A Political Aesthetic of Remembrance:

Colonial Violence in Australia’s Memorial Landscape

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More I think than most Australians recognise, the plight of Aboriginal Australians affects us all…We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask—how would I feel if this were done to me?... And if we have a sense of justice, as well as common sense, we will forge a new partnership.

– Prime Minister Paul Keating, Redfern Park Speech, Sydney, 1992

Citizens of democratic and non-democratic nations alike grapple with how to represent histories of violence in their physical landscapes. Should political societies gloss over or acknowledge past genocide, colonial violence, and slavery? How should the physical environment commemorate victims? Should they aim to be politically instructive? And how visceral should the depictions of violence be – should we show the public sanitized or jarring images? Since at least the Cold War and with renewed fervor in recent years, citizens have acted on the urge to topple memorials and other visual reminders of injustice. But societies show no signs of ceasing to erect new commemorative markers, and citizens continue to live in physical environments saturated with historical reminders, from permanent memorials to subversive “counter-monuments” (J. Young 1994; Strakosch 2010). So the question is not *whether* but *how* monuments and memorials should best reflect societies’ political or ethical priorities.

In his discussion of hate speech, Jeremy Waldron briefly considers what it would mean for a society not only to *follow* its shared principles of justice but also to shape its physical environment to make the society *look like* its principles of justice. Monuments, statues, public buildings, ceremonies, uniforms, signs, and posters are all elements of this “political aesthetic” (Waldron 2012). A political aesthetic is the way our public and semi-public spaces look (or, especially for people with vision impairment, are perceived by the other senses) and how they reflect various public values or ideas. A political aesthetic is a useful way of thinking about how societies can best reflect their ideals of justice beyond deliberation, institutions, and public opinion. When a society – the people, the state, or both – decides what to do about these physical markers of violence and injustice, it is engaging in commemoration and shaping its political aesthetic: what kinds of expression and speech will we value and promote in a just society? What kinds of symbols and markers? What kinds of public ceremonies, art installations, architectural structures, and landscapes?

Because our quotidian aesthetic environment is accessible to interpretation by all, the political aesthetic is an important point of entry for everyday citizens to engage in public debate about political ideas. Despite the widespread recent interest in the political aesthetic among citizens of the United States, South Africa, Europe, and elsewhere – as seen in efforts to take down or protect Confederate monuments, the #RhodesMustFall movement, and community art projects such as the *Stolpersteine* in Germany – political theorists have largely overlooked the political implications of the aesthetic commemorative environment.

Theorists of material culture, geography, and urban planning have long recognized the importance of the physical landscape for politics (ex. Jacobs 1992; Grabow and Heskin 1973; Harvey 2010; Hayden 1994), but political theorists have not focused much attention on the aesthetic or sensory elements of public space.[[1]](#footnote-1) Additionally, while the growing study of transitional justice processes such as state apologies and truth commissions has raised important questions about the purpose and implications of how we treat the past (ex. Buckley-Zistel 2006; Barta 2008; Chakravarti 2014), these inquiries have largely neglected place and space. Connections between a political aesthetic and the commemoration of violence are even rarer. By integrating rich interdisciplinary literatures of urban planning, critical and cultural theory, history and public history, museum studies and material culture, and political philosophy and theory, I hope to fill in some of the gaps in the conventional scholarship on the political aesthetic and historical commemoration. These connections are crucial if we are to overcome the various impasses and omissions of our current dominant frameworks.

Moreover, many of the frameworks first developed after the Holocaust still dominate scholarly and popular debates about the commemoration of violent events. These conversations, in wake of the imperative to “never again” allow future atrocities after Auschwitz, often center on a key dichotomy: harmful forgetting versus painful remembrance. An example is Theodor Adorno’s post-Holocaust rejection of *aufarbeiten* (“working to overcome the past”), or German forgetting, in favor of a painful but necessary reckoning, *verarbeiten* (“working upon the past”) (Adorno 1998). Similar fears of sweeping history under the rug or failing to remember the past are reappearing in contemporary conversations about Confederate monuments and other politically contentious symbols in democracies such as the United States, South Africa, and Australia. Contemporary U.S. critiques of Confederate statues in public spaces argue that monuments should be removed because they are painful reminders of historical injustice (ex. Delgado and Stefancic 2004; Landrieu 2018), while the monuments’ defenders warn of the high cost of historical erasure or forgetting (ex. Jones 2015). This postwar dichotomy of forgetting and remembrance continues to dominate discussions of historical commemoration of atrocities.

But it is important to move beyond this impasse. Those who pit remembrance against forgetting or erasure (ex. Waldron 2012; Rieff 2016) fail to recognize that remembrance is often really an act of forgetting and forgetting an act of remembering. As James Young and others (ex. Anderson 2006) have shown, remembrance always encompasses some selective forgetting, contributing to collective amnesia because of the narratives and stories that commemoration ignores, eclipses, or minimizes (Young 1994). As such, all commemoration, including memorials, involves both remembrance and forgetting. When we fail to recognize the ways in which collective remembrance is also an act of forgetting, uncritically repeating the idea that remembrance and forgetting are binary opposites, we contribute further to the effacement of both terms, eroding their meaning. Moreover, a single-minded focus on “remembrance” at the risk of “forgetting” simplifies history, ignoring the way in which the past is always seen through the biases and frameworks of the present.

For these reasons, I am less interested in whether commemoration remembers or forgets history and more interested in whether or how an aesthetic of commemoration can employ concepts that might aim at cultivating sensibilities that work against future occurrences of violence. Rejecting the notion that monuments to historical violence could ever be *apolitical* or *merely* honor victims, I instead make a pragmatic argument that political societies should consider what kinds of messages might be politically productive – specifically, what themes or concepts could constitute a political aesthetic of commemoration aimed at preventing a *summum malum* of future mass violence. As such, my analysis is descriptive, critical, and prescriptive. It describes current aesthetic representations of historical violence and one associated political theme – solidarity – and suggests possible future aesthetic representations of historical violence.

I argue that one way a political aesthetic of commemoration might open up imaginative possibilities for a world without future colonial and political violence is by cultivating solidarity. My approach is similar to Judith Shklar’s project of avoiding a *summum malum* of cruelty (Shklar 1989). In this paper I focus on avoiding this worst end of future mass violence for two reasons: first, I think there is a nice symmetry between memorials to past mass violence and avoiding future mass violence; and second, reconciliation, equality, and justice are all important goals, but the avoidance of mass violence is in many ways a lower bar to clear. I want to explore solidarity as a way to avoid future mass violence as one possible first step towards the longer-term, deeper political goals of justice or reconciliation.

