

Around the Bend

The Curious Power of the Hills around Queenstown, Tasmania

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Approaching the town of Queenstown you can't help but be taken aback by the sight of the barren hillsides, hauntingly bare yet strangely beautiful. This lunar landscape has a majestic, captivating quality.

In December 1994 after 101 years of continuous mining—A major achievement for a mining company—the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company called it a day and closed the operation thus putting Queenstown under threat of becoming a ghost town. Now, with the mine under the ownership of Copper Mines of Tasmania, the town and the mine are once again thriving. Although Queenstown is primarily a mining town, it is also a very popular tourist destination offering visitors unique experiences.

So, head for the hills and discover Queenstown—a unique piece of 'Space' on earth.¹

In his discussion of the labour of the negative in *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labour of the Negative*, Michael Taussig opens out into a critique of criticism.

Criticism, says Taussig, is in some way a defacement, a tearing away at an object that ends up working its magic on the critic and forging a 'curious complicity' between object and critic.² Taussig opens up a critical space in which to think *with* the object of analysis, cutting through transcendental critique, as a critical defacement, which, in the very act of cutting, produces negative energy: a 'contagious, proliferating, voided force' in which the small perversities of 'laughter, bottom-spanking, eroticism, violence, and dismemberment exist simultaneously in violent silence'.³ This complicity in thinking might be charged by critical methodologies which engage in, and think through, peripatetic movements. In the chiasmic interplay of people and things, new materialities and worldings are generated.

This article provides a point of entry into a marginal place that is constituted in and through a series of desecrations. This is also a place constituted through what Kathleen Stewart, building on Taussig, calls 'eruptions of intensity': moments of mimetic excess, disruption and displacement, and 'dramatized, embodied spectacle' that give rise to what she calls a 'wild cultural proliferation'.⁴ Like the place which is to be discussed here—a mining town in central western Tasmania made in and through the intensities of rifts and ruptures, booms and busts—this article performs a similarly discontinuous and hallucinatory interpretive work—a performative or 'crafted mimesis'. 'Like montage or collage, it operates through a poetics of and by citation that can only "grasp" its "object" by following its interpretative moves into their tense and varied effects. In it, the power to comment becomes fragmentary with a built-in incompleteness and abruptness of statement.'⁵ In the encounter with this place, the subject and a place are constituted through movement, travel, exchange.

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Driving the notoriously winding Lyell Highway to Queenstown from Hobart, my mobile phone reception drops out and the car radio searches for a frequency. It picks up a station broadcasting in a foreign language, and this glossolalia soundtracks my journey through a landscape that becomes increasingly desolate. As you approach Queenstown the wilderness landscape starts to peter out to dry moon rock. The highway passes by the remains of the subsidiary mining towns of Gormanston and Linda, where only a few derelict houses remain, and continues up

Mount Lyell. A road sign cut to the shape of three copper-coloured rocky mountains resembles three fingers beckoning:

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The road narrows and clings to the mountain as it descends to the Queen River valley in a dizzy combination of twists and hairpin turns, a drive *Lonely Planet* describes as ‘unforgettable’.⁶ Half way down, the visitor is invited to survey the scenery at a roadside lookout, whereby the visitor perversely looks upon the beauty of ecological destruction. An old advertisement beckons the visitor to survey the ‘beautiful’ hills from a chairlift that spans the valley but which has since been removed—taken to the ski fields of Queenstown, New Zealand. A dated information placard explains why the hills are bare, but the valley doesn’t entirely correspond to the displayed material: clumps of vegetation are dispersed through the landscape like hair returning to a recovering cancer patient.



Hills around Queenstown

Photo: Emily Bullock

Queenstown is known as the mining capital of Tasmania's 'wild west', a regional tag formed through the turbulent exploits of the miners in the late nineteenth century. The town's 'otherworldly' quality is regularly described by way of allusion to other places—most commonly to the American 'wild west' frontier and to the moon. Its extreme climate reinforces this; it rains on average three hundred days a year, but in summer temperatures climb into the forties, and bushfires are a recurrent threat. The last time I was here, temperatures were soaring and I awoke in my bed in the Empire Hotel in the early hours of the morning to howling winds rattling the thin panes of window glass like a dust storm that would force shut saloons, barbers, and stables and leave behind the eerie trail of tumbleweed. In the morning, the skies were clear and blue and air calm, as if the havoc of the night had been a dream. Or a film.

