

love at last sight

Port Arthur and the Afterlife of Trauma

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On 28 April 1996, Martin Bryant shot dead thirty-five children, women and men at Port Arthur, Tasmania's premier tourist location and the setting for the most notorious penal establishment of nineteenth-century Australia. Twenty of Bryant's victims were shot in the Broad Arrow Cafe. Following the shootings, the fate of the cafe remained uncertain for nearly four years.

— HER FIRST TIME: 2000

I will walk straight towards it. Because death, anguish, loss of faith, all that is inconsolable in this life, finds its afterlife in the bare bones of everyday objects, buildings, people's faces. There is no monument there yet, but I'll know it when I see it—this cafe slash gift shop slash den of gastronomic ill-repute, where twenty people died one afternoon not so long ago, twelve in less than half a minute.

Those who were inside the Broad Arrow at the time of the massacre or those who went in straight after rarely spoke about what they saw. Glenn Cumbers, a Uniting Church minister at the time from nearby Nubeena, said that:

The scene inside the Broad Arrow was just something that took your breath away ... I remember looking at people who were still sitting upright in their chairs, holding a