

*Interrogating Placedness: Tasmanian Disconnections*¹

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Abstract: This paper sets out to interrogate Tasmanianness and its placemaking. The cultural landscape and social realities lived out in Tasmania are constructed around contested and contentious imaginings of place and the histories, the stories, that belong to it. In the end the question hanging in the air is to do with place and culture and 'culture's role' in shaping 'place' – landscapes, artmaking, museums, etc. Tasmania, ringed as it is with water offers a model of containment that allows for the kind of prodding and poking not easily done elsewhere. Also, it has a history of a kind that is not easily found elsewhere. Nonetheless, like places elsewhere Tasmania has idiosyncratic stories that seem to wet everything all at once and all the time.

VDL: An Island at the Edge

Tasmania (Van Dieman's Land, VDL) is one of those places that, in a global context, holds pretty much a back-of-mind status, if it ranks at all. On the other hand 'Taswegians', from inside the shoreline, imagine 'their place' as a vernacular exemplar of the part that represents the whole – however that is variously understood and contested. Given the place's histories it more or less carries multiple layers of Taswegian cultural cargo that in a kind of way infects many things 'Tasmanian' with a kind of Gothic darkness.

In many ways the very notion of imagining the place as Van Diemen's Land (VDL) – 'Tasmania' now – is something of a disengagement with its layered histories – not to mention its 'geoplacedness' at world's end.

When Abel Tasman happened upon what he imagined to be Van Diemen's Land in 1642, unbeknown to the world, the island's landmass had been continuously inhabited by Aboriginal people for approximately 40 thousand years – coincidentally about the time that current research now suggests there is evidence for modern humans in Europe².

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² "Earliest evidence for modern humans in Europe identified" ... 3 November 2011, by Tamera Jones – <http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/news/story.aspx?id=1087&cookieConsent=A>

Moreover, it had been isolated from, and insulated from, the Australian continental landmass and the social-cum-cultural dynamics in play there for eons. It is believed that the island was joined to the mainland of Australia until the end of the last glacial period approximately 10,000 years ago.

These are time continuums well beyond the imaginings of the likes of Abel Tasman and those who followed him to this island at the edge of the world over the next century or so. Anthony van Diemen, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, who had sent Tasman on his mission of discovery, surely could not have imagined the kind of timelessness that preceded their enterprise. Neither could the flow of European adventurers, whalers and sealers for the most part, who followed him in dribs and drabs for another century or so.

The colonial disconnect between Aboriginal 'placedness' and European understandings/imaginings of place and time, and European connections to, and the possession of, place, unavoidably set up contentions that have shaped, and underlined, Tasmanian sensibilities up until the present.

In so many ways, Tasman's VDL can be imagined as a paradise of a kind and one that Tasmanian Aboriginal people had existed within in splendid isolation for eons. Conversely, life on the island can be imagined as brutish and hellish place with the people in decline – genetic, cultural, whatever. Whatever the imaging's, in the end they are all speculative – and Eurocentric. Tasman hardly spent any quality time ashore but he was around long enough to make the judgment that the island was not so ripe for colonisation. Indeed, it was not quite like the East Indies and the Americas, filled as they were with the kinds of 'treasures' coveted by European sensibilities and value systems.

This place VDL was nonetheless a 'treasure island' of a kind that was not visibly overflowing with the kind of treasures Tasman's patrons were seeking – at least not immediately. The 'discoveries' of far-flung Terra Australis's southern extremities (thence forth no longer incognita) plus New Zealand and the Fiji Islands were somewhat disappointing for Tasman's patrons and their entrepreneurial-cum-colonial aspirations.

Propelled towards the island by the Roaring Forties, Tasman named the 'place' and planted the Dutch flag ashore and moved on. He did so just in case it turned out that his masters ultimately saw a value in the place he couldn't. It was an arrogant assumption that by simply planting a flag a place could be possessed. What the arrogance depended upon the inhabitants, such as they may have been, comprehending, and understanding without negotiation, the veracity of his symbolic actions.

The irony of it all being that the place was almost as far away from The Netherlands – home (!) – as you can go before getting closer. Somewhat curiously, the irony persists, given that in so many ways as 'the place' embodies a kind of persistent disconnect to the world – a dislocation(?). Currently, this has much to do with the rather naïve mindset, but nevertheless steadfast, ongoing reliance upon natural resource extraction

and exploitation – a kind of economic ‘detachment’ that inevitably confronts ideas of inclusiveness and the sensibilities of belonging here ... not elsewhere.

Postcolonial Tasmania in so many ways owes its placedness to its elsewhere-ness. Indeed it can be argued that it was its elsewhere-ness that made the island a somewhat ideal prospect for British colonisation, given the need at home to mitigate the increasingly undesirable consequences and outcomes of the Industrial Revolution. Here was a place that the social dross of this social revolution could be profitably dispatched to, in order to make way for the more useful emerging middleclass and its willing underlings. It offered both a threat to discourage delinquency and a place to deposit irredeemable souls out of sight, out of the way and perhaps most importantly, out of mind – yet replete with resources useful at home.

As it has turned out, VDL was also a likely place for those with Dickensian ‘Micawberish’ aspirations to make good and start anew. For the most part they were the down trodden, and the over looked, who along with various outsiders were attracted to the possibilities of exploiting the opportunities this antipodean outpost seemed to offer. Dickens’s Micawber³ and family emigrated to Australia where he fulfills his middleclass destiny as manager of the Port Middlebay Bank and wins his social standing as a successful government magistrate. Some of these Micawberish souls, notably George Augustus Robinson among them, returned home triumphantly wealthy on the island’s bounty, to live out the quasi-gentlemanly lifestyle they aspired towards when they left. Others remained to live out their good fortune – albeit that all too often it was ill gotten and won in ways hardly spoken of.

Putting aside the millennia of Aboriginal presence on the island for a minute, the European "Age of Discovery", catapulted Tasmania into a Eurocentric timeframe that was to cast a bleak shadow over this antipodean outpost. The end of the 18th and early 19th Century saw the first era of decolonisation when most of the European colonies in the Americas gained their independence from their respective ‘capitals’. However, the industrialisation of the 19th Century United Kingdom led to a new wave of imperialism. Colonisation accelerated but by the end of the 20th Century six hundred years of colonial aspiration gave way to globalisation.

In large measure, ‘placescaped’ by its colonial histories, Tasmania finds itself at the vanguard of 21st Century contests that aim to redefine the ways places are understood. Likewise, the people with attachments to these places are having their rights to enjoy these place’s treasures, and equitably, are also being redefined.

Placescaping a VDL Paradise

Paradise is an imagined place and universally imagined as the place of eternal bliss. When VDL is retrospectively imagined in such a way, the flipside of such imaginings is not all that far away. Paradise, in religious belief systems, is a place that holds the promise of exponential positivity and eternity in all its expressions. Conceptually it is

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilkins_Micawber – 15/12/12

the flipside to the wretchedness of civilisation. In paradise there is only happiness. Paradise is a place of contentment, but not by necessity a place where luxury and idleness might prevail.

In a Eurocentric-cum-Abrahamic context, paradise is a "higher place" and the inverse to the diabolical hellishness promised as the 'wages of sin'. Most interpretations of religious belief systems are likely to suggest that paradisiacal visions seem to traverse cultural divides and do so across time. If they do, they are bound to be loaded with cosmological imaginings.

Typically, the paradise idea is projected as the abode of the virtuous dead. In ancient Egypt the 'otherworld' is Aaru, the ideal hunting grounds where the worthy dead live after judgment for an eternity. For some Celtic belief systems, paradise was a Fortunate Isle where heroes and other favoured mortals were received by the gods into a winterless blissful paradise. Little wonder that the South Pacific was so readily imagined as paradise. In Verdic India, the physical body is destroyed by fire but recreated and reunited in the Third Heaven in a state of bliss. Given the subcontinent's 'wealth', little wonder that this place was to become "the jewel in the British imperial crown". In a cosmological context, 'paradise' describes a world before it was tainted by evil. Looking back with privileged knowledge VDL might well be imagined in this kind of way – as a kind of Eden before Adam. In the Abrahamic faiths, the Garden of Eden is a metaphor used in imaginings of paradise. It's the perfect state of things before the fall from grace – the perfect state that will be restored in the 'World to Come'. Again, looking back Tasmania might well be envisaged as such a garden – a kind of Aaru even.

