultural Heritage Policy exemplify some contemporary attempts to renegotiate and rewrite earlier acts of marginalisation.

While the refrain of ‘intrusion’ is renegotiated in the ‘here and now’, the ‘tug of war’ coda may also have shifted, so that those once excluded by white democracy now participate in their own acts of rivalry and exclusion. Indeed, Reeve observes that the development of these cultural heritage policies has also resulted in the development of disputes between several traditional owner groups concerning traditional boundaries.

VicRoad’s attempt to address the historical act of intrusion has complexified Hume and Hovell’s construction of a homogenised interior. As Indigenous communities engage in a tug of war about traditional boundaries and attempt to re-inscribe Indigenous meaning upon cultural and actual space in the here and now, previous inscriptions of white intrusion and tug of war face the possibility of being—at least temporarily—overshadowed. The retrieval and re-inscription of such meanings represents a new type of double linearity, for it is not simply the past that is inscribed onto such space, but a past/present where the past is retrieved in a way that is meaningful in the present. These acts of re-inscription are sensitive to the difference between actual and cultural spaces, and as such they represent attempts on behalf of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to occupy the same actual space, while acknowledging that such spaces are in fact culturally distinct.



FIGURE 2 The Hume Highway in the ‘here and now’

The implications of these findings warrant further reflection, particularly in terms of the way meaning is retrieved and reinscribed by traditional owners. Much can be said, for instance, about the relationship between oral and written history and the spatial narrative, and the difference between white linear travel based upon notions of arrival and discovery, and Indigenous travel which emphasises remembering and return. These considerations are explored within the scope of a wider research project. However, to return to the theme of traversing, I will conclude with some observations made during a recent road trip of the Hume.

Today the Hume is recognised as our Federal Flagship Freeway. In the 294 kilometres of the Victorian corridor alone it contains 158 kilometres of dual carriageway bypasses, 26 interchanges and 59 bridge structures. At both ‘ends’ of the Hume in Sydney and Melbourne, once convoluted exit and entry points have been transformed into streamlined designs that demonstrate our engineering prowess and the value contemporary Australia places upon temporal and spatial efficiency. Reflecting upon this, the proprietor of the Tarcutta Pub for over fifteen years, Derek Hammond, observed:

We are slap-bang in the middle of the Hume here. Right between Melbourne and Sydney. Once upon a time it used to take six hours to get to Sydney. Now it takes four. I haven't been to Sydney for years, because it used to take so long. But now really it's just up the road. It feels like time or space is shrinking.²⁹

Hammond's comments seem to mourn the passing of an era when the road was experienced in ‘real time’. A time before ‘the bypass’ when the road was characterised by the punctuations of place, and the track wound through places of national significance such as Kelly Country and Gundagai. Now, it seems, the road is committed to conquering its temporal and spatial constraints, as if the fast-tracked road doesn't want to remember.

While the members of the 1824 exploratory expedition travelled along appropriated native paths and were made uncomfortable by an invisible presence that followed them through the trees of an unknown ‘interior’, the modern driver/reader can ‘zoom’ along duplicated corridors and dual carriageways. There is no smoke to obscure their way, no presence to distract or create a sense of disquieting otherness.

The modern freeway is built for speed and efficiency but, in minimising the twists and turns, deviations and delays, one wonders if some of the inherent pleasures of this spatial narrative have also been reduced. In buying time, have we lost national memories that remind us of our contradictions? And what does it say about us, that this spatial narrative of nation is now described by a tourist website as nothing more than ‘a quick boring route’?³⁰

CLOSURES & OPENINGS

As we drive along our roads, the kinds of narratives we experience depend to some extent upon our ability to read and write them. By consciously retracing these narratives we are able to determine the extent to which we implicitly reiterate or rewrite them. Acts of driving can then become acts of interpretation. They can help us understand our restlessness and our need for home. Perhaps this is what Mark Mordue meant when he wrote:

It's something I've been thinking about for a long time. The Australian road and our experiences on it. The way we venture into this nation by bitumen and dirt to find out about ourselves, by accident as much as intention and whether such journeys map something irreconcilable or wide-open to us. Or some strange mixture of the two?³¹

By retracing the status of ‘intrusion’ and ‘tug of war’ along the contemporary Hume, I am attempting to engage with what Brooks has described as the therapeutic function of frame narratives. By retelling this formation story, I want to gauge the extent to which the traumas of the past have been or can be incorporated into our present. I want to know if it is possible, as Mordue suggests, to find another way of approaching something that is both irreconcilable and wide open to us?