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The scenery is somewhat weird. The gaunt, rugged hills, and deep gullies once verdant with forest and fern are now utterly destitute of vegetation, the continuous deluge of sulphur and arsenic from the Mt Lyell Reduction Works being fatal to all plant life.⁷

The view from the window of my spartan room in the Empire Hotel is unreal. Peeling back the curtains on what looks to be a dismal day, I cast my gaze across to the mountains: a glowing and spectacular sight. Pinks, dark reds and violets meld and fuse in a display of pyrotechnical wizardry. But the picture that I, and many tourists, see from the pub's window is just that, *a picture*. The mural I'm looking at is fixed to the side of the art deco-styled Paragon Theatre, once a town landmark and centre of activity. Built in 1932, the theatre provided Queenstown with its main source of contact with the 'world', screening a range of films from early talkies and Technicolor romances to *Billy the Kid* (David Miller, 1941). Today the windows of the Paragon are pasted full of old photos and notices that speak of absence—*Recognise any of these former usherettes? Please ring me*. But the mural along its side is a relatively new addition to the building. Painted in 2006 by the local GP who promises to restore the theatre to its 'original glory', the mural flaunts Queenstown's famous bald hills as an immense source of community pride. It also proves to be a piece of insurance for the inquiring tourist: on a day like today, it's going to be



Mural of hills around Queenstown on the Paragon Theatre

Photo: Emily Bullock

virtually impossible to see the hills, thus my gaze is diverted to the reproduction, but on a clear day such as yesterday, the visitor can see the hills and is hence invited to make comparisons between the two. Like the theatre itself, the mural stands as a theatrical paragon—of a landscape where the natural and artificial commingle. Despite its relative newness, the mural wall has already taken on the appearance of yet another neglected building as weeds sprout through the mortar and run up over the purple hills.

Like the weeds on the side of the Paragon, vegetation is starting to return to the bald hills of Queenstown, which have been a popular tourist drawcard since the turn of the century, sold in travel guides and brochures as a spectacular ‘moonscape’. In 1948, travel guidebook writer Stanley Brogden exclaimed, “These naked mountains, with their inconceivably varied colourings, occupy every view. No matter which way we turn—they seem to crowd into the very street we are in.”⁸ In the hills, visitors can see the effects of more than a hundred years of ecological degradation. A

combination of a severe bushfire in 1896 and the emission of sulphurous gases from the pyritic smelting process at the Mt Lyell copper mine have resulted in Queenstown's weird denuded landscape. This poisoned landscape, with its 'acid soils and tainted air', is perhaps stranger than the dense tracts of wilderness which characterise the remainder of Tasmania's west coast.⁹ Edward Colless describes the hills as 'a diabolical moonscape' and 'a beautiful aberration; as captivating and as unsettling as the night sky over Baghdad during the Gulf War'.¹⁰ The oft lionised pioneers who 'opened up' the west coast to the industrial pursuits of mining—a literal paring back of the wilderness—have in Queenstown produced a grotesque excess to its own history in its wasted landscapes and 'choppy geomorphics'.¹¹

This article traces a localised concern with excess and waste, place and identity in a mining town whose existence is increasingly threatened by the immanent closure of its copper mine. As Pete Hay says, 'in Queenstown we have a construction of place that is grounded in cultural processes that have caused the *extermination* of natural processes and local ecologies over a considerable area'.¹² Many locals believe the bald hills draw tourists to the town and thus provide a source of income at a time when the mining industry is endangered. Through the 1990s, for instance, ex-miner Noddy Reid ran a souvenir shop selling 'the world's dirtiest water', bottled from the polluted Queen River.¹³ But despite the importance of tourism to the town, and the reopening of the former mining railway between Strahan and Queenstown in 2002 as a tourist attraction, tourists regularly bypass Queenstown and opt to stay in the beautified tourist port town of Strahan, forty kilometres away. Queenstown, as the woman manning the visitor centre tells me, gets the 'overflow from Strahan'; those who stay in Queenstown comprise an excess tourist culture. Apparently, to stop over here is a perversion as the town remains, local Harry Deans says, 'a toilet stop on the way through to Strahan'.¹⁴