The concept of paradise traditionally turns up in the manifestations of cultural production – the art and literature and particularly so in the pre-Enlightenment era. For instance, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is an epic poem concerned with the Fall of Man, the temptation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Pre-contact (pre-colonial) Tasmania is sometimes discussed in terms of its being a paradise of a kind. Indeed, the Terra Nullius idea, the idea that translated/interpreted Tasmania/Australia as 'Empty Land', 'An Unowned Place' or 'Nobody's Place' might, by extension, be imagined as 'paradise' of a kind – otherworldly in a way, ripe for exploitation, somewhat like Egypt's Aaru, a place out of the reach of judgment etc. etc. In 1770 when Captain James Cook planted the Union Jack on the shores of Botany Bay, he declared that 'this new southern continent' was 'Terra Nullius',⁴ even though it was a bountiful place and apparently envisioned as being ripe for colonisation. Somewhat arrogantly, the land's presumed 'emptiness' – empty of a familiar social order – enabled Cook to proclaim British sovereignty over this 'new land'. This was to have diabolical consequences for Australia's/Tasmania's Aboriginal people.

By-and-large, Tasmania's Aboriginal people were conveniently regarded as 'primitive', inconsequential and a part of the island's fauna. This was an idea that lingered on into the 1960s in Australia. It was the 1967 referendum that allowed for the counting of Aboriginal people in censuses and the Government making laws for Aboriginal people. In Tasmania this had a particular resonance. The Truganini myth held that the people

⁴ http://www.nfsa.gov.au/digitallearning/mabo/tn_01.shtml

“were not there” – and at times somewhat triumphantly. Truganini was imagined as “the last Tasmanian Aboriginal” even though there are thousands of people currently celebrating their Tasmanian Aboriginality. Likewise, Terra Nullius was an idea that was to persist virtually unchallengeable in Australian law until 1992 when one Eddie Koiki Mabo⁵, an Indigenous landowner, turned the legal doctrine of Terra Nullius on its head in Australia’s High Court. An idea that was incomprehensible for a large part of the body politic in Australia right up to the handing down of the judgment.

The paradise idea ought not be confused with utopia here. Typically, Utopia is an imagined ‘ideal community’-cum-social order possessing all manner of desirable things. Coined by Sir Thomas More in the 16th C for his book ‘Utopia’, the word has entered the English lexicon to describe a fictional island/place in the Atlantic Ocean – a place to muse upon. If VDL’s explorers and adventurers had looked deeply enough into what was around them, they might well have come to see the people they encountered as living out a kind of utopian existence. By and large they simply didn’t look, nor it seems, might they have been open to such a proposition.

The Utopia idea lauds the principle of communal ownership. Something like communal ownership is quite likely to have been the case in VDL as it is in many ‘First People’s’ social structures. Given similar manifestations on continental Australia, and the Pacific region, it is not such an outrageous notion. Nevertheless, virtually no anthropology was undertaken in VDL. Quite simply, the discipline was yet to emerge. As a consequence, for the lack of first hand witness reports, little is known of pre-colonial Tasmanian Aboriginal social structures or the cultural imperatives in operation. On the evidence currently available, it is reasonable to speculate that there was a sophisticated social structure in operation – and based on its own idiosyncratic knowledge and belief systems. The speculation that ‘the culture’ was one that had found a kind of equilibrium in relation to the landscape has some credibility. This might be so, albeit that it is an idea that is in stark contrast to the Eurocentric cultural standpoint from which it is often made – and its presumed pre-eminence.

A contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal academic, Greg Lehman, writing on *palawa*⁶ (Tasmanian Aboriginal) cultural identity says:

For Palawa the world is substantially Tasmania, which is considered home. Palawa identity is predicated on this. Palawa identity also has a supernatural origin, referring to the powers of animals, plants, rivers, mountains, spirits and ancestors, which often blur into one another.⁷

Since humanity’s primordial roots, it seems that home is typically somewhat paradisiacal in human imaginings of it across a myriad of cultural expressions. It’s the place humanity tends to defend and retreat to. In contrast, it seems that Captains Cook’s

⁵ Eddie Koiki Mabo – <http://icarusfilms.com/new98/mabo.html>

⁶ http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Palawa%20Voice.htm
15/12/12

⁷ http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Palawa%20Voice.htm
15/12/12

and Bligh's sailors in Polynesia imagined the life they found on these tropical isles, to some extent 'utopian' even if well away from 'home' – perhaps even paradise of a kind. Collectively, much of the European colonial imperative was arguably founded upon the realisation that 'at home', with the rise of industrialisation, opportunities were depleting in the context of social change and intensifying competition, thus causing social distress. For many, comfortable imaginings of home were diminishing and being challenged by apparent opportunities elsewhere.

Curiously, just short of two centuries later than Britain's colonisation of the Australian continent, and offshore VDL, a group of about 200 disaffected Australians set sail for postcolonial Paraguay to set up a utopian colony, Colonia Nueva Australia⁸. In a postcolonial society, they were looking to establish a different kind of colony, founded upon socialist principles somewhat like their forebears in North America. Perhaps not so surprisingly, the idea of paradise and elsewhere, and in a colony of a kind, was never far away from this venture. Even if it was to flounder, in so many ways vestiges of this 'colony' persists – and somewhat curiously, as a kind of Australian cultural enclave.

Unlike the utopian impossible promise of something paradisiacal, the flipside, Dystopia, speculates upon an uninviting future. While Utopia remains out of reach, the promise of Dystopia seems eminently achievable. That is, a Dystopian future that posits the negativity that society might present in regard to the environment, politics, religion, psychology, spirituality, technology etc. For this reason, Dystopia takes the form of a plethora of speculations – pollution, poverty, the collapse of society, political repression and totalitarianism. We have come to know Dystopian societies via Orwell's totalitarian invasive super state depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*⁹, and Huxley's *Brave New World*¹⁰, where 'humanity' is scientifically controlled by all manner of social devices.

Back to the paradise idea and farming. Interestingly, *palawa* people via their 'firestick farming', had presented their colonial invaders with a pastoral paradise of a kind, a Gloveresk kind of *Arcadia*¹¹, and one that eventually proved to be well enough suited for the livestock of the Old World. Albeit a 'placescape' the colonisers made little attempt to understand the ways it had been purposefully managed to be, they readily 'appropriated' it for their Eurocentric purpose. Even so, as Greg Lehman tells us, the land was 'farmed' for kangaroo and wallaby and as it turned out VDL colonials exploited this, somewhat in oblivion, reinforced by the Terra Nullius idea. Lehman says:

The kangaroo was also essential to the survival of the first British beach-heads. In early years, European crops failed and livestock did not prosper. The British hunted kangaroo for food, and Aborigines defended it, not just as a food source, but as they would their own kin.

⁸ <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/travel/travelfeature/new-australia-the-australian-colony-in-paraguay/> 15/12/12

⁹ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/may/10/1984-george-orwell> 15/12/12

¹⁰ BRAVE NEW WORLD: A Defence Of Paradise-Engineering <http://www.huxley.net/>

¹¹ "The subject of [Glover] painting *The River Nile, Van Diemens Land*, from Mr Glover's farm 1837 is the landscape of Tasmania as it appeared before European settlement. Glover depicts it as an *Arcadia*, an ideal rather than an actual world." ANG REFERENCE LINK

The British failed to establish a partnership with natural resources such as the kangaroo, but exploited these when they needed them, then disregarded them when they lost their commodity value. The kangaroo afforded the British not a place in nature, but a place for capitalism in the colony. Other native foods and technologies were treated in this way, at the same time as Aborigines were alienated from a land with which they had the most intimate of connections. This threatened their culture and identity. Aboriginal people were transformed; no longer noble savages, we became denigrated as the enemy of prosperity and, at the conclusion of government-sanctioned genocidal practices, pronounced extinct. Yet, like the kangaroo, Aboriginal communities did survive, albeit changed.¹²

If an imagining persists for millennia, as likely as not a kind of balance between bliss and wretchedness can also be imagined. In this far-flung place, disconnected from the colonising imperative – intercontinental and mainland – as it was, there might not have been a need to fear death even if life was valued. And, as likely as not, these imaginings would be for the *palawa* universally imagined not so much as a ‘place’ but as somewhere placeescaped by them, their ‘closed loop’ Arcadia¹³ perhaps. It was their place and somewhere they belonged to – somewhere they were a part of and likewise a place that was part of them. Yet, when VDL became the subject of European colonial imaginings hell was not all that far away, even if at times VDL was imagined as a kind of Antipodean Arcadia. The subliminal hellishness came by the hands of VDL’s colonists, bringing with them their ‘sinfulness’, their fears of death and their disconnections to the ‘elsewhere places’ they imagined they could possess – and that must serve them far from home.