When I refer to “violence,” I mean physical violence. Dustin Howes’ definition is useful here: Howes adapts Carl von Clausewitz’s definition of war to suggest that violence is “the use of our body by another, who intends to submit or destroy our will for their purpose or purposes” (Howes 2009, 41). Thus, violence includes only the use of bodies as means to an end if that end is the subjection of the body of another. Natural disasters are not violence since storms cannot intend to do anything; environmental degradation is only violence if it is meant to force a population off its land or poison a group of people; necessary medical procedures or pulling someone from a fire are not violence; stealing and destroying property are not violence as long as they use theft and looting, not the body, as a means; and suicide is not violence, since its purpose is not the changing of the will as long as one’s will is to destroy oneself (Howes 2009, 42–45). Nonviolent sources of injustice like employment discrimination or hate speech are not violence. Only physical attacks on bodies are violence; although Susan Sontag calls the act of photographing dead bodies “soft murder” (Sontag 1977, 15) and scholars often speak of “doing violence to a text,” I do not consider these acts to be violence (although they may be unjust).

Although I am wary of outsider prescriptions for the politics of former colonies in the Global South (e.g. Narayan 2005), I follow Linda Zerilli’s articulation of the possibility and even need for judgment by others: while lived experience may provide privileged knowledge, we should also leave room for decrying injustices even from an outsider standpoint without immediately dismissing such critical judgment as imperialism (Zerilli 2009). We might also think about the ways in which claims about “the Indigenous way” and “authentic experience” have been invoked by regimes to ward off authoritarian critiques from outsiders and consolidate power. What about cultural differences between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous visitors? Again, I proceed with caution; I want to avoid essentializing Indigenous “traditional” beliefs about human remains and memory, and I want to steer clear of what is likely a false dichotomy between Western and Indigenous attitudes toward human remains.

For these reasons, I do not discuss what people “will think” when they see memorials. I read these works as texts, following Roland Barthes’ work/text distinction in which the work is consumed while the text is played with and caught up in discourse; the work is taken at face value while the text is seen as symbolic; the work is examined as a product of the author and her historical time while the text is examined as a network of connections to readings and interpretations.[[2]](#footnote-2) This does not mean that historical context is unimportant – merely that it is also useful to read symbols such as monuments through careful analysis and interpretation of their outward aesthetic in order to analyze them within our current political context.[[3]](#footnote-3) This is necessary, I argue, for a future-oriented political imaginary aimed at counteracting future violence. Textual reading also opens up possibilities for critical analysis that can identify the racism, sexism, or other oppressive meanings of a “text” even when its history, creation, or author predates feminism, anti-racism, etc. or its original authors did not intend such an oppressive meaning (Britt 2000, 424). And while all texts are open to differing interpretation, without a critical reading of texts we are left without the tools to distinguish between readings or narratives that prop up oppression and violence and readings or narratives that criticize and wrangle with histories of violence and oppression, including counter-narratives.

In the remainder of this paper, I lay out what I see as one of the major debates among political theorists of solidarity (solidarity based on shared characteristics versus solidarity based on shared practice) before showing, through close textual readings of two memorials to colonial violence against Indigenous Australians, how a political aesthetic might begin to explore or cultivate political solidarity as practice. I tease out themes and issues of solidarity through these texts and ultimately describe the contours of a radical vision of political solidarity: one that extends to one’s enemies, even to perpetrators of violence and their descendants.

# Solidarity

There is considerable disagreement among theorists of solidarity about what solidarity is or means. For Iris Marion Young, solidarity is “a sense of commitment and justice owed to people” (I. M. Young 2002, 222). For Juliet Hooker, solidarity is “the reciprocal relations of trust and obligation established between members of a political community that are necessary in order for long-term egalitarian projects,” like democracy, “to flourish” (Hooker 2009, 4), “the citizenly capacity to act in ways characterized by public-spiritedness or reciprocity” (Hooker 2009, 21). The concept has roots in Greek polis-based ideas of civic friendship and Christian *caritas* (brotherly love) as well as the specifically civic bonds between members of a political community that the French and American Revolutions emphasized, and today it mostly refers to solidarity between members of the same community, or fellow citizens (Hooker 22). Merriam-Webster cites the first known usage to 1841, as the French *solidarité*, from the Latin for “unity” . But philosophers have explored similar concepts under different names – mutual trust, political friendship, and other-thinking or other-feeling – since at least Aristotle, who was concerned with the question of whether citizens would trust each other (Aristotle 1998). Here, I will consider solidarity to be a set of prosocial attitudes and practices that, by cultivating understanding of others who are different from ourselves, orients us to see others as “with” us in one sense or another. The first part of this definition, the prosocial attitudes and practices, emphasizes relationality and connections between people that form the social fabric and make politics possible. As I will discuss in the next section, solidarity based on shared activity or practices rather than shared characteristics is a more compelling basis for solidarity. The second part, understanding those who are different, is purposefully vague. We might be able to understand some aspects of another without having to understand them fully; a basic level of understanding another is grasping that the other shares common experiences (of pain, grief, political activity, or simple activities of daily life). The last part, seeing others as “with” us, returns us to the etymological roots of solidarity – the Latin *solidum*, or “whole.” We do not have to like someone or even agree with them (we can even hate them) in order for us to feel the basic sense that we are “with” them, whether that means that they share in common cause with us, participate with us in politics, or just exist in the same political community as us.[[4]](#footnote-4)

A note: many theorists (e.g. Allen 2004; Ferguson 2012) focus on *democratic* solidarity. I want to note that even non-democratic political societies may strive for and attain solidarity; certainly, in the Soviet Union there was sometimes a great sense of fellow-feeling among many (but not all) citizens. However, democracy cultivates shared practices of citizenship better than do many (but not all) non-democratic forms of government, and thus much of what I discuss here is more pertinent to democracies than to other forms of governance.

## Solidarity as Common Characteristics

Some theories of solidarity consider common or shared characteristics as the basis for solidarity. Of these, I briefly discuss theories based on shared membership in a political community and theories based on ideas of the human. First, many theories of solidarity based on commonality emphasize national solidarity and solidarity with one’s local community. For example, David Miller forwards common membership in a national community as a basis for solidarity (Miller 1997). Iris Marion Young also bases solidarity in political community, on the fact that “people live together … in a locale or region, whether they like it or not” in economies and societies that make them dependent on, and affected by, each other (I. M. Young 2002, 222).[[5]](#footnote-5) Although Young denies that her theory of solidarity is one based on “fellow feeling or mutual identification,” (I. M. Young 2002, 222) her solidarity is based on shared membership in a political community (a characteristic, not a practice).