Through the town's quest to preserve a grotesque landscape via the archiving of a place and culture, Queenstown's hills adumbrate a fraught relationship between excess and waste, place and identity. While levels of production at the mine are as high as ever, technological advancements, increasing job specialisations and a change in ownership to offshore vendors have made for the decrease in the town's population to around two thousand. Greater value is now (dis)placed on Queenstown's wasted physical landscape for its sense of identity, place, as well as

economic return. As Pete Hay notes, 'the social value placed upon the bare hills is a key element in the community's collective and individual construction of its sense of place ... the hills constitute the single most important icon of the people of Queenstown's expressed sense of belonging to this place'.¹⁵ Further, the contestations over Queenstown's landscape follow Stephen Muecke's observation that:

things and people are mutually transformative—the place changes according to *who* comes to occupy it and *what* they do there; the people change as a consequence of the place, which is itself defined not just by its form, but through the potentialities introduced in the intervals in its territory ... As transient lives pass through it, we represent it and it represents us.¹⁶

The debate over Queenstown's hills provides a point of disruption and displacement which, as Kathleen Stewart suggests, gives to 'moments of dramatized, embodied spectacle, moments of the mimetic excess ... a world subject to eruptions of intensity'.¹⁷

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We go for a cup of tea up the street, feeling that living in this barren place must be a horror.¹⁸

Breakfast at JJ's Coffee Shoppe, province of town gossip. Tea doesn't compensate. As I gaze outside through the white lace curtains, the woman at the next table tells her friends about her husband's affair with a woman in the next town. They peer at me with suspicion. Paranoia setting in, I head for the streets. Men loiter outside the Koppa Rock Café in standard fluoro yellow vests, marked as people either to be kept in check (like those latter-day canary convicts), or revered as town heroes for staying on and keeping the town alive and the nation afloat. 'Loitering tends to blur the distinctions on which social order depends—between innocence and guilt, between the good citizen enjoying a moment's respite and the seedy character who may just be taking the sun on this bench or idling in that shady doorway'.¹⁹ Wing Dings and chips and eyes as I walk past them.

Queenstown's main block, laid out in the standard grid fashion, resembles the scene of a western, with its wide, open streets and grand but dilapidated hotels and

shop fronts adorned with iron lace. As I walk the streets, muddied utes cruise by, slow down to stare, speed up again—on a constant quest for distraction and reckless abandonment. Further on is the famed gravel oval, icon of the harsh ‘wild west’ where football matches turn into bloodbaths. The residential streets are lined with stumped ramshackle houses: rough rows of weatherboard, fibro, Permalum, corrugated iron. Near identical, the mass-produced houses are the products of early industrial modernity, put up quickly and cheaply by the mining company to house its workers. Queenstown’s miners are now as likely to be *seagulls*—fly-ins from intra- or interstate—so many houses are ruined, boarded up, shells of corrugated rust, and overwhelmed by man ferns. Others have a semblance of order. A pair of boots on the doorstep, washing hung under the front verandah, an umbrella by the door, are signs of life. Houses cling to the sides of hills, or are built hard against them. Now partially ‘destandardised’, they are inscribed with traces of a local, lived history. And, with the regrowth of plant life, residents have begun to establish gardens around their homes where before they could not, with some pockets of town taking on the appearance of a budding suburbia, fresh with garden gnomes and rockeries encased in giant truck tyres. The vernacular setting is a rippling of coarse textures, folk artefacts: most front yards bear satellite dishes, painted up in colours of the football club of allegiance. From every vantage point, it seems, the imposing icon Penghana, original home of the first general manager of the mine, Robert Carl Sticht, and now a luxurious bed and breakfast, can be seen on its high rocky cleft.