Ann Curthoys, writing on ‘WEH Stanner and the historians’, noted the impact of Stanner’s words on the writing of Australian history generally. She talks about the Tasmanian historian, Henry Reynolds’ work and quotes him:

Henry Reynolds tells us that he read [Stanner’s 1968 Boyer Lectures: *After the Dreaming*¹⁴] some time late in 1969. The lecture on ‘The great Australian silence’, he writes, ‘helped strengthen my disquiet about mainstream historical writing’ (Reynolds 1999, p. 91). He was especially struck by the remark that the inattention was not simply absent-mindedness but a structural matter. In 1984, Reynolds declared that the work on Aboriginal history had been so extensive since Stanner’s lecture 16 years earlier that one could now say that ‘the Great Australian Silence’ has been shattered, the cult of forgetfulness abandoned. Slowly, unevenly, often with difficulty, white Australians are incorporating the black experience into their image of the national

¹²http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Palawa%20Voice.htm
15/12/12

¹³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcadia_\(utopia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcadia_(utopia)) 15/12/12

¹⁴ W.E.H. Stanner (1991) [1968]. *After the Dreaming*. Boyer Lecture Series. ABC. ISBN 0-7333-0199-1. Retrieved 17 August 2010.

past' (Reynolds 1984, p. 19).¹⁵

Yet somehow, despite the shattering of the silence in an 'Australian' context, in Tasmania the silence persisted more stubbornly. The Tasmanian 'disconnect' in all too many of its manifestations carried on in obstinate defiance, despite increasing political acknowledgement of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and presence.¹⁶

Tasmania and Exploitation

Between 1772 and 1802, eleven expeditions explored and mapped the southeastern Tasmanian coastline, with French landing parties spending lengthy periods onshore. The search for new land to colonise was, arguably, always on the agenda albeit that these expeditions were often characterised as being scientific – nonetheless expeditions with colonial expansion were on the agenda.

Ostensibly, the British settlement of VDL in 1803, on the banks of what is now known as the Derwent Estuary, was to head off any French claims to the island. The British sent a small party from their Sydney colony in order to stifle any French claim. In 1800, the French had sent an expedition led by Commander Baudin to explore the South Seas, ostensibly a scientific venture, but nonetheless one suspected to be part of an attempt to establish a French colony on the coast of New Holland.

Eight years on in 1811 when Lachlan Macquarie¹⁷ traversed the VDL midlands as a tour of familiarisation with the colony he had been appointed to govern, he tended to imagine the land's elsewhere-ness as a somewhat perverse kind of otherness. He named places after members of his party, homeplaces in Scotland, his wife and himself. A random selection from his journal gives us an insight into his imaginings of the placescapes he was traversing – and the implications of the Terra Nullius idea deeply embedded in colonial sensibilities.

Friday 6th. Dec^r. 1811 ... At 6 a.m. Set out from Macquarie River -- travel for 3 miles through Argyle Plains -- which contains good Pasturage; thence through Hills & Vallies for 3 miles more -- poor Soil -- to "Mount Campbell" (named after D. Campbell by me -- and formerly called Mount Augustus) leaving it on our left; then enter "Maclaine Plains" and travel through them for 2 miles to a rising Ground covered with wood, which separate them from the next Plains. Thence travel two miles over "Antill Plains" (so named by me after Cap^t. Antill), which are beautifully interspersed with Trees and contain good Pasturage for Cattle. ---At 10 a.m. halted on the Left Bank of

¹⁵ WEH Stanner and the historian – Ann Curthoys –
<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/docs/Contents%20Sample%20Chaps%20Index/hinkson/HinksonSamplechapter.pdf>

¹⁶ TAC backflip on Mundine –Matt Maloney, The Examiner Oct. 21, 2012, –
<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/410131/tac-backflip-on-mundine/?cs=94> & Mundine's cheap shot below belt –Martin Flanagan, The Age Oct. 19, 2012 –

<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/408166/mundines-cheap-shot-below-belt/?cs=12>

¹⁷ http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macquarie-lachlan-2419_15/12/12

Elizabeth River (so named now by me in honor of M^{rs}. M. being formerly called the Relief Creek) in Antill Plains; dis^{ce}. from last Ground being 10 miles.” – Journal to and from Van Diemen's Land to Sydney in N.S.Wales.¹⁸

Sheep arrived in VDL soon after the island was colonised in 1803 and by 1828, there were 680 thousand sheep on the island. Sheep numbers continued to grow and by 1840 sheep numbers had exceeded a million. Wool offered a durable product that could be transported ‘home’ for processing and to feed the increasing industrialization of Europe. Towards the end of the century wool prices plunged during a deep economic depression. The wheel turned and sheep were slaughtered in large numbers and rendered into tallow – the only durable, useful and profitable product they were fit for once wool was removed from the equation.

Post WW2, Australia was said to be 'riding on the sheep's back'. By the 1950s the gross value of wool production had increased to in excess of 50% of the total value of all agricultural production, compared to less than 20% at war's end. The increase in the price of wool during this period led to a sharp increase in sheep numbers, and fine wool production in Tasmania made Tasmania's midland graziers wealthy and important contributors to the states economy.

The promise Lachlan Macquarie detected in the placescaped terrain he encountered in 1811 was fulfilled, despite the blight of encroaching desertification that sheep herding brings with it. Macquarie's assumed ‘emptiness’ of the land was something of a self-serving myth. Quite simply, the kangaroos and wallabies had been exchanged for sheep – and to a lesser extent cattle. The land was re-placescaped to fit the imperatives of a new open loop ecology where the greater part of the nutrients produced were destined for elsewhere.

A not so dissimilar story has been played out with Tasmania's forest resources. Forest conservation and reservation was, in the 19th Century, Tasmania ‘managed’ under the curious title of the Waste Lands Act. This Act was founded upon the Imperial Government's 1842 Act - when the Van Diemen's Land Governor was able to grant Licences for the felling, removal and sale of timber from such lands. This ‘Waste Land Act’ made possible the licensing of forestry activities after Van Dieman's Land become Tasmania in 1856.

The Waste Lands Act divides [Tasmanian] lands into three Classes, that is to say :-Town Lands, Agricultural Lands, and Pastoral Lands. The Unsettled Lands Act, as its name implies, treats only of such lands as lie beyond the boundaries of land at present located. With reference to the alienation of settled lands, or those which come under the operation of the Waste Lands Act, the system of sale by Auction has been retained, although that system has only been made imperative with regard to the alienation of the Lands comprised in the first Class, that is

¹⁸ Journal to and from Van Diemen's Land to Sydney in N.S.Wales
<http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/all/journeys/1811/1811.html>

to say, Town Lands ...”¹⁹

In the Waste Lands Act of 1881, provision was made for land reservation for the preservation of timber. The State Forests Act preservation and the policing of the Act were not well organised. The management of forest resources was chaotic with the imperative being more to do with exploitation than management – and with preservation being postponed to another time. This has been an argument that has persisted into the 21st Century in Tasmania and evidenced in the so-called, and widely reported, ‘Tasmanian Forest Wars.’ This protracted and largely ‘ideological conflict’ perpetrated between ‘the exploiters’ – the true inheritors of the Tasmanian colonial imperative – and the radical conservationists-cum-environmental activists – the true believers in climate change and the degradation of the planet.