One important limitation to national solidarity is obvious: we might want to cultivate solidarity with those outside our own political communities. National or local solidarity might be useful for promoting national unity or political participation, but here I focus on solidarity as it might cultivate an aversion to future violence, and much of the history of nationalism is a history of violence. The last part of my definition of solidarity, that we feel that someone is “with” us, aligns well with national solidarity but the second part, that we understand others as sharing in common activities (such as grieving or cooking for our families or experiencing physical pain), does not require shared membership in a political community. Moreover, as Juliet Hooker points out, sometimes national fellow-feeling is not enough to overcome racial animus.

Second, universalist and humanist theories of solidarity claim that solidarity is based on common characteristics, like innate human nature. For example, political philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues, against critics of universal humanism, that it is possible to construct a normative vision of the human that is inclusive of all humans rather than exclusive of the disabled, racial minorities, and women, as the category of “human” has been used throughout much of Western thought. Nussbaum lists life, bodily health and integrity, bodily integrity, senses/imagination/thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, engagement with other species, play, and control over one’s environment as core human “capabilities,” and argues that denial of any of these capabilities means denying people a good life and the ability to truly fulfill our potential as humans (Nussbaum 1995, 41–45). This and similar ideas of what constitutes a “human” have formed the basis for many theories of “human solidarity,” a theory of solidarity based on the innate characteristics of all humans. Human solidarity argues that we can find solidarity with any other human *qua* human.

The view of human solidarity has been widely criticized. One critique is foundational: it argues that there is no ontological basis for a claim to innate human solidarity. For example, Richard Rorty (1989) rejects commonality as the basis of solidarity, since his theory of contingent selfhood eliminates the possibility of any core self or essential human-ness. His contingent theory of selfhood means that there is no “’natural’ cut in the spectrum of similarities and differences which spans the difference between you and a dog, or you and one of Asimov’s robots – a cut which marks the end of the rational beings and the beginning of the nonrational ones” (Rorty 1989, 192). Similarly, Michaele Ferguson (2012) objects to the idea that there is some objectively real “thing” that we all share (even though we might differ in our readings and interpretations of it). This ontological objection urges us to see the world as constituted of different people interpreting objects differently, rather than as constituted of a single race of humans who share something special *qua* humans.

Another reason we might not want a theory of solidarity based on commonality is that it is all too easy for theories of what we share to find those who do not share those characteristics and exclude them. As Nussbaum notes, it is hard to pick one vision of human life over another and that universalisms, if constructed wrongly, can exclude the oppressed (Nussbaum 1995, 38–39). Indeed, feminist scholars have been vocal in articulating the problems with liberal ideas of the human that have excluded women’s unequal reality (MacKinnon 1985). As those who propose universal humanisms have encountered, strong and valid objections arise whenever we start talking about the “human.” Primary among these objections is how we are to define the human, and whether those defining criteria exclude or dehumanize some marginalized people, such as disabled people or racial groups whom scientific racism has historically defined as subhuman. Michaele Ferguson, similarly, objects to an *objective* account of sharing, in which members of democratic publics have common *characteristics*, because this ironically creates an antidemocratic framework in which elites decide what those shared characteristics are.

A final reason we might object to solidarity as based on shared characteristics is pragmatic: as Rorty points out, any “us” (as implied by statements like “we are all human”) implies a “they” – and the category “human” is simply too large to be meaningful because it does not account for a “they.” That is, “our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as ‘one of us,’ where ‘us’ means something more smaller and more local than the human race” (Rorty 1989, 191).[[6]](#footnote-6) So even if we were able to get around the exclusionary and ontologically shaky aspects of commonality, we might still not be able to wrap our heads around an “us” that includes everyone. Rather, it is more feasible for individuals to find solidarity with others on shared ground, even if it is only the basic experiences we share, like losing a parent or eating breakfast.

I find these critiques of solidarity as commonality convincing. However, even if I could be convinced that a contingent, non-essentialist ontology actually opens up rather than forecloses the possibility of a completely inclusive human commonality, I do not think that a theory of innate human commonality is necessary for a theory of solidarity. Because a theory of shared *practices* is so useful as a basis for solidarity, we do not really need to base solidarity on shared characteristics.

## Solidarity as Common Activity

I’ll turn now to a framework of solidarity as shared practices or activities. Theories of solidarity or similar concepts from Hannah Arendt, Richard Rorty, Danielle Allen, Michaele Ferguson, and Juliet Hooker emphasize praxis or activity, not commonality or shared characteristics, as the basis for political solidarity. I find these frameworks more convincing than commonality as the basis for solidarity, as I explain below.

I think Hannah Arendt’s discussion of *sensus communis* shares many of the characteristics of solidarity as political theorists generally understand it today: a practice of accounting for others, in public life, in a way that takes into account their differences from ourselves.[[7]](#footnote-7) For Arendt, the things that make up what I call solidarity – the *sensus communis*, considering others who are different from ourselves – enable citizenship in the political sphere. Arendt’s starting point is a critique of totalitarianism and the horrors it enabled in the Second World War, and so she starts her theory of shared public life from the negative case, from the worst offenses of totalitarianism – isolation of people from each other and the rejection of pluralism and difference.

One of the biggest threats of totalitarianism (as well as its predecessor, modern mass society) is that it corrupts politics and misunderstands the public sphere. For Arendt, love binds us together in the private sphere, where emotions belong. But love cannot carry over into the public sphere; it becomes perverted, misunderstood, once it becomes public and thus it cannot sustain politics. Thus, early Christian ideas of brotherhood replaced love as its worldly counterpart. But even Christian brotherly love was unable to carry the public realm by itself because it focused too much on the spiritual rather than the earthly world (Arendt 1998, 53). One of mass society’s biggest mistakes is its misperception that society is or should be like a family. This causes a privatization of the public by thinking of it as subject to the same rules as the private realm (Arendt 1998, 57). Taken too far, this privatization becomes an exclusionary, protectionist politics that views the nation as a family that must be protected from the outside and purged from the inside. This is totalitarianism.

So in the public sphere, we cannot rely on love. Instead, Arendt forwards a Kantian idea of common sense – *sensus communis* – that includes thinking “in the place of everybody else… claim[ing] assent from others because in judging he has already taken them into account and hence hopes that his judgments will carry a certain general, though perhaps not universal, validity.” This validity, importantly, will only “reach as far as the community of which my common sense makes me a member,” which may be a specific group of people or may be, as for Kant, all humankind (Arendt 1966, 140). Totalitarian government destroys human life, both public and private, by basing itself “on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man” (Arendt 1951, 475). But *sensus communis* fights loneliness and brings people together through imagination and perception. Totalitarianism makes humans superfluous and uproots them from others, which is fatal because “[e]ven the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our *common sense* which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data” (Arendt 1951, 475–76). This is not only alienating but also a kind of falsehood: the totalitarian state’s “disregard for facts, its strict adherence to the rules of a fictitious world” (Arendt 1951, 391–92), and its “insanity” (Arendt 1951, 411), are attributable to its “murder of the moral person” and its “destruction of the individuality” (Arendt 1951, 455). Arendt wants us to use our common sense to fight these tendencies that allow totalitarian politics and violence to flourish.