—‘A CEMETERY OF BLACK STUMPS’

Mining started at Queenstown when gold and copper deposits were found at Mt Lyell in the 1880s. Several leases were granted to mine the area and these merged into two major leases in 1903, forming the competing mines of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company (MLMR) and the North Lyell Mining Company (NLMC) each of which mined copper and built railways to transport the ore. These companies eventually amalgamated to mine the open cut mine, the Iron Blow, which became the single largest producer of copper in the British Empire. At its height in 1908, Queenstown’s population was six to seven thousand.²⁰ But like many mining towns, Queenstown was, and remains, subject to the booms and busts of the mining

industry, with notable falls in the 1890s, 1920s, and 1970s, threats of closure, and changes in ownership. After one such change of ownership, in 1912, a fire broke out in the Mt Lyell mine and killed forty-three miners, an event that continues to haunt the town. A large section of the town's Galley Museum is devoted to the event, and various competing stories (including a host of conspiracies) are told about the incident. At its height, several thousand workers were employed at the mine, but with the decrease in copper prices in the 1970s the mining activities were greatly reduced and workers retrenched. It was in the 1990s that Queenstown's future was most uncertain. In 1994, the MLMR ceased operations because of the increased costs in extraction caused by the deepening of the mine, as well as mounting environmental concerns about mining. After a few months, the mine was taken over by Gold Mines of Australia until this company withdrew because of low returns on copper. Since 1999 the mine has been leased to Sterlite Industries, an Indian-owned company.

Queenstown's vegetation began to deteriorate when the early miners felled trees to fuel the mine's blast furnaces, but with the introduction of pyritic smelting by US metallurgist Robert Carl Sticht in 1895, vegetation was prevented from regrowing. The ore from the mine, rich in sulphur, was tipped straight into the blast furnace, and sulphur vapours filtered the air. Geoffrey Blainey paints a grim picture of early Queenstown in his history of the mine, *The Peaks of Lyell*:

Sulphur was the curse of Mt Lyell. When the big company smelted its pyrite in ten or eleven large furnaces, Queenstown found its climate changing. In still weather sulphur from the smelters thickened fogs into pea-soupers, choked Queenstown and blanketed the valley. For days on end men working on the hills above the town basked in the winter sun and looked down on the creamy waste of cotton wool in the valley ... Sulphur was every breath of air; even tobacco lost its taste.²¹

The polluted landscape is the stuff of dystopian science fiction, as Blainey continues:

Sulphur, rain and fire painted a new landscape. Fogs heavily charged with sulphur made green grass and plants yellow in a day. Bushfires raced through the scrub in successive summers and left blackened hillsides. No fresh vegetation grew, for the sulphur fumes killed almost all the plant life within miles of the smelters. Heavy rain began to erode the top soil. Early

in this century the landscape was black and desolate, a cemetery of black stumps. Two beautiful valleys had become as ugly as battlefields.²²

Further still, natural forces assisted in the formation of the bare landscape, as Blainey notes: 'If Mt Lyell's climate and terrain had been different—if it had been a hot, dry and flattish terrain like Kalgoorlie—the acidic waters would have been coped with'.²³ The King and Queen rivers, which flow to Macquarie Harbour, were also filled with acidic tailings from the mine, killing both rivers and the harbour with poisoned sludge. The local tourist association at the time, which was run by one of Sticht's employees, dubbed Queenstown as the 'lunar landscape', therein beginning a long association of Queenstown with the alien.²⁴ But while the pyritic technique in smelting was abandoned for economic reasons in 1922 and the smelter closed in 1969, the land and water continue to remember the damage.