The idea that a “real peace deal” might be brokered between these protagonists seems to be a folly, given the perceived risks and what both sides perceive to be at stake.

Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke said his “honest judgment” was that the signatories to the peace deal would not reach a final agreement.

“Now people have to look down the barrel of being without an agreement,” he said. “Let market forces run their course without a higher level of support than was on the table.”

Tasmanian deputy premier Bryan Green said the two governments saw no prospect of a fundamental shift in the two sides’ thinking.

“We understand each side's argument,” Mr Green said. “There's no way we can shoehorn them into an agreement. That is never what it's been about.”

Of an original 572,000 ha. claim, the conservation groups are understood to have reduced their bid to around 475,000 ha.

But they refused to compromise on high conservation value old growth forests, some of them bordering the existing World Heritage Area.

A demand by the timber industry to keep access to 160,000 cubic metres of sawlog annually is understood to have been reduced to about 120,000 cubic metres.

Green groups say the break point came when the industry refused to allow sawlog quota to be retired, but instead wanted it redistributed.”²⁰

Yet late in 2012 the promise of a ‘deal’ hung in the air:

¹⁹ The Hobart Town Daily Mercury Wednesday 10 March 1858 p.2.

²⁰ Sydney Morning Herald Oct 28 2012

While Deal to end Tasmania's 'forest wars' imminent: While there has been no official announcement on a deal to preserve large areas of native forests, insiders say the deal is very close to agreement.²¹

1890 saw the Crown Lands Act repealed and consolidated, along with the Waste Lands Act, and State Forests act of 1885. 2012 witnessed ongoing tensions to do with place and just who it was that should be exploiting the resources imagined as belonging to the place – not to mention the contested 'rights' to do so.

GetUp²², the Australian community based non-profit activist group, was launched in 2005. It set out to be an independent political movement focused upon building a progressive Australia that in turn focuses upon social justice, economic fairness and environmental sustainability. Unsurprisingly GetUp took up the Tasmanian 'Forestry Debate'. Similarly, Richard Flanagan's 2007 article "Out of Control: The tragedy of Tasmania's forest" Flanagan proffered the idea that as a consequence of the forestry debate, Tasmania is an increasingly oppressive place to live. His story began with:

... a story about a Tasmanian man fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) for sale in a London nursery. Along with the healthy price tag, some £160, is a note: "This tree fern has been salvage harvested in accordance with a management plan approved by the Governments of Tasmania and the Commonwealth of Australia." If you were to believe both governments, that plan ensures that Tasmania has a sustainable logging industry - one which, according to the [then] federal minister responsible for forests, Eric Abetz, is "the best managed in the world".

The truth is otherwise. The man fern - possibly several centuries old - comes from native forests destroyed by a logging industry that was recently found to be illegal by the Federal Court of Australia. It comes either from primeval rainforest that has been evolving for millennia or from wet eucalypt forests, some of which contain the mighty Eucalyptus regnans. These aptly named kings of trees are the tallest hardwood trees and flowering plants on Earth; some are more than 20 metres in girth and 90 metres in height. The forests are being destroyed in Tasmania, in spite of widespread community opposition and increasing international concern.

Clearfelling, as the name suggests, first involves the complete felling of a forest by chainsaws and skidders. Then, the whole area is torched, the firing started by helicopters dropping incendiary devices made of jellied petroleum, commonly known as napalm. The resultant fire is of such ferocity it produces mushroom clouds visible from considerable distances ... [Consequently] Tasmanians will be condemned to endure the final humiliation: bearing dumb witness to the great lie that delivers wealth to a handful elsewhere, poverty to many of them, and death to their future as the last of these extraordinary places is sacrificed to the woodchippers'

²¹ ABC NEWS Thu Nov 22, 2012 10:46am AEDT

²² <http://www.getup.org.au/about> 15/12/12

greed. Beautiful places, holy places, lost not only to them but to the world, forever.

And in a world where it seems everything can be bought, all that will remain are ghosts briefly mocking memory: a ream of copying paper in a Japanese office and a man fern in an English garden. And then they too will be gone.”

That the debate persists, and is ever likely to, should be no surprise at all to anyone alert to the cultural and social dynamics at play in Tasmania – a place that has been perpetually imagined as being at the edge, disconnected from the realities of ‘elsewhere’ in various contexts.

Indeed, at almost the eleventh hour of the latest round of the forestry debate, and just before Christmas closed down thinking for the year, GetUp was using social media to get the message out that there was a forest to be saved and a petition that needed to be signed online and that:

“Next week the Legislative Council will vote on the Tasmanian Forest Agreement. If passed, over half a million hectares of Tasmania’s most precious native forests will be protected. But right now it is unclear whether the members of the Legislative Council will support or scuttle the agreement.

There’s an official online petition, and MLCs are paying close attention to it because you have to verify that you’re a local voter to participate. We know they’re checking the results carefully, so it’s a really great chance to have your say.

Even in the apparent ‘defense of home’ that consistently appears in the discourses that surround resource exploitation in Tasmania, is the demand for resources from elsewhere – with timber and wood fiber, Japan, China and Asia generally. The disconnect between the imperatives of home and the ‘needs’ of elsewhere drive the contention.

The history of postcolonial mining in Tasmania is one laced with all the tensions in attendance in the other layers of resource exploitation. Long before European settlement in 1803, Tasmanian Aborigines were engaged in the mining of flints, salt and ochre. Typically this activity is disregarded as trivial, albeit it was almost the only mining activity centered on local imperatives – and for millennia. Nonetheless, the early settlers had need of building materials and began quarrying sandstone, limestone and clay for brick making. They also began extracting coal for fuel up to 1820, as coal was found at several locations. The first successful coal mine was opened in 1834 with convicts from Port Arthur²³ providing labour – the Douglas River Coal Company’s mine opened in 1849, and the Mersey Coalfield near Latrobe in 1850.²⁴

²³ http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Port%20Arthur.htm
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²⁴ Tasmanian History: Mining:
http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/M/Mining.htm 15/12/12

However, it was the discovery of a rich tin deposit in 1871 that changed the mining imperative as tin had an 'elsewhere value'. With this discovery, Western Tasmania became the focus for prospectors. The first western deposit of tin was found in 1876. Extensive alluvial gold deposits were found in 1879, followed by a reef of gold in 1881. By the turn of the 20th Century with the mineralisation of Tasmania's rugged and somewhat inhospitable Western region being exploited, along with the rich tin resources of the island's North East, a century of colonisation had delivered the colonisers a suite of resources – mineral, agricultural and timber – to fuel the aspirations of empire albeit that powerful globalising forces were emerging and taking root.

The imperatives of elsewhere: home; the metropolis; somehow have taken precedence over local necessities in Tasmania. Albeit disconnected from the 'mainland' and 'colonial metropolises', colonial, and postcolonial, Tasmania nonetheless felt the lustful magnetism brought on by the island's mineralisation – gold, copper and tin in particular. Far flung as Tasmania/VDL seemed to be, it was a convenient enough treasure chest as any colonial may wish for, contained as it was within a defining coastline.

That Tasmania/VDL might be imagined as a kind of antipodean Arcadia is unsurprising. That such ideas might be nurtured into a future, and become a corner post in the arena where a 'History War'²⁵ might be fought out in public, and fueled by the daily press and a 'footnote' laced with political agendas, it is an idea that one way or another defies credibility in a 21st Century context. In the Sydney Morning Herald in 2003 Helen Irving had this to say:

What is a footnote worth? A great deal, says Keith Windschuttle in his critique of the work of historians Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds. Details in their footnotes about the numbers and nature of Aboriginal deaths in colonial Tasmania are, he finds, false or misleading. Some include inaccurate figures; others list primary sources that cannot be located. The claim that there were "massacres" of Aborigines is not supported by the evidence. Their history is, therefore, distorted and their conclusions wrong. Tu quoque (you too?), writes Robert Manne in the introduction to his edited collection, *Whitewash*, finding inaccuracies in Windschuttle's own work.