Aside from connecting people through perception, *sensus communis* is also important for our discussion of solidarity because it embraces plurality and difference (Arendt 2006, 221, 1951, 476). Difference is a basic fact of the world, as individuals share the world as common ground but still occupy their own locations in that world (Arendt 1998, 57). For Arendt, “It is out of pity that men are ‘attracted toward *les hommes faibles*’, but it is out of solidarity that they establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited” (Arendt 1963b, 88). Thus, solidarity includes an acceptance of difference, including those in subordinate groups. In her imaginary condemnation of Adolf Eichmann, she indicts the Nazi primarily for his crime against humanity – that is, his crime against the pluralistic nature of humanity. Arendt condemns Eichmann because he “supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations – as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world” (Arendt 1963a, 279).

Importantly, for Arendt *sensus communis* and solidarity are not just traits that we passively possess, but rather – as shown by her exploration of its failure under totalitarianism – an activity that we have to actively practice and cultivate.[[8]](#footnote-8) Because *sensus communis* a practice that can be cultivated, Arendt’s conception of *sensus communis* illustrates many of the most important capacities of solidarity. It can help us understand others who are different from us, it can move us away from the kind of thinking that justifies their extermination, and it is an activity rather than a trait.

Borrowing from Arendt’s *sensus communis*,Michaele Ferguson argues that we shift away from a claim that members of a democracy must have some *commonality* – of language, institutions, ethnicity, or history – and toward a claim that members of a democracy engage in the *activity* of self-government by exercising political freedom (Ferguson 2012). In this vision of pluralistic sharing (which I discuss here because I think it is similar to solidarity), “sharing is a first-person experience of relating to others: I experience that I inhabit the world together with other persons who are themselves subjects… without my awareness of the existence of other subjects, it would be meaningless to say that I share: With whom could I share, if there were no others?” (Ferguson 2012, 38) In the *activity* account, what is in common is a set of meanings that are created actively by people through social interactions. One crucial element in Ferguson’s vision of sharing as activity is that we are sharing with plural others in a society of difference. Because we no longer need to find characteristics that we share with others, sharing as activity opens up the possibility for solidarity with others who, like us, also participate in world-building.

Also indebted to Arendt, Danielle Allen (2004) articulates a praxis of something like solidarity: political friendship – as an antidote to racial animus in democracies. Allen identifies the central problem of U.S. democracy as distrust, especially between racial groups. Her remedy to distrust is the *practice* of friendship rather than finding common *characteristics*, and her proposal for achieving democratic solidarity is “wholeness” (emphasizing mutuality and integration rather than assimilation) rather than “oneness” (homogeneity). For Allen, political friendship is built on the recognition of having a shared life with another, namely, our shared experiences and practices as members of the same polity.

Likewise, Juliet Hooker sees solidarity not as commonality-based, but rather as both a normative orientation and a practice (Hooker 2009, 21). For Hooker, solidarity is based on “structural conditions that require people to develop contingent solidarities… that are not dependent on mutual identification (i.e., thinking of others as being ‘like us’) or shared nationality” (Hooker 2009, 37). The problem of political solidarity, she argues, is that it is fundamentally shaped by race. The U.S. and other racialized societies have not achieved full solidarity; rather, we have had racialized solidarity, “the diametrically opposed ethical-historical perspectives developed by dominant (white) and subordinated (nonwhite) groups in a racial polity” (Hooker 2009, 88). This racialized solidarity stems from whites’ failure to acknowledge and remedy racial injustices. In fact, many whites see nonwhites’ calls to remedy racial injustice as the real threat to solidarity. As a result, nonwhites experience the dominant race-blind discourse as hypocritical and see racism as the status quo while whites see racism as an aberration or exception to a status quo of equality (Hooker 2009, 44). This creates a solidarity gap between nonwhites and whites. As a result of this framing of the problem, Hooker’s solution to overcoming racialized solidarity is at the systemic or discursive level.

However, unlike Allen, who focuses on individual practices of friendship, Hooker argues that individual practices like charitable giving are not sufficient to overcome racialized solidarity. Rather, we should work to change the underlying “normative orientations among dominant groups that need to be overcome” (Hooker 2009, 49). We might not be able to fully overcome racialized solidarity, but an important first step would be making whiteness visible to whites in order to facilitate a “radical reevaluation of the meaning of the [moral and political] categories themselves” (Hooker 2009, 50), to “transform the ethical self-understanding of the political community as a whole” (Hooker 2009, 52) by revealing inequalities and confronting questions of justice. Hooker thus emphasizes solidarity as rooted in practice, but unlike Allen, she highlights not individual practices but rather systemic practices that would create normative change at the discursive level.

Finally, as I have noted, Richard Rorty has ontological and pragmatic objections to solidarity as commonality. What he proposes instead is an extension of solidarity to others who are not like us – those who are not in our immediate ingroup – not on the basis of innate human commonality, but rather on the basis of *shared pain and humiliation*. We all share in common the experience of shared pain and humiliation, and he argues that depictions of the pain and humiliation of others are a way for us to extend our solidarity to those otherwise different from us (Rorty 1989, 192). Rather than think of human solidarity as an antecedent to political solidarity, something we can discover, Rorty wants us to think of human solidarity as something we can actively create by expanding our sense of who is included in “us.” The practice of exercising our “imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers” (Rorty 1989, xvi) is the activity that Rorty argues will allow us to expand our feelings of solidarity a little further. Like Hooker’s discursive and structural changes, Rorty’s proposed changes to practice are more abstract than Allen’s practice of friendship or Ferguson’s practice of sharing democracy.

Some of the most convincing elements of the theories of solidarity as practice or common activity that I have described above are 1) the imaginative exercises that ask us to think about others (Arendt’s *sensus communis*, Rorty’s imagination of the suffering of others, Ferguson’s democracy as an act of sharing) and 2) the embrace of difference (Arendt’s pluralism, Allen’s “wholeness” rather than “oneness,” Rorty’s admission that we will probably not be able to expand “us” to everyone different from ourselves). Theories of solidarity based on practice are also appealing because they are not subject to the same critiques as are theories of solidarity based on characteristics. They are not subject to the critiques of nationalism or of ontological determinism that solidarity-as-characteristics face. And importantly, they also emphasize that solidarity must be sought and cultivated, not automatically found wherever a group of people share similar characteristics or group memberships.