—CURIOUS MAGIC

Black stumps of trees on sulphur-rotted hills,

They look for all the world like half-plucked fowls.²⁵

Queenstown's landscapes bear the grotesque effects of the quest to modernise Tasmania in order to rid it of its 'convict stain'. This mining venture was seemingly a path out of the murk of colonialism, a forgetting of the past in its modern industrialism. Yet these toxic landscapes are merely an extension of colonialism; they might constitute what Deborah Bird Rose calls (after Blanchot) 'wounded space': 'geographical space that has been torn and fractured by violence and exile, and that is pitted with sites where life has been irretrievably killed'.²⁶ Wounded space, says Bird Rose, is a product of continued colonial cultural formations; in its social formations and environmental consequences, the mining industry continues, perpetuates as well as exceeds, colonial structures. Queenstown's landscape serves as a distinct example of a system of capitalist production gone wrong. This presents itself not in the form of a lack such as that which filters the imaginings of other ghost towns that litter Tasmania, but in the form of overproduction and excess that accompanies the wasted landscapes that surround Queenstown. While constituted by loss and devastation, this presents itself as a superabundance sustained by the grotesquerie of its contested landforms.

The bare appearance of the hills that have defined Queenstown for over a hundred years constitutes a perversion of the 'wilderness' that characterises the remainder of Tasmania's west coast. Queenstown is situated on the edge of the World Heritage-protected south west wilderness. In Tasmania, 'wilderness' is a potent imaginary domain which is bracketed and revered as a 'sacred cathedral' in ecological as well as touristic discourse. Any incursion of this 'sacred' space such as that at Queenstown might then be said to constitute 'desecration'. Jesse Shipway says that one of the discourses of industrial modernity in Tasmania is that of stripping nature of its sacred character to transform it into 'pure potentiality, replacing an immanent value with an instrumental one' (115).²⁷ As industrial modernity harnesses nature toward profitable ends, its contours are transfigured beyond their original configurations. But from desecration issues 'a curious power' of the sacred and inexplicable. As Michael Taussig suggests, 'desecration is more than the inverse of the sacred'.²⁸ As a kind of transgression, desecration produces a 'strange surplus of negative energy ... within the defaced thing itself'.²⁹ Taussig suggests:

Defacement is like Enlightenment. It brings insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery. As it does this, however, as it spoliates and tears at tegument, it may also animate the thing defaced and the mystery revealed may become more mysterious, indicating the curious magic upon which Enlightenment, in its elimination of magic, depends.³⁰

In its raw appearance, the landscape is strangely productive or reproductive, in the sense that it is not only valued but effectively appears to itself emit a 'curious magic' that Taussig so discusses—the pull of this negativity issuing both an affective force and a troubling of neat value regimes. Stephen Muecke writes of the 'ecofascist' tendency toward disgust of waste, or 'bad things in the landscape'.³¹ The presence of waste in or of the landscape would render visible our *relation* with the landscape, rupturing conceptions of 'wilderness' landscapes valued as 'pure'. Scarred by over a century of mining, Queenstown's landscape constitutes a veritable 'wasteland', from which issues a curious potential to disturb conceptions of these 'pure' and 'clean' Tasmanian landscapes built on the idea of 'wilderness', which appears to be underpinned by notions of value as fixed and inherent to an object rather than ascribed, insecure and changeable.³²

An absurd humour coagulates at the bald hills, rupturing into a perverse laughter. It is a landscape made grotesque and fantastically aberrant, in which discrete spatial boundaries between inside and outside, nature and culture are violated through inversions, weird protrusions and distensions. Trees have been eaten away by the sulphurous miasma—a smell of hell in the biblically enshrined ‘brimstone’—and Queenstown’s topographic contours have been literally turned inside out as the landscape’s ‘gems’ are now at its surface. Mt Lyell is now the inverse mirror image of the mountain that once was, due to open cut mining; instead of a mountain peak, it bears a deep crater filled with a liquid of ludicrous, unnatural hues coloured by sulphuric fumes.