Is this what the history wars boil down to? A matter of footnotes? On the surface it may look like this. The conclusion may be simply that historians should take more care in checking their sources. There is, however, more to writing history than getting the facts right.²⁶

²⁵ Sydney Morning Herald – Footnotes to a war, Helen Irving December 13, 2003 – <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/12/15/1071336875054.html> 15/12/12

²⁶ Sydney Morning Herald, Footnotes to a war, December 13, 2003, HISTORICAL RESEARCH, Helen Irving – <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/12/15/1071336875054.html> 15/12/12

The insidious 'Truganini myth'²⁷ had insulated colonisers against any idea of a responsibility to share, in any way, the wealth they may extract from this island. Geographically remote, somewhat out of reach of the likelihood of moral scrutiny of any colonial metropolitan 'authority' as it was (is?) and freed from any 'obligation' to the people who had occupied the island for millennia, the plunderers seemed to be licensed to pillage. Conveniently, the Aboriginal people were imagined as 'primitive', 'inferior', 'devolving' and 'doomed to die out' and the invaders, with their diseases and guns, had merely hastened the inevitable. There seemed to be little need for remorse.

Unraveling the narratives that attach themselves to postcolonial story telling in Tasmania is an exercise full of irony and there is no comfort whatsoever to be found in the postmodern proposition that "truth is myth, and myth, truth" (Dr. David Hansen²⁸ in his 2010 award winning essay 'Seeing Truganini'). The need to continue the unraveling persists; truths are known but not quite outed. Curiously, the ghosts of a time that fewer and fewer wish to know about, or take into account, are as restless as ever.

On an island of ironies, where leading Aboriginal activists can have fair skin and blue eyes, the question becomes more perplexing. Even to Tasmanian Aborigines, some of whom are predicting bloodshed, the answer is divisive. To the rest of the world it is just baffling, for Tasmania is still frequently - and wrongly - cited as the site of the only successful genocide in history ... Yet while European notions of blood are not as catholic in their liberating possibilities for identity as initiation into Aboriginal law, it is in these notions of blood which denied Tasmanians their identity for so long that Aboriginal Tasmanians now find themselves writhing in a new torment ... A people who suffered so completely from a racist ideology, and whose very existence was denied for over a century, now have to face once more their recurrent, mocking fate: the derision of a world that, in the end, still thinks they don't exist

...²⁹

²⁷ TRUGERNANNER (TRUGANINI) (1812?-1876), Tasmanian Aboriginal, was born in Van Diemen's Land on the western side of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, in the territory of the south-east tribe. Her father was Mangerner, leader of one of the tribe's bands, and in her adolescence she was associated with its traditional culture, making occasional visits to Port Davey. The tribe was disrupted by European sealers, whalers and timber-getters; by March 1829, when she and her father met G. A. Robinson at Bruny Island, her mother had been killed by sailors, her uncle shot by a soldier, her sister abducted by sealers, and Paraweena, a young man who was to have been her husband, murdered by timber-getters. At Bruny Island mission in 1829 she 'married' Wooraddy, from Bruny. They were associated with all the missions that Robinson and his sons conducted around Tasmania in 1830-35; they acted as guides and as instructors in their languages and customs, which were recorded by Robinson in his journal, the best ethnographic record now available of traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal society. Source – <http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/750074?c=people> ... Despite being labeled as such for many years, Truganini was not the 'last Tasmanian Aborigine', as the population of mixed descent Aboriginal people living in Tasmania readily attests to. Nevertheless, the story of her life and death remains immensely important, not only as a symbol of the plight of Indigenous Australians, but as an example of the insensitivity of museum practices. – <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE1098b.htm> 15/12/12

²⁸ David Hansen – <http://wheelercentre.com/calendar/presenter/david-hansen/> 15/12/12

²⁹ Richard Flanagan, Tension in Tasmania over who is an Aborigine, Sydney Morning Herald – October 17 2002 – <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/10/16/1034561211169.html> 15/12/12

Taswegian Communities of Ownership and Interest

Communities of people have many things in which they share a cogitative sense of ownership - for example roads, schools, a health service, even a landscape. Those with such an interest form the Community of Ownership and Interest – its COI – for such things.

All too often a COI's shared and layered ownerships and interests are down played and may even be belittled or denied –particularly when contentious or complex issues are involved, such as the rights to the wealth invested in landscapes, communities, etc. However, recognising the layerings of ownerships and interests, and the social-cum-cultural dynamics involved, can offer a way forward in dispute resolution plus better, and more inclusive, understandings of 'place'.

If we listed items that had a COI, we would include items and locations that were owned by the public – public places and spaces – such as a park, or a river, a monument, a memorial; an institution and/or a heritage building; a museum; a water supply; a forest; a festival; a ritual; clearly the list is as endless as the kinds of attachments people have for places, things and events. And there is the issue of 'cultural property' and 'cultural knowledge' where there are subliminal layers of 'cognitive ownerships'³⁰ that increasingly come into play with the changing ways Indigenous cultural material – Australian and other – is currently being understood.

Indeed, individuals within a place's – and an event's, space's, knowledge system's – COI will almost certainly have multiple layers of ownership and interest in it. The 'truth' in the ownership and interest here is 'cognitive,' a matter of 'lore' rather than 'law' – that which is taught; hence to do with wisdom; concerning cultural knowledge, traditions and beliefs. It pertains to cognition, the process of knowing, being aware, the acts of thinking, learning and judging.

If we take a museum as an exemplar, museums are to do with cognition – musing; the contemplative; the meditative. In a 21st Century context, public museums hold collections of cultural and intellectual 'property' held in 'trust', and under the stewardship of trustees, on behalf of a COI with an inclusive membership. If, on the other hand we look at 'courts', then they are to do with power over conduct; enforcement and authority; control and regulation, guilt and innocence – none of which have a place in musing places, nor much to do with musing. By way of example, Criminal justice is to do with the system of practices, and the institutions of government, directed towards the upholding of authority and social control. Likewise it is to do with deterring and mitigating crime, or sanctioning those who violate laws with penalties and efforts to rehabilitate the outcomes of a crime – antisocial conduct. Courts also offer those accused of a crime protection against abuse of investigatory and prosecution powers.

³⁰ Boyd, W.E. 2012. 'A frame to hang clouds on': Cognitive ownership, landscape and heritage management. Pp. 172-198 in Skeates, R., McDavid, C. & Carmen, J, (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Members of an inclusive COI should be understood as having both rights and obligations commensurate with their claimed ownership, expressed interest and their relationship to say, 'cultural property' or some resource or other – or a public institution and its overall enterprise. A member of the COI may also be referred to as a "stakeholder" but stakeholderhood in its current usage has generally come to mean an 'exclusive' group of people – a person, group, business or organisation that has some kind vested or pecuniary interest in something or a place. Typically, 'stakeholders' assert their rights when there is a contentious decision to be made. However, 'stakeholders' are rarely called upon to meet or acknowledge an obligation. Conversely, members of a COI will have innate understandings of the obligations that are expected of them and the rights they expect to enjoy – indeed, there are likely to be stakeholders in the COI mix.

It is just the case that for an institution say, the COI mix, when assessed from outside, is intentionally, functionally and socially more inclusive. That is more inclusive than say a list of stakeholders drawn up in respect to a development project that governments – Local, State and Federal – typically make decisions about. Stakeholder groups and Communities of Ownership and Interest are concepts with kindred sensibilities – law and lore, the former reinforcing the latter. Nonetheless, these kindred concepts engage with different community sensibilities; with different expectations and different relationships – even if sometimes many of the same people have a 'stake' in something as well as other relationships as a member of a COI. Also, a COI member may have multiple, and sometimes conflicting, layers of ownership and/or interest.

In Tasmania, the disconnect between the understanding of an inclusive Community of Ownership and Interest and those with pecuniary and economic interests in resources – almost anything of 'value' – is both palpable and polarising as has been evidenced by the 40-year Forest Debate. More recently, there has been over eight years of strident community dissension that has surrounded, and has impacted upon, the failed Tasmanian forestry company, Gunns Ltd. – and in particular the company's \$2.3 billion Pulp Mill proposal³¹.