In fact, it seems to me that the real power of solidarity is when it is extended to people who are *not* like us. One common use of the term solidarity is in labor movements, which emphasize building coalition of diverse groups and extending solidarity within and across unions and social movements, as seen in arguments to support another union by not crossing picket lines *out of solidarity*. I will now give some background to the Australian context before showing how two memorials to colonial violence in Australia exemplify the idea of solidarity I have been teasing out in this discussion.

# Australian Colonial Violence and its Memorials

## Australian Colonial History

For approximately 60,000 years, hundreds of communities of Indigenous peoples[[9]](#footnote-9) lived in Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. At the time of European arrival, the population was likely up to a million people large and comprised of complex hunter-gather (Macintyre 2009) and horticultural (Pascoe 2014) societies. Dutch explorers “discovered” the continent in the early 17th century but it was the British who settled it, in the late 17th century and throughout the 18th century, as a naval base and penal colony.

Until 1868, Britain exported convicts and settlers to various penal and “free” colonies in Australia. As in the Americas, European contact meant contamination with deadly diseases that caused a steady population decline. Settlers seized land and water sources from Indigenous Australians and converted their land for grazing cattle and sheep. They engaged in a campaign of rape and violence against Indigenous women. They exhumed Indigenous skeletons without consent and against communities’ wishes for anthropological purposes. By 1901, when the colonies federated into the Commonwealth of Australia, the Indigenous population had declined significantly, although the Census’ count of 90,000 is likely an underestimate (“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population” 2002). Policy changes in the early 19th century resulted in the end of concentrated settlement regulated by the colonial government and began a free-for-all land grab that resulted in further conflict between Indigenous people and settlers over land (Boyce 2013).

In addition to land seizure and disease, colonizers inflicted systematic violence against Indigenous peoples. Hundreds of massacres killed at least ten thousand people (Ryan et al. n.d.; Bottoms 2013; Elder 2003), or by some estimates, 20,000 people (Reynolds 2006, 127), with a massacre considered to be the killing of at least five or six people to eradicate or impose domination over a population (Ryan 2012, 96). These massacres were carried out illegally by settlers, and they constituted an organized process of decreasing the Indigenous population and using fear to assert dominance. Often, if Aboriginal people killed a white settler or stole their sheep or food, that was grounds for a massacre, characterized by “hunting parties,” ambushes, poisoning of food supplies, or military-style executions (Ryan 2012, 102–4).

The early 20th century saw a program of enclosure, restricted rights, forced assimilation in some cases, and forced segregation in others. There were lynchings of Indigenous people suspected of crimes, exclusions from social welfare programs such as maternity leave and pensions, school segregation programs, restrictions on Indigenous people’s ability to drink or buy alcohol or guns, and expanded powers for Australian and local governments to remove Indigenous children from their families. In the 1930s, the government began a program of forced assimilation for Indigenous peoples already in contact with Australians of European descent began alongside a continued program of segregation for those on reservations. In the mid-20th century, Indigenous activists successfully pushed for Indigenous people’s inclusion in education and other social programs offered to white Australians. Despite continued mistreatment and disenfranchisement, at least 1,000 Indigenous people fought for Australia in the First World War and at least 3,000 in the Second (Maynard 2018, 91). During the Second World War, many Aboriginal people were relocated to camps. A program of forcible removal of tens of thousands of Indigenous children from their families by government and church officials from the 1910s to 1970s created the “Stolen Generations” (“Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families” 1997).

Inequality and oppression still marked Indigenous people out from white society in the mid-20th century; Indigenous students and workers became politically mobilized around poor working conditions, unequal wages, poor health, denial of government services, land rights, and white mining projects on Indigenous land in the 1950s and 1960s. Mid-century reforms gave Indigenous Australians citizenship but left in place state-level legal discrimination (Irving 2001). Other reforms in the 1960s gave all Aboriginal people the vote; gave some compensation and a chance to apply for titles to former lands; ended federal and many states’ discrimination; and counted Indigenous people in the census (Keneally 2016, 924; Rowse 2010). Land rights disputes continued throughout the 1970s to today, with the Australian government giving back some land and sacred sites such as Uluru (an important sandstone formation in Northern Australia) and finally recognizing Indigenous native titles to land to pre-date European colonization in the 1990s and early 2000s. The High Court of Australia’s decision in *Mabo v. Queensland (No. 20)* in 1992 overturned the 200-year doctrine of *terra nullius* (the assumption that the land was empty and owned by no one) and reinstated Indigenous land rights. After *Mabo* the Indigenous Land Corporation began buying and transferring to Indigenous people hundreds of properties covering tens of millions of acres (Goodall 2001).

## Reconciliation and the Fight for Recognition

Throughout the end of the 20th century and early 21st century, the government launched several programs attempting reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Australian government. Resistance and demands for recognition escalated in the 1970s, including the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a protest site that has been demanding land rights for Indigenous peoples since its erection in 1972 (Robinson 2014).

Figure 1 - The Aboriginal Tent Embassy

In 1999, Parliament, under Prime Minister John Howard, passed a Motion of Reconciliation but Howard refused to formally apologize, worried that the leftist multicultural “black armband” narrative of Australian history would chip away at national unity and pride. The federal government under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologized for the forcible removals resulting in the Stolen Generations in 2008.

The brutality of colonial history was largely ignored by historians and grade schools for much of the 20th century, when “everyone knew that, while war was important, Australians went away to the other side of the world to engage in it” (Reynolds 2013, 19). It was not until the 1990s that scholars really began to document colonial massacres of Indigenous Australians (Ryan 2012). The “History Wars” debates that emerged in the late 20th century split scholars who favor calling colonial violence “genocide” (Dwyer and Ryan 2016; Neath and Andrew 2018; Tedeschi 2018) and those who prefer calling it a “war” (Reynolds 2013), as well as those who favor the “Aboriginal resistance model” (Reynolds 2006, 2013) and those who favor a narrative of colonial violence as far from a fair fight (Boyce 2013).

Memorialization of colonial violence toward Indigenous people has increased in recent decades, with a renewed interest among historians, artists, and the public in commemorating this history (Batten and Batten 2008). Many memorials to colonists and “explorers” have been contextualized since the multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s, especially through the addition of plaques decrying colonial massacres and land seizures (Batten and Batten 2008).