The Iron Blow looks, by turns, like a deranged amphitheatre or a degenerate crop circle, with its smooth rings caved in from underground mining. With its corrupted surface, the landscape is rendered alien yet remains uncannily familiar. The surface is penetrated and insides are brought outside, just as miners are swallowed at 12-hour intervals by the sulphuric and diseased earth. As you drive the road that hugs Mount Lyell, you can see miniature waterfalls in the clefts between



West Coast Open Cut, 1998

Stereoscopic photograph: Martin Walch

rocks, a degenerate form of picturesque beauty more like abject secretions of lurid-coloured waters, their wetting of the rocks enhancing their spectacular colours. Here, the visitor encounters the *other* end of nature, stripped, turned, cut, in its full, wild hilarity. Here, she can't deny the perverse thrill of seeing a place so intoxicated by its own waste, a place forged through the transgressive outcomes of a violently exploitative capital accumulation, and where value continues to accumulate, to amass, to exceed pure instrumentality. This is the curious magic of this place, what happens when the tear in the face of the land releases a strange material energy which amounts to the sum of more, not less—a 'proliferating presencing' that issues from the void, as Taussig puts it, where things come alive just when they or their representation are proclaimed dead.³³

There is a sense of movement and wicked humour in these hills; they appear to issue an exacting material force. Locals say they change every time you look at them:

Mt Lyell is yellows to brilliant oranges at sunset ... depends on what the weather has been, if it's been raining and then fine it can be a light pinky mauve, it can be grey on a dry day or brilliant white if it's been dry for a period of time ... At night time it can go from mauve to brilliant purple, it can go from a cream to a yellow to a brilliant orange.³⁴

Further still, the hills are not a stable point on which to fix one's ideological perspective. As local resident Marilyn Ridsdale comments, 'some see the trees and are disappointed, or you get the ones who look at the hills and don't see a single tree on it. They just don't see the trees.'³⁵ The hills constitute a landscape 'never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body'.³⁶ There is a sense that mining has produced more than minerals in its standard production line schema; it has produced the excessive and superabundant, that which exceeds its normal boundaries and which demands to be performed. Edward Colless calls the hills a 'diabolical moonscape'.³⁷ The hills perform a kind of outrageous wickedness of style, akin to the adoption of a clashing outfit. As Brogden once commented, 'the colours of these mountain-sides defy description—yellows, oranges, puces, greens, blues ... There was never such a colourful devastation as this.'³⁸

And yet the town is nestled within this strange landscape without apparent contradiction. Painter Jan Senbergs, who completed two series of paintings based

around Queenstown in the early 1980s, was struck by the way in which ‘normality’ persisted in the playing of regular football matches amidst the ‘absurd world’ of the town.³⁹ But Senbergs’ *Footy Ground, Queenstown* (1982), itself modelled on a postcard of the town’s celebrated gravel oval, is anything but normal; the ground merely melds with Senbergs’ overall chaotic Escher-like view of Queenstown. The football ground is, as Bakhtin would say, an ‘extraordinary realism’, a central part of the everyday, yet a perverted and exaggerated symptom of it in its harsh, gravel texture.⁴⁰

—MOVEMENTS

The folk of Queenstown have, as a consequence of the culture of embattlement that has prevailed since the Franklin Dam fracas, a clearly defined sense of who belongs and who is alien.⁴¹

A moving landscape can *move* a people. As the Queenstown landscape moves, grows over, changes, a resident group fires up, retaliates, is *moved*. As Giuliana Bruno suggests, ‘motion, indeed, produces emotion and ... correlatively, emotion contains a movement’.⁴² The grotesque landscape has itself spawned a further grotesque appearance as the vegetation has begun to grow back since the cessation of smelting. The mining company is now also forced to undertake a revegetation program in accordance with the greater awareness in the state toward environmental issues. Now in a transitional stage between the ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’, Queenstown’s hills are a contested site. As the stark presence of the hills is increasingly diminished, ‘reclaimed’ by nature, the town’s mining history is threatened with extinction.