Mechanisms for musing, remembering and forgetting

Museums are interesting places, not so much for the interesting things they collect, loaded as they are with our cultural memories, but for the 'officialness' of the stories they tell, and have been allowed to tell – or commissioned, entrusted or signed up to tell. Tasmanian museums, the musing places of Tasmanianness, come replete with multifarious loads of Tasmanian imaginings. The promulgation of the 'Truganini story' in various ways, in Tasmania's public museums, is an exemplar of an apparently

³¹ Pers. Com. Bob McMahon Tasmanian community activist – <http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-man-who-pulped-the-pulp-mill-20120927-26nwk.html> ... <http://bobmcmahon.blogspot.com.au/> ... Profile... <http://www.wild.com.au/feature/article/bob-mcmahon> ... 15/12/12

stubborn disconnect between scholarship and the social-cum-cultural realities lived out in the wider Tasmanian community.

Large sections of the two museums' collections and exhibits celebrate the island's colonial 'heritage.' They do so in ways that privilege somewhat benign or toned-down constructs of colonial memories, which selective and polite remembering allows for.

For a prime example, there are contentious stories that surround the Hobart Royal Society's³², the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's³³ founders, implication in the robbery of Truganini's grave. Even if spoken of in hushed whispers now, the 'material' gleaned found its way into 'the museum' for purposes of contemplation – and for decades. The skeleton was included in the now infamous 'Crowther Collection'³⁴ at the TMAG, which included a display that consisted of 33 skulls and three skeletons.

Just a generation after her death, the museum put on exhibition that perplexing montage which included Truganini's skeleton, her death mask, various photographs of her, bundles of her shell necklaces – euphemistically hers if not hers in fact – and ironically one of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur's famous 'proclamation boards' plus other Aboriginal artifacts. Interestingly, it was reported in the Hobart Mercury, sometime in May 1945, that four shell necklaces were stolen from "The Tasmanian Room" at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Somewhat bizarrely, this was while Truganini's skeleton was in 'safe keeping' elsewhere for the duration of the war and just three years before its removal from public exhibition altogether. The potency of these shell necklaces famously worn by Truganini is palpable.

For the colonials-cum-settlers-cum-'invaders' there is almost no escaping these necklaces' 'trophy of empire' status nor the bleak cultural cargo that comes with them. Likewise, Truganini's skeleton carried a deeper and more malignant story that resonates still, decades after her remains were cremated on April 30 1976, a century after her death, and finally laid to rest as Truganini herself wished.³⁵

As for the necklaces, for Tasmania's Aboriginal community, clearly the necklaces are cultural property and cultural treasures invested with the continuum of their being; charged with connections to place; and endowed with linkages to elders and ancestors. In Tasmania there is nothing that is ordinary about a *maireener* shell necklace³⁶.

³² <http://www.rst.org.au/history.html> 15/12/12

³³ http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/visitor_information/about_us 15/12/12

³⁴ <http://www.tasmaniaforums.com.au/content.php?230-skulls> 15/12/12

³⁵ Pioneering journey home for Truganini, *The Age* May 30 2002 ... In February this year, Norman Palmer, the chairman of a House of Commons working group inquiring into human remains held by British institutions, made a trip to Tasmania's Bruny Island. The island was the ancestral home of Truganini, the so-called last Tasmanian Aborigine. Truganini died in Hobart in 1876; her skeleton was displayed in the Tasmanian Museum until 1947. In 1976 her remains were cremated, and her ashes were scattered on Bruny Island's waters. But the matter did not end there. Last year Britain's College of Surgeons revealed that it held samples of Truganini's skin and hair in its collection. Under Tasmanian law - the first of its kind in the world - indigenous Tasmanian remains must be returned to Tasmania. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/05/29/1022569791663.html> 15/12/12

³⁶ How Truganini is envisioned seems to be in a state of flux. Likewise, there has been something of a paradigm shift in the ways in which we might envision "Truganini's Necklaces". That is the *maireener* shell necklaces Truganini is typically depicted wearing along with those

Together these *maireener* necklaces evidence the continuity of Aboriginal Tasmanians' presence and identity. This is a story the museum now tells, yet the memories of its role in the promulgation of the convenient story that Truganini was the last of her people, echoes in the galleries still.

In the TMAG there was also a diorama that depicted a *palawa* family (father, mother child) that was a profound example of a conveniently constructed imagining of Tasmanian Aboriginal life prior to colonial contact. It depicted *palawa* people as being naked and in a vacant wilderness landscape. In the 1930s, when it was assembled, there was sufficient anthropological evidence available for the Preparator of this diorama to know that a group engaging in 'domestic' activity would almost certainly include a greater number of people. The depiction in the diorama drew on a romantic, convenient and yet erroneous, parallel between the non-Aboriginal family unit (mid 20th century) and the *palawa* 'family' unit before colonisation.

Aboriginal Diorama, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart, installed circa 1930, and de-installed c. 1995 (photograph by Ray Norman).



As a device installed to 'edify', arguably the diorama was set up to give credibility to the implication that the *palawa* culture was/is of a lower order and comparatively valueless. It makes an unfavourable comparison, by implication, between *palawa* culture's lack of possessions and non-indigenous culture's relative wealth and

attributed to her – plus those named after her - <http://truganininecklaces.blogspot.com.au/>
15/12/12

'sophistication', using the nuclear family as a tool for direct and inappropriate comparison. In recognition of this, the TMAG added a 'Dilemma Label'³⁷ to the diorama in December 1992, which read:

1730 ?- 1930? What can we see in this diorama? The nuclear family was not a traditional Aboriginal arrangement. Day-to-day family life included aunts, uncles grandparents and other relatives. A man and women working ... but how? In traditional Aboriginal society women provided much of the food and gathered firewood. Child rearing was shared.

Who is the boss? The man stands facing the viewer, and makes eye contact with us. The women sits tending the fire and she and the child look down and away. In this arrangement it seems clear that the man is dominant, the woman is docile and passive.

In traditional Aboriginal society women were partners with men. So who is in this diorama? The image of the family, work and power was seen as in 'normal' white Australia in the 1930s, when this was made. It is still a nostalgic ideal for some but it was never part of Aboriginal life.

If this is so misleading why is it still here? ... It can show us how ignorant white Australia was sixty years ago about Aboriginal society. It can also show us how dominant groups have tried to remake other groups in their own image, to make them share alien values and beliefs. ...³⁸

The label went some way in addressing the issues of racial prejudice and 'governmental' misinformation. Given that the label was placed where it could have been easily overlooked, it was a feeble effort – and in the end a compounding and ill-considered initiative. From the perspective of prominent Tasmanian Aboriginal activist, Greg Lehman,³⁹ the 'Dilemma Label' devise was:

not acceptable to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as a response, rather it has been presented to them yet another example of postmodern bullshit to deal with.

However, decades of activism on the part of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community have brought about significant changes to the presentation of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture.

³⁷ At the National Museum of Natural History, "dilemma labels" intended to point out the stereotypes inherent in the wildlife displays and ethnographic halls brought out a controversy that eventually led to the closing of the Africa hall. The labels, a long-term initiative begun this year, were eventually removed. <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Controversy-in-museums-a-timeline/>

³⁸ Pers. com. Julia Clarke, Curator, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 1994

³⁹ Greg Lehman: Greg is descended from the Trawlwuy people of North East Tasmania. He graduated from the University of Tasmania in 1986 with a BSc in Life Sciences and Geography and completed a thesis on narrative identity and its role in co-operative land management in 1996. Greg worked as a research officer for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and was the inaugural Secretary of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council and as part of the Premier's Working Group, negotiated the Tasmanian government's Aboriginal Lands Act 1995. ... <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/people/lehman.html> 15/12/12

Indeed, scholarship in regard to Tasmania's colonial and Aboriginal histories has moved on with the appointment of an Aboriginal curator, the installation of a Tasmanian Aboriginal Gallery and the appointment of a Tasmanian Aboriginal Advisory Council.