Additionally, several monuments and memorials related to Indigenous exploitation have been created since the reforms of the 1960s: a group of Aboriginal artists created the Aboriginal Memorial, an artwork marking 200 years of white settlement, and offered it to the National Gallery of Australia, which partially funded it, in 1987; the City of Mitcham and several civil society organizations funded a memorial at the Colebrook Training Home, which from 1943-1972 housed hundreds of forcibly removed Aboriginal children, in 1998; Reconciliation Place was designated by the federal government in Canberra in 2001; the City of Sydney curated a monument acknowledging the service of Indigenous Australian soldiers in 2015; and there are several more official monuments around the country and in the planning stages. Talks are now underway to design a National Resting Place for the remains of Indigenous people who were buried after violent deaths or taken abroad to be displayed in museums and returned to Australia but unclaimed by their communities. However, there are over 180 documented Indigenous massacres by the British in Eastern Australia alone, most of which do not have memorials marking the Indigenous people slaughtered there (Ryan et al. 2017).

# A Political Aesthetic of Solidarity

One possible goal of solidarity when it comes to memorials to historical violence should be that solidarity cultivates an aversion to inflicting violence upon others. This aversion might work toward a collective avoidance of the *summum malum* of future mass violence. That is, memorials to colonial violence like massacres, brutal executions, or kidnapping might be especially equipped to work against the possibility of future colonial violence and its modern iterations. Since violence against Indigenous bodies at the hands of the carceral state and child welfare system remains a problem in Australia, this problem is more an immediate reality than a remote possibility, so if a political aesthetic is able to contribute to solving this problem by cultivating sensibilities that work against future violence, it certainly should.

One way that I think a political aesthetic of commemoration of violent histories can work to open up imaginative possibilities to a world without future mass violence is through the ideas of solidarity discussed above. As case studies, I will discuss two memorials to colonial violence against Indigenous Australians: “Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener” in Melbourne and the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial in northern New South Wales. Both were created through cooperation with Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors and both encapsulate solidarity as I have defined it: as a set of prosocial attitudes and practices that, by cultivating understanding of others who are different from ourselves, orients us to see others as “with” us in one sense or another. I also see these memorials as a part of the ongoing process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and between Indigenous communities and the Australian government. As such, they constitute part of a political aesthetic that aims to cultivate sensibilities that will lead the public away from future violence.

I chose these cases because of their very different aesthetic styles – one uses sleek industrial materials and is situated in a cityscape and another uses “natural” materials and is integrated into a rural landscape – and because they represent two different types of colonial violence to Indigenous bodies – hanging execution and vigilante massacre. I do not want to hold them up as exemplary monuments or as perfect encapsulations of ideas of solidarity, but rather tease out how certain themes of solidarity play out in and around each. Aside from the formal memorials I discuss here, Australia is also dotted with also many informal memorials and *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1989), including what Neil Carter, Indigenous member of the Australian Government’s Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation calls “living memorials,” which include waterholes in the desert that are significant only to members of Indigenous communities (Neath and Andrew 2018, 99). A database of formal and informal markers can be found at the citizen-compiled Monument Australia database (“Monument Australia” n.d.).

## “Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener”

In 1841, two Tasmanian Aboriginal men were convicted of the murder of two white whale hunters in the bay around Melbourne. They became the first people hanged in the burgeoning city of Melbourne; after only a few more public executions, the Melbourne Gaol was built and further executions were conducted inside (Land 2014). The sentencing judge explained that these men’s hanging was meant to send a threatening message Aboriginal people considering armed resistance (Land 2014, 10). Although there was one other man and three women in Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner party, the defense relied on colonial customs of coverture and stereotypes about Aboriginal women being coerced by their husbands in order to spare the women from punishment (Land 2014, 14). Thus, the two men Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener were sentenced to death and were hung on Melbourne city streets in front of hundreds of onlookers.

Starting in 2006, a group of citizens began organizing for a commemoration of the lives and deaths of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener. After local organizing, the city of Melbourne agreed to commission a memorial site near the Old Melbourne Gaol and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology campus. The permanent memorial that resulted, “Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener,” was created by Wiradjuri/Ngunnawal/Celtic artist Brook Andrew and Trent Walter, Andrew’s collaborator and an independent publisher.

The piece consists of six brightly covered boxes resembling newspaper vending machines, a structure resembling a swing set with chains connecting to a stationary stone that resembles grave markings and that reads “Tunnerminnerwait” and “Maulboyheener,” and landscaped plants of Indigenous cultural significance. The newspaper boxes are in the colors of the Australian and Aboriginal flags (Andrew and Walter n.d.) and display text and pictures inside, including accounts of the history of these two men’s death and of the historical context of the colonization of Tasmania and Melbourne. The boxes riff on the theme of newspapers and newsworthiness. The text inside one box includes an explanation of the design and intent of the memorial alongside 19th-century advertisements for sheep and for safe passage to Hobart, Australia. Another promises “AN INCREDIBLE STORY OF A CLASH OF CULTURES AND COLONIAL ‘JUSTICE.’” The newspaper vending machine boxes are especially interesting symbols because Australia does not have a history of newspaper vending machines on the street like many North American and European countries do.



Figure 2 Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener

The bluestone block connects to the swing set like a swing but is the opposite of a swing: stationary, solid, and immovable. The artists describe the stone as a place for “visitors to the site to sit, contemplate and reflect. The children’s swing seat becomes the tomb, laden with memory and history” (Andrew and Walter n.d.). Likewise, the swing set evokes the crude gallows where Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener swung, juxtaposing the cheerful primary colors of the newspaper boxes and the swing set with the tomblike stone and the symbolism of the hangman. The gallows imagery is especially haunting when one takes into account the fact that contemporary reports of the hanging describe a cruelly botched job performed on poorly built gallows (Land 2014, 11). The site’s location next to the Old Melbourne Gaol, which dates to the mid-19th century, and the use of bluestone on the swing/tomb and the path connecting the memorial to the grounds of the Gaol, was a deliberate symbol of crime, punishment, and injustice in colonial and contemporary Melbourne (Andrew and Walter n.d.). Indigenous architect Rueben Berg had a powerful reaction to the piece: “The first time I saw the new work, there was no one around and I was incredibly moved. I push my son on a swing all the time, so even though there was no movement, I could hear the creaking of hanging, and it was quite a disturbing and distressful situation. It was powerful” (Neath and Andrew 2018, 104).

The memorial is not only an art piece and educational marker but also a site for an annual memorial ceremony. A plaque informs visitors that the Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener Commemoration Committee holds an annual memorial service at the site. Indigenous community leaders as well as non-Indigenous Australians are involved in this ceremony. Further, the artists’ statement explains that the intended audience for the piece is for “Melbourne locals and visitors” alike (Andrew and Walter n.d.).