In a perversion of the state’s famed Green movement, the locals want their bald landscape preserved. Many of Queenstown’s residents campaign for the preservation of the bald hills. According to Edward Colless, ‘resident action groups using defoliants conduct guerrilla strikes against nature for the sake of preserving the unnatural. They speak about their obligation to the national heritage.’⁴³ And Hay notes that, ‘along the coast, and under the cover of night, boat-borne saboteurs torched venerable Huon pines’.⁴⁴ These responses to environmental change suggest an affective condition of solastalgia, a term Albrecht defines as ‘the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the

present state of one's home and territory'.⁴⁵ As a form of place attachment, which scholars such as Edward Casey have discussed, solastalgia registers when 'there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation)'.⁴⁶ Albrecht says this manifests as something similar to that of nostalgia, which refers to the longing for a lost place. But rather than pining for a lost place, solastalgia registers the 'lived experience' of the loss of the present, 'a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at home'.⁴⁷

But while Albrecht's examples all point to ecological disruption such as the introduction of open-cut mining as being the cause of solastalgia, this appears to be inverted in the case of Queenstown. Here, it is the desire to *rid* the town of its altered landscapes which presents solastalgia. In 1988, Councillor Bruce Dilger waged a battle against the regrowth of wattle: 'A few can enhance the idea of a lunar landscape. When they become numerous we'll have a problem.'⁴⁸ The contestation over the hills reached the national news and in 1993 the then-premier Ray Groom intervened to block the mine's plans for rehabilitation in support of the locals, a move ordinarily reserved for Tasmania's forested landscapes. The mine then fought with the government to permit its revegetation project: while the mine believed Queenstown's landscape 'an embarrassment to the Australian mining industry', the government supported the community in their claim that the hills were an important tourist attraction.⁴⁹ Tasmanian Greens' spokesman Gerry Bates argued that the hills are 'no doubt ... a talking point, [but] no one will miss them when they are gone'.⁵⁰

But Queenstown's bald hills provide a profound sense of history and heritage, identity and belonging, and folklore and legend for Queenstown's residents. As one local resident claimed in response to the mine's revegetation proposal, "That mine fed 6000 people, it gave them an education, it put them right through life, and now they want to pull everything down."⁵¹ Here, the mine itself appears to collapse into the hills around it, making the landscape inseparable from industry. This relationship then has the effect of establishing affective relations between place and people as well as between people, as well as reconfiguring systems of value. According to Pete Hay, the bald hills 'constitute the single most important icon of the people of Queenstown's expressed sense of belonging to this place'.⁵² For Queenstown's residents, the hills constitute the town's difference from other

Tasmanian mining towns: one local said prior to the implementation of the revegetation project, 'If the reveg goes ahead ... this'll be just another town with no real attraction. Like Rosebery.'⁵³ Renowned for its high suicide rate, Rosebery is hemmed in by densely forested hills and has its own mine that suffers continual threats of closure.⁵⁴ Through the 'guerrilla strikes', residents attempted to stave off the 'ghosts' which have visited other abandoned mining towns such as Renison Bell, Williamstown and Teepookana, where little physical trace remains of the once-vainglorious towns based around secondary industries. As a place forged through the very materiality of waste, Queenstown's identity appears to be contingent on the peculiar situation of fixing—through archiving and preserving—waste. Waste is here what, paradoxically so given its own boundary riding quality, would secure Queenstown's precarious identity as a town and its history through a curious act of 'presencing' which spreads and multiplies itself in waves.

While the 'guerrilla strikes' have now been deemed illegal, the hills continue to spark intense contestation within the local community, and this is prompted by the local tourism industry. When I asked a Queenstown resident whether the 'guerrilla attacks' still occurred, she affirmed that it was illegal, 'but if it wasn't, then I'd be out there doing it myself'. The landscape, including the mine site itself, has been submitted for National Estate nomination because of its 'national significance as a mining landscape'.⁵⁵ Ironically, the submission states that 'as a cultural landscape