The national significance of the Hume Highway as spatial narrative is amplified through the act of consciously retracing and rewriting the original act of traversing in the ‘here and now’. We can see how order, purpose and meaning were originally inscribed onto our cultural and actual space, and in observing these changes, we may also begin to consider how we might participate in the reading and writing of our future narratives.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Judith Wright, 'Sanctuary', *Two Fires*, Angus and Robertson, Melbourne, 1955.
- ² AB Paterson, quoted in MG Lay, *History of Australian Roads*, third edition, Melbourne Australia Road Research, Vermont, 1984, 4.
- ³ Henry Lawson, quoted in MG Lay, *History of Australian Roads*, third edition, Melbourne Australia Road Research, Vermont, 1984, 5.
- ⁴ Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1975.
- ⁵ Patrick White, *The Tree of Man*, Viking Press, United States, 1955, 9.
- ⁶ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Vintage, New York, 1984, 52. Also cited in Dino Felluga, 'Modules on Brooks: On Narrative Desire', *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, November 28 2003, viewed 20 March 2004, www.perdue.edu/guidetotheory/narratology/.
- ⁷ Brooks, 70.
- ⁸ Brooks, 75.
- ⁹ Brooks, 75.
- ¹⁰ Brooks, 98.
- ¹¹ VicRoads, *Construction of the Hume National Highway: Craigieburn to Wodonga*, Submission for 1995 Institution of Engineers, Australia, Engineering Excellence Awards. Entry Code. C30. Kew, 1995. 1. Also in VicRoads, *The Hume: Building a National Highway Across Victoria, 1960–1994*, Kew, Victoria, 1994, 3.
- ¹² These local histories include: Rae Beresford, *Up and Down Sydney Road: The Romance of the Hume Highway*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1958; Rosemary Boyes, *The Hume Highway: A Potpourri of Stories and Scenes, Today and Yesterday*, Mt Eliza Press, 1978; Warren Denning, *The Road to Canberra: The Story of a Highway*, Australian Publishing Co, Sydney, 1947; Jean Field, *Grey Ribbon to the Border*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1973; B Searles, *The Hume: Australia's Highway of History*, NMRA, 1980. During a recent meeting in Gunning NSW with Michael McGirr—whose 'biography' of the Hume Highway, entitled *ByPass: The Story of a Road*, was published by Picador in August of this year, we discussed the ways in which other written histories of the Hume have focused upon the towns along the Hume, rather than the Hume itself. Keen to avoid this, McGirr used a recent traversing of his own to tell the story of the road. This involves a bike trip he and his wife made from

Gunning to Melbourne. McGirr employed a similar structure in his first book, *Things You Get for Free* (Picador 2000), which uses a journey he took with his mother to explore issues of relationship and intimacy.