## The Myall Creek Massacre Memorial

The Myall Creek Massacre is one of the best-documented massacres of Indigenous people in Australia. At Myall Creek in New South Wales in 1838, 12 white settlers killed 28 Wirrayaraay men, women and children. The next day, the killers came back to burn the bodies. The massacre was ostensibly in retaliation for the theft of cattle and the killing of a white stockman in the region, although even contemporaries of the murderers recognized them not as an act of revenge but as an act of terror (Ryan and Lydon 2018, 15). Unlike most massacres, seven of the perpetrators of these crimes were successfully prosecuted by the colonial government, despite the only witness to the massacre, a station hand named Yintayintin, being legally unable to testify in court because he was Indigenous (Tedeschi 2018, 114–15). However, the ringleader, John Fleming, escaped arrest and quickly returned to public life (Ryan and Lydon 2018, 14). As for the rest of the perpetrators, the settler population of New South Wales was outraged not by the murder of Aboriginal people but by the prosecution of the murderers for a commonplace crime like murdering Aboriginal people (Maynard 2018, 89).

Deliberations about its creation began in the 1960s, but the memorial was organized in the late 1990s by a group led by Sue Blacklock and members of the local Wirrayaraay community (Batten and Batten 2008, 106). The organizing committee ultimately included both descendants of massacre survivors and descendants of local settlers, including one woman descended from a perpetrator of the massacre (Ryan and Lydon 2018). The committee, composed of members of both victim and oppressor groups who came together, (Neath and Andrew 2018, 97), stressed a “powerful message of forgiveness and reconciliation” (Ryan and Lydon 2018, 17).

The permanent memorial was built and opened in 2000 and added to the National Heritage List in 2008 (Ryan and Lydon 2018). It consists of a winding walkway through bush and trees, with granite markers with etchings in English and the local Indigenous language, Gamilaroi, documenting the events of the massacre. The path culminates in an overlook over the massacre site, where a large boulder is etched with words of remembrance.[[10]](#footnote-10) Many memorials integrate “natural” materials and landscaping in an effort to honor Indigenous practices surrounding respect for country, in contrast to the “European” tradition of memorializing significant figures through busts and statues of individual figures (Batten and Batten 2008). In contrast to “Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener,” the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial uses far more “natural” materials and is integrated into the surrounding landscape. Just as “Standing by” is integrated into its urban landscape and includes symbols of urban life and Melbourne’s history, the Myall Creek Memorial is also very contextually situated in its surroundings. This was a conscious effort by the committee, including by Indigenous organizers, to respect and integrate the memorial into the natural surroundings.

Like at “Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener,” every year a dedication ceremony is held, with remarks by a historian, public figure, or community member and a ceremonial walk of hundreds of participants down to the central part of the memorial site. At some recent ceremonies, schoolchildren have lined the path as participants in the memorial walked down the path. At the 2017 remembrance ceremony, Chief Crown Prosecutor for New South Wales and Indigenous Mark Tedeschi said, “If we acknowledge that Aboriginal communities were subjected to massacres in a multitude of locations all over Australia for more than an a century there may be more sympathy for the current generations striving for equanimity, understanding and acceptance” (Tedeschi 2018, 115–16).

# Conclusion: A Radical Political Aesthetic of Solidarity

I now discuss how these memorials give us a chance to explore the various themes of solidarity I have been exploring, and I end with an account of a radical political aesthetic of solidarity.

I have defined solidarity as 1) a set of prosocial attitudes and practices toward others that, by 2) cultivating understanding of others who are different from us, 3) orients us to see others as “with” us in one sense or another. First, solidarity as prosocial attitudes enforced by common *practices* rather than common *characteristics*. Both memorials are not only static markers but also sites for annual memorial ceremonies. These ceremonies are political practices that bring people together to commemorate lives lost to colonial violence. The Myall Creek Massacre Memorial also encourages the active practice of walking through the landscape, perhaps prompting reflection on the relationship between individuals, political societies, and their built and natural landscapes. Likewise, the educational materials inside the newspaper vending machines at “Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener” might encourage viewers to further educate themselves about the history of colonial violence or Australian penal history. Further, the organizers of both memorials engaged in shared practices of organizing, documenting history, engaging in political negotiations, and coordinating with various stakeholders. Any memorial created by civil society agitation will be a result of intensive political practice with others.

And this practice is often shared with others not like ourselves. The second theme of solidarity I have emphasized is cultivating understanding of pluralistic others. Both memorials were created by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, from the artists to the committee organizers. Because the work of organizing does not end with the erection of the monuments but rather continues with the annual ceremonies, these stakeholders are engaged in long-term, solidarity building political praxis with others who are politically and culturally diverse. And even for permanent memorials that do not host regular ceremonies, there is still the possibility for generating discourse and involvement the local community, especially when communities are consulted in their design. Public historians and community organizers have emphasized the importance of memorialization being led by or in consultation with Indigenous stakeholder communities (Batten and Batten 2008).

Further, the Myall Creek Memorial was a conscious effort of pluralism. Its creation and mission, from the committee’s equal representation by Indigenous and non-Indigenous members (Batten and Batten 2008) to its goal to educate all visitors about the Wirrayaraay people, reflect a shared, cross-cultural mission. In contrast to some other memorials, whose lack of markings and location suggest they are for local Indigenous communities to quietly reflect,[[11]](#footnote-11) the Myall Creek Memorial attempts to be “for” both Aboriginal audiences and non-Indigenous audiences alike (Cordiner 2018). I think that “Standing by” reflects a similar openness to multiple and diverse audience, as it is located on a busy street in an international city full of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, immigrants, and foreign tourists.

The final theme of solidarity I have explored is its ability to enable us to see ourselves as “with” others. I read these memorials as a work of commemoration that corrects the wrong of Australia’s non-recognition of colonial violence. As such, they may cultivate an attitude of cross-cultural understanding of plural others, enabling me to see myself as sharing political and social practices “with” others. By learning about their violent historical subjugation, non-Indigenous Australians may be able to see Indigenous Australians as sharing a political community *with* them in a way they did not before. By learning about colonial violence in Australia, an American or a Kenyan might see Australian Indigenous people as having experienced colonialism *with* Indigenous populations of those countries, and as sharing political histories of domination *with* those political communities. Seeing ourselves “with” others may enhance feelings of being brought together or of social distances being bridged. I do not want to say this is how every participant in the aesthetic of solidarity will certainly feel, but I want to point out the possibilities for such an aesthetic to open up the political imagination to feelings of solidarity towards others. The hope is that solidarity might cultivate sensibilities that work against the possibility of future violence, because if I see myself as sharing common practices with and understanding others who are different from myself in a way that reframes them as existing “with” me, I might be less willing to contribute to or allow a politics of violence and fear that will result in violence being perpetrated against them.