All this is yet to be mirrored, in any substantial way, in the story telling in TMAG's sister institution in Launceston with 121 years of history, the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery⁴⁰ (QVMAG). The QVMAG is 'auspiced' and managed (owned?) by Launceston City Council. Arguably, it is more politicised than the TMAG in that it does not have an independent standalone Board of Trustees – the city's Aldermen are functionally the institution's 'Trustees'. When this has been contested various 'defenders' of the institution and the status quo of its *modus operandi* have made the claim that it has "the most democratic trusteeship in Australia"⁴¹. In one sense it may be true, yet in another, best practice in regard to contemporary museum administration has been somewhat discretionary at the QVMAG – and to various extents this can be attributed to the politicisation of public collections in Tasmania. For example, it wasn't until 2011 that, as an institution, the QVMAG had anything that resembled a constitution or charter – contrary to Museums Australia's Code of Ethics⁴². Rather it operated as a division of Council under Tasmania's Local Government Act. And, it wasn't until 2012 that it had a benchmarked Strategic Plan. Given that the institution is generously funded by the city's ratepayers, Tasmanian taxpayers plus private and corporate donors, this is a rather extraordinary circumstance in regard to accountability – and quite probably a unique exemplar in Australian public administration.

The QVMAG has its own set of cultural constructs promulgated via its collections and the manner in which they have been acquired, researched, curated and presented over time. While it must be said that this would be true of almost every public collection funded by 'government', it is just the case that the 'political imperative' which comes with the funding over time is more discernable than it may be in like institutions elsewhere – and in some more than others.

An example of the kind of 'political critique' proffered by politicians in power is easily found. Riling against 'inconvenient' commentary in the cultural arena, Australia's Prime Minister Howard invoked the "black-armband view of history" as a 'defense'. It was a 'politically loaded suggestion' he ran with when rationalising why he did not believe in issuing an apology to the stolen generations in the Aboriginal community, and indeed a range of contentious issues with negative 'baggage' to do with Australia's

⁴⁰ <http://www.qvmag.tas.gov.au/qvmag/> 15/12/12

⁴¹ The Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery is a Tasmanian State institution and its trustees are appointed by the State government via the mechanism of the Governor & Council. The institution is directly accountable to the government via its Board of Trustees.

⁴² Institutional ethics: "Minimum essential requirements for museums, regardless of size: a constitution, clear aims, written policies and procedures; sufficient funds to operate; a collection of high quality objects, which are properly housed, preserved, documented and displayed; premises adequate for all aspects of museum work ... etc.
[http://www.history.sa.gov.au/chu/downloads/CMP_help_sheets/Code%20of%20Ethics%20\(Museums%20Australia\)%20a%20summary.pdf](http://www.history.sa.gov.au/chu/downloads/CMP_help_sheets/Code%20of%20Ethics%20(Museums%20Australia)%20a%20summary.pdf)

colonial histories⁴³.

Politics serially, and sometimes surreally, touches upon cultural sensitivities and sensibilities – and sometimes it touches public collections. Interestingly, within the QVMAG, Tasmanian Aboriginal stories are currently noticeably down played and virtually absent in the institution's public galleries. Somewhat curiously, on the institution's art gallery campus only five objects – *maireener* shell necklaces – of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural production are on exhibition. However, it must be noted that after the refurbishment of the Royal Park campus, and its reopening, there was a temporary exhibition, Robinson's Cup⁴⁴, that presented the work of five contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural producers. Despite the promise of continued engagement with these and others 'artists' in the community, it's a promise yet to be fulfilled. Even if it is said to be early days, is it really?

Similarly, on the QVMAG's Inveresk campus, where the focus is upon social history(ies?) and the natural sciences, there are no examples of Tasmanian Aboriginal relationships to 'place' on exhibition. That is, Aboriginal storytelling that would help make sense of Tasmania as place – placescaped as it was for 40,000 years by Aboriginal people. This has not always been so evident. Like it was with its sister institution in Hobart, the TMAG, in the QVMAG Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultural production have not been proactively included in, and celebrated as an integral part of, Tasmanian storytelling. That is currently so, despite two important colonial objects, the euphemistic "Bothwell Cup" and an example of Governor Arthur's 'Proclamation Boards' being on exhibition. These objects are included in an exhibit entitled "Tasmanian Connections". These two objects together, in the context of this exhibit, can be read as pertaining to the colonial displacement and decimation of Tasmanian Aboriginal people – and by extension, read as colonial trophies of a kind. They are there at the expense of any other representations being opened up to be considered, or that might advance a more inclusive (reconciliatory?) discourse – therefore tending to underline the misconstructions of the Truganini myth given their cultural baggage.

In the absence of other visions of Tasmanian Aboriginal storytelling elsewhere in the museum, except for the many hundreds of objects in its 'reserve collections', from a 21st Century perspective this can be read as a disconnect with large slabs of the storytelling that might help make sense of 'place'. Reportedly, visitors to Tasmania, and the QVMAG, looking to explore Aboriginal people's place within the Tasmanian story, find the absence of Aboriginal cultural on exhibit disappointing – and for some,

⁴³ <http://www.smh.com.au/national/rudd-squirmishes-with-howard-over-the-history-wars-20090827-f18h.html#ixzz2EYBG0Fv9>;
http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/RP9798/98RP05 15/12/12

⁴⁴ Robinson's Cup Exhibition: September 2011 >February 2012 ...
http://147.109.236.45/bloogooocms/uploads/files/redevelopment/qvmag_on-show_art-gallery.pdf 15/12/12; http://www.bothwell.com.au/index.php?p=1_37&_LiveEdit=preview 20/12/12;
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/27233580?searchTerm=robinson%20cup%201835%20bot>
<http://www.jbhawkinsantiques.com/uploads/articles/GARobinsoncup.pdf>.
NB Correction: Pers. com. : J.B. Hawkins "the article mis-attributes the cup to the TMAG collection but it is in fact held in the QVMAG collection." 21.12.2012

insulting⁴⁵. That the wider Tasmanian Aboriginal community might also feel slighted is quite understandable. Given that these two objects, presented in the way, and in the context, they have been, does raise issues to do with Aboriginal sensibilities and sensitivities that are seemingly downplayed – ignored even.

Viewing the exhibit and informed by the background of comfortable Tasmanian colonial histories that prevailed until the late 20th Century, some viewers might well feel comfortable enough in front of this exhibit. Yet they might well see that Aboriginal culture is by-and-large being represented by two objects – the Proclamation Board and the Bothwell Cup – that speak rather loudly of the Tasmania's Aboriginal people's decimation in a way and still feel comfortable enough with what is before them. The apparent inertia, and the visible lack of critical enquiry and engagement with the issues that are apparent here, appears and reads as being something less than reconciliatory. It is especially so in this museum, given its claimed 'status' and claimed connectivity to place that's proclaimed, and celebrated even, in the exhibit's marketing and title – "Tasmanian Connections".

The exhibit presents, and arguably privileges, a Eurocentric colonial representation of the island's histories. Anything approaching a postcolonial sensibility seems far far away. Indeed, the convict exhibit here provides a somewhat interesting counterpoint to the kind of treatment the Tasmanian Aboriginal has received in the exhibit's curation. The institution contests this critique, asserting that the "exhibition was developed to include the six key themes of dinosaurs, geology, Tasmanian fauna, Sydney Cove shipwreck, Convicts (the JW Beattie Collection) and transport. It was not intended to be a chronological social history of Tasmania."⁴⁶ In effect, and by extension, the Aboriginal story was quite deliberately excluded.

Why might this have been? To include Aboriginal Tasmania in this exhibit, with this brief, might have been seen as being inappropriate – possibly even insensitive. However, would this automatically be the case? Arguably not, but clearly there was/is some kind of institutional inhibition at work here. It is an open question as to just what the inhibition(s?) is to do with. If there is a problem here, it appears to be that any contentiousness to do with proactively including a Tasmanian Aboriginal discourse in 'the musing' is perceived to be intrinsically difficult, Or, is it to do with the kind of awkwardness that comes with acknowledgement, truth telling and reconciliation?