- ¹³ Max Lay, email correspondence with author, 15 August 2004.
- ¹⁴ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, Faber and Faber, London, 1987.
- ¹⁵ Carter, 'Introduction', xxii–xxiii.
- ¹⁶ AEJ Andrews (ed.), *Hume and Hovell 1824*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1981, 23.
- ¹⁷ Henry Angel's testimony in Hamilton Hume's *A Brief Statement of Facts*, documented in AEJ Andrews, 291.
- ¹⁸ Although this phrase appeared in many of the newspaper obituaries to Hume, it was in fact incorrect. The title of first-born explorer belonged to WC Wentworth, the 'Currency Lad', who resisted the Exclusivists' stranglehold on the colony by co-editing Australia's first free press, *The Australian*, and creating a fraternity of Emancipists known as The Australian Patriotic Association.
- ¹⁹ Charles La Trobe's letter to GW Rusden, a portion of which was published by JJ Brown in *The Yass Courier*, 24 May 1872, 2.
- ²⁰ *The Edinburgh Review*, January 1828, 94–7.
- ²¹ I am indebted here to Kirsten McKenzie's comparative reading of the relationship between class and masculinity in Cape Town and Sydney in the 1830s: Kirsten McKenzie, 'Of Convicts and Capitalists: Honour and Colonial Commerce in 1830s Cape Town and Sydney', in *Challenging Histories: Reflections on Australian History, Australian Historical Studies*, 2000, 199–222.
- ²² VicRoads, *The Hume: Building a National Highway Across Victoria, 1960–1994*, 21–4. Faithfull's Creek, which sits between Wangaratta and Benalla, was named after one of the first overlanders, William Faithfull, who brought stock to Euroa from Sydney in 1838, tracing parts of what is now the Hume. In April of that year a party of some eighteen men in the employ of George and William Faithfull were out searching new land to the south of Wangaratta. In the vicinity, or possibly on the present townsite, of Benalla, a large number of Aboriginals attacked the party's camp. At least one Koori and somewhere between eight and thirteen Europeans died in what became known as the Faithfull Massacre. Local reprisals continued for a number of years, resulting in the deaths of up to 100

Aborigines. The reason for the attack is unclear, although some sources claim that the overlanders took shots at local Aborigines and generally provoked them. It also seems that they were camping on a hunting ground. It was also at Faithfull's Creek Station that the Kelly gang cut the telegraph wires before holding up the National Bank at Euroa. See Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998.

- ²³ Christopher Reeves, Environmental Officer/Native Title, Cultural Heritage and Stakeholder Consultation Officer, at VicRoads, interview with the author, 8 April 2004.
- ²⁴ VicRoads, *Guidelines for the Conduct of Archaeological Surveys*, VicRoads, Kew, 1996. Prepared by Gary Vines, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West. In 2003 this document has been reworked as the new *VicRoads Cultural Heritage Guidelines 2003*. It contains similar policy information but now also outlines clear consultative procedure, including the employment of Indigenous consultants.
- ²⁵ Tony Birch, 'A land so inviting and still without inhabitants: Erasing koori culture from (post) colonial landscapes', in Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner & Sarah Nuttal (eds) *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, Routledge, London, 1996.
- ²⁶ VicRoads, *VicRoads Cultural Heritage Guidelines 2003*, text by David Rhodes and Chris Reeves, prepared in conjunction with TerraCultural Heritage Consultants, Kew, 2003. 13. 3.1. Indigenous and Cultural Heritage Sites and Places. 3.1.1. The Archeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972 (Vic). 3.1.2 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (Cth).
- ²⁷ Christopher Reeves, interview with the author, 8 April 2004.
- ²⁸ Christopher Reeves, interview. Reeves provided an example of two delayed major road projects at the Shepparton bypass and the Echuca Moama Bridge. While Yorta Yorta Traditional Owners were recently unsuccessful in their Native Title Claim (2002), they have been able to assert their rights through the Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act of 1972 (Vic) and more recent amendments. While the federal government has authorised and approved the development of both of these major road projects, VicRoads is not able to proceed until it receives Traditional Owner consent. Consequently Chris Reeve is now involved in consultation with the Traditional Owners to develop an alternative route that will

protect sites of significance.

- ²⁹ Derek Hammond, Proprietor of the Tarcutta Pub, interview with the author, 21 January 2004.
- ³⁰ 'The Hume Highway is the quickest route between Melbourne and Sydney. It is generally a quick boring route although there are some items of interest along the way', viewed 10 July 2002, www.bugaustralia.com/humehighway.
- ³¹ Mark Mordue, 'Romancing the Road', *Weekend Australian*, 16–17 November 2002, 4.