I want to propose a radical version of this vision of solidarity: the possibility that we might feel solidarity with those who have oppressed us. This is the possibility that Afro-pessimists think is unlikely and that Christian theologians predict brotherly love will achieve. I argue that we should be cultivating solidarity towards all people – *including members of dominant and violence-perpetrating groups* – in order to avoid retaliatory violence and the politics of victimhood. If solidarity can comprehend the perpetrator as well as the victim of crime and the complicit bystander, if members of dominant and violently subordinated groups can come to see each other as active practitioners of solidarity who operate “with” each other, it may become more difficult to imagine committing future violence against each other. On the one hand, solidarity might make future violence against historically subordinated peoples less palatable. On the other hand, it might also close off political imaginaries in which subordinate group members return violence with violence. This radical vision might get us closer to a political future free of a cycle of violence and retaliation. Solidarity as understanding and engagement does not mean endorsement of the wrongdoer or member of the dominant group, but they might make it more difficult to inflict violence against her in the future, helping avoid the *summum malum* of future mass violence.

An important caveat: a political aesthetic of solidarity, that is, portraying symbols and sensory depictions in the physical environment, is one way that a society can cultivate such a vision of solidarity, but I am not arguing that monuments and memorials alone can or should achieve this goal. They should be (and, in Australia, are) part of a larger project of reconciliation that also includes state apologies and documentation of atrocities; education in public schools and civil society about histories of violence and how they connect to contemporary politics; and a healthy culture of debate about history and its significance in the media and public life. The political aesthetic of solidarity should provoke deliberation and debate rather than foreclose it.

Many public events in Australia open with Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country statements. In Acknowledgements of Country, Indigenous or non-Indigenous speakers state that they recognize the Indigenous community who were traditionally custodians of the land where they stand. In Welcomes to Country, members of the Indigenous community who were traditionally custodians of the land where the event take place acknowledge past and present Indigenous custodians and then welcome the newcomers to the land. For example, in 2008, Ngambri-Ngunnawal elder Matilda House Williams delivered the first ever “Welcome to Country” to federal Parliament, at the occasion of the government’s formal apology to the Stolen Generations. In her address (House Williams 2008), she said:

A Welcome to Country acknowledges our people and pays respect to our ancestors’ spirits who created the lands. This then allows safe passage to visitors. For thousands of years our peoples have observed this protocol. It is a good and honest and decent and very human act to reach out to make sure every one of us has a place and is welcome… Prime Minister, my grandchildren have handed you a gift of a message stick, a tangible symbol of today’s ceremony. This message stick, a means of communication used by our peoples for thousands of years, tell the story of our coming together.

These practices of acknowledging the historical custody of land by Indigenous peoples may be striking to U.S. readers, as similar acknowledgment of Native American land and history are far from prevalent in our shared environment. But the Welcome to Country practice is an especially striking practice. There, Indigenous people not only state their communities’ primacy but then extend solidarity to their oppressors. Here, a practice of radical solidarity is being offered to the other, perhaps enabling a political imaginary that works against future violence by cultivating understanding of others and even orienting us to see them as “with” us.

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1. Exceptions include Elizabeth Grosz’s (Grosz 2001) proposal for a more inclusive conception of architecture and space, Susan Bickford’s (2000) examination of the institutional sanitization of public spaces purified of discomfort and uncertainty, Thad Williamson’s (2010) analysis of sprawl as a moral issue of injustice, and Jennifer Forestal’s (2017) connection between the design of physical and digital spaces and those spaces’ effects on democratic engagement. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Barthes 1984) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sara Guyer sees her method of interpreting memorials as a way to “read them, that is, to take account of their assumptions and effects and to analyze how—and whether—they memorialize genocide” (Guyer, “Rwanda’s Bones,” 162). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I want to note that another definitional element of solidarity is whether it is rational, affective, or both. Others have already pointed to the problem of defining solidarity as either emotional/affective or rational, including Juliet Hooker (2009) and Richard Rorty (1989). I do not want to give this question a full treatment here, as I find arguments by democratic theorists like Sharon Krause (2008) and feminist theorists like Sarah Ahmed (2013) who complicate the distinction between emotion or affect and reason in political engagement. But it also might be worth showing how even Hannah Arendt, who deliberately separates private emotions from the public sphere, runs into the problem that thinking and feeling are fused. In her explanation of *sensus communis*, she slips between the language of thinking and feeling as the other: “Suppose I look at a specific slum dwelling and I perceive in this particular building the general notion which it does not exhibit directly, the notion of poverty and misery. I arrive at this notion by representing to myself how I would *feel* if I had to live there, that is, I try to *think* in the place of the slum-dweller… while I take into account others while judging, this does not mean that I conform in my judgment to their’s [*sic*]” (Arendt 1966, 140–41, emphasis added). Despite saying, “[g]enerally speaking, the role of the ‘heart’ in politics seems to me altogether questionable” (Hannah Arendt 1963, 54), Arendt herself is unable to fully disentangle emotions and reason, public and private. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Young’s theory is not only national or local, however. She also notes that not the scope of solidarity, but the says not the scope of solidarity but “scope of obligations of justice is global” (224). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. And in fact Rorty allows that solidarity-as-commonality may be useful as an ideal theory, a *focus imaginarius* toward which it can be good to strive (Rorty 1989, 196). But as real theory, this framework is not viable. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hannah Arendt does not fully articulate a theory of solidarity, but she approaches it through her theory of *sensus communis*. In fact, she does not use the language of solidarity much in her work at all – but I think these concepts bear a significant similarity to what I discuss here as solidarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Just as *sensus communis* is tied up with plurality, action is too. Action in the public sphere can cultivate a good public life because it “corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt 1998, 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Aboriginal Australian peoples (of the Australian continent) and Indigenous inhabitants of the Torres Strait Islands together comprise a group that is today often referred to as Indigenous Australians. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The plaque at the final boulder reads, “In memory of the Wirrayaraay people who were murdered on the slopes of this ridge in an unprovoked but premeditated act in the late afternoon of 10 June, 1838. Erected on 10 June 2000 by a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in an act of reconciliation, and in acknowledgement of the truth of our shared history. We remember them. Ngiyani winangay ganunga.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, the Aunty Ida West Healing Garden and Memorial Gate in Tasmania does not include markings that explain its historical connection to the local Palawa community and Ida West’s successful campaign to return the Wybalenna historical site in Tasmania to the Palawa people. This might indicate that the site is not meant to be a tourist destination or educational resource for a wider audience, but rather a site of reflection for the Palawa people (Batten and Batten 2008, 109–10). Another such sites that is difficult to find or that are located in Aboriginal neighborhoods or far from tourist attractions is the public artwork “Remember Me” (a monument to the Stolen Generations in the Atherton Gardens public housing project in Melbourne), by Reko Rennie. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)