Queenstown Postcard, West Coast Council

continuation of mining must remain an essential ingredient to avoid fossilisation of the landscape. Continued open-cut or underground mining will complement, not compromise, the cultural value of this landscape to Tasmania'.⁵⁶ Similarly, the Lake Margaret Hydro station outside Queenstown also remains safeguarded by the Queenstown community. In 2006, Hydro Tasmania announced it would close its 94-year-old power station, but the outraged community put up a fight to preserve the artificial lake, and it is now undergoing restoration. West Coast Mayor Darryl Gerrity claims "Lake Margaret should attract hard-core wilderness buffs. The old pioneer walking tracks to Tullah and Cradle Mountain can be reopened and provide an experience much wilder than the [Lake St Clair to Cradle Mountain] Overland Track".⁵⁷ The museumising impulse isn't confined to locals, however. In the revised edition of his history of Mt Lyell, Geoffrey Blainey recommends 'one patch of bare hillside should, if at all possible, be preserved. It would then continue to puzzle, anger, delight or astonish visitors, attracting them in their hundreds of thousands and so keeping the town alive'.⁵⁸ If such affective responses of tourists can keep a 'town alive', then Queenstown's hills attest to the curious, moving power of a desecrated landscape which the tourism industry abets in a further wave of exploitation.

—VIVA VIV

The tourist who first enters Queenstown by the disorienting curves of the Lyell Highway might follow the road signs marked by the ubiquitous italicised letter 'i' to the Information Centre, housed in the old Imperial Hotel. But the centre, manned by a team of aged retirees, merely disorients the visitor further: it doubles as the reception room for the Galley Museum, the town's only museum housing the sprawling collection of the late miner, Eric 'Shrewdy' Thomas. The Information Centre provides an excess of information. Here the photocopier has full reign, promising infinity with every copy: atop a glass cabinet filled with silver spoons, doilies, and fine bone china are lined stacks of photocopies—of tourist leaflets, information from the internet on Tasmanian minerals and the process of mining, lists of Australian state emblems and 'Australian Outback Recipes', including Damper, Kangaroo Stew, and Stockman's Tea. Overleaf a map of Queenstown, hand-drawn and labelled, is a photocopy of a genealogical tree beginning with William the

First, branching out into a labyrinthine web of Edwards, Richards and Georges, and finishing with Elizabeth the Second. A great evolutionary tree of life, its branches perhaps suggest a direct line of descent between Queenstown folk and English monarchy that draws links between classes in a deep, almost archaeological, and strangely hopeful sense of time.

Apparently, if one wants to get orientated in Queenstown, first one must pass through the town's vast accumulation of detritus. While now Queenstown's 'official' museum, the collection has the appearance of a vast grotesquerie like those Tasmanian sites described by Colless where 'strange dreams manifest in the "unofficial" folk museums or "educational fantasies" that gradually form around and deform domestic hobbies and private visions'.⁵⁹ The museum began in 1974 after Thomas, who hauled the last load of ore from the open cut in 1972, retired to spend his time compiling his collection of photographs—'the town's family album'.⁶⁰ From there, the collection grew to fill the entire space of the old two-storey hotel and since 1986 has been run by a team of volunteers.

In a corner just beyond the entrance foyer of the museum stands what appears to be a newer addition to the collection: a cardboard cut-out in the shape of a human. For his face, a face seemingly taken from a family photo is blown up to life size; across his legs, the yellow hills of Queenstown spread; a collage of newspaper articles, stickers, bits of leaves is pasted to his torso, and all over his body is a glitter that shines like gold dust. 'VIVA VIV', 'VIV'S FAITH IN ABT PLAN', 'ABT BRINGS BOOM TO WEST.' Upon closer inspection, the messiah of progress turns out to be local businessman Viv Crocker, who, in the mid 1990s, established with fellow railway enthusiasts the Mount Lyell Abt Railway Society to promote the restoration of the Abt Railway in a bid to connect with the west's frontier tradition. In 2003, the Abt Railway was reopened to tourists as the 'West Coast Wilderness Railway'. As the hills grow over with 'wilderness', Queenstown's folk and its history are retold: By way of figurative distortions—a grotesque, exuberant form of exaggeration—Queenstown's scale is imaginatively extended and enlarged so as to be imagined as a place of grand self-importance, a place larger than its present allows it to be.

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—NOTES

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