Truth and Musing

In the end, stepping back from actively engaging with contentiousness simply brings about even more layers of contestable imaginings. Undeniably, it merely adds yet another layer to the contentiousness to the musings invited in museums. Interestingly, Pablo Picasso had something to say about museums and truth that has a particular resonance here:

⁴⁵ Pers. comm.: Lola Greeno, September 2012

⁴⁶ Pers. comm.: QVMAG Director, October 2012

Museums are just a lot of lies, and the people who make art their business are mostly impostors ... We have infected the pictures in our museums with all our stupidities, all our mistakes, all our poverty of spirit. We have turned them into petty and ridiculous things.⁴⁷

Modern politics contains many examples of proof by assertion. This practice may also be observed occasionally in museums somewhat like it is with the use of political slogans. In museums, collections of 'ideas' are presented as narratives in order to provide easily digested take away messages. The technique is also sometimes found in advertising. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin said, "A Lie told often enough becomes the truth." Supposedly, Joseph Goebbels embroidered that idea somewhat when he is often quoted as saying:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.⁴⁸

Standing in the exhibit 'Tasmanian Connections', in a defunct and repurposed railway workshop in Tasmania, musing upon Tasmanianness can be perplexing – and more so from the vantage point of a 21st Century understanding of 'place.' That is, musing on a 'placedness' that vibrates with echoes of the past, and hearing Picasso's insights resonate in the musing, and thinking about Lenin and Goebbels too ... well the disconnections before you become positively boisterous.

Rainbow Tinting in Rear Vision Mirrors

The trouble with research is that it tells you what people were thinking about yesterday, not tomorrow. It's like driving a car using a rearview mirror.⁴⁹

Research that is viewed through rainbow-tinted rear view mirrors is doubly troublesome. Collections come with multifarious agendas and the truth, however that might be interpreted and understood, is at best illusive.

Public patronage is the support, encouragement, or financial aid that 'the public' bestows upon the keepers of public collections – and typically via government and taxes. In the history of museums, patronage was typically the province of the noble

⁴⁷ THE MUSEUM AS A SITE OF CONTEST: The Bilbao Guggenheim, Jeremy MacClancy Reprinted from *Focaal*, No. 29, 1997, pp. 91—100 (Pablo Picasso quoted in Barr 1946: 274). <http://www.scholars-on-bilbao.info/fichas/MacClancyFOCAAL1997.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/goebbelslie.html> 15/12/12

⁴⁹ Bernard Loomis – 1923 - 2006 – American cultural producer, toy developer and marketer

class, monarchs, popes and the captains of industry, all of whom have provided aid to underlings towards demonstrating their wealth, power and authority. It also refers to the right to bestow authority to the benefices of office – and sometimes the guardianship of saints. Most public institutions (museum?) depend upon political patronage. It grants the beneficiaries with the use of resources – public monies – to reward institutions, and in the end individuals, for their ‘support’. Some patronage systems may be benign, yet the term may refer to a type of corruption, or favouritism, where power brokers reward groups, institutions, ethnicities, etc. for their support using various manifestations of ‘largess’ – legally and illegally. Storytellers need sustenance and thus are vulnerable to persuasion. If the demand is for a ‘smoothed over history’ so be it. But what is the purpose of the museum?

People hold strong opinions about museums. Some assert that their primary function should be scholarship, others insist that it's more important to communicate with a wide audience. In pursuing either of these goals, should museums focus on exploring objects or investigating their contexts—are they about looking at things or telling stories? Adding to the debate, there's lingering anxiety about relativism; some commentators (and probably many visitors) think museums should strive to be objective, others relish a variety of views.

It has become a cliché to say that museums are today's churches—special places for contemplation, separate from day-to-day concerns; conversely, there's an argument that museums should aim to be commonplace, part of normal life. It is intriguing that museums were once talked of as places that reinforced cultural hegemonies, but now they are more often seen as democratising access to [cultural production], and even as politically correct when they attempt to include groups formerly omitted from history.

While some believe museums have changed far too much, others think they haven't been transformed enough ... Tiffany Jenkins believes museums are suffering from “a crisis of cultural authority” because of unremitting questioning of their “foundational purpose”, which she isolates as “the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge”. She wishes museums were still seen “as a distinct realm, removed from social and political forces”. She seems to want museums to separate themselves from a world changed by postmodern relativism, cultural theory and postcolonialism, to rediscover their earlier “implicit universalism” and to ditch today's “explicit subjectivism”...

She's quite wrong to say museums no longer value knowledge. They continue to be highly didactic institutions and ... remain passionately committed to promoting understanding, and to rather old-fashioned ideas such as truth and beauty. Long may museums continue to change to find new and more effective ways to share collections and expertise with ever

wider audiences.⁵⁰

As Picasso insinuates, absolute truth as inflexible reality is unlikely to be found in a museum. Nonetheless, we might expect to find some placedness if the institution is interrogating its purpose – and the realities within which it exists. There are absolutely no square circles, and there are absolutely no round squares, although there is likely to be an awful lot of fussiness when you step upon contested ground searching for meaning.

Reconstructing Somewhere

Fundamentally the Tasmanian cultural landscape has been, and is being, reconstructed via the agencies of hegemonic imperialism and globalism. The placescaping that has gone on within its shoreline, and the cultural realities lived out there, have undergone the kind of modification that might be put side by side with say, climate change. Yet this transformation is at once contested and endorsed back and forth across numerous lines in the sand. ‘Taswegians’, imagine their sometimes bleak, sometimes paradisiacal, inheritance as a fraction, a disconnected fraction, that represents a whole – albeit one that might be an elsewhere place.

In so many ways, the island’s stories have had layer upon layer of imaginings from elsewhere imprinted upon the cultural landscape and the lives lived out within it. So many things ‘Tasmanian’ come into view wearing a dismal Gothic veil. In its original state, the island can be imagined as an unknown ‘elsewhere place’, a disconnected place at the edge of the world, existing in splendid isolation with a closed ecosystem. It’s a place that might have been imagined as being oblivious to, and unbothered by, the constancy of the warfare elsewhere. Each hunt was as successful as the last. It was a place where death needn’t be feared in a kind of oblivion where unknown neighbours, somewhere far away, poked each other in the eye. It’s the kind of place Hollywood might imagine and one where every ending might be a happy one.

But no, a rational musser could not sustain such imaginings – such placemaking – any more than they might willingly entertain a nightmare that trawls the depths of our subconscious fears, our uncertainties, our feebleness, and our contemplations of our sinfulness perhaps. The museums of old were full of plunder, the spoils of war and cultural trophies transmogrified into curiosities and the symbols of power. In Scandinavian museums the plunder is acknowledged for, and celebrated as, the Viking booty and the treasure that it is. In the museums of later colonial enterprises the collected plunder masquerades as a kind of quasi-universal knowledge bank. Yet, ‘Elgin’s marbles’ are uncomfortably detached from their place despite their ‘keepers’ assertions that “they are best cared for here” even if disconnected from home.

⁵⁰ The Art Newspaper: What are museums for?... Maurice Davies. Books, Issue 224, May 2011 Reviewing ‘Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: the Crisis of Cultural Authority’, Tiffany Jenkins, Routledge; The Best Art You’ve Never Seen: 101 Hidden Treasures from Around the World, Julian Spalding; ‘Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition, James Simpson – <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/What-are-museums-for/23597> 15/12/12

Who owns these places of the muse and “all this stuff”? In the 21st Century it is an open question, even if in the 19th and 20th Centuries there may have been a carnivalesque conga line of claimants deeming for themselves privileged access, if not ownership. Their music lingers but the dance has changed. Somewhat like the Bolsheviks for whom killing off private property was never enough – money needed to be abolished. Neo-musers need to rummage among the skeletons, the backroom detritus, the dross – and freely. These neo-musers (neo-owners!) are an ever growing legion, armed with insights and apparatus never before contemplated, looking to reconfigure the ivory towers of yesterday.

Social scientists tell us that the physicality of places shapes the cultures that inhabit them. In a desert life will be competitive, there will be fewer resources and war gods kind of make sense. In the mountains you will have different sets of imperatives. Still, the question hanging in the air is, does place shape culture or is it culture that shapes its place? Quite possibly it is a matter of memory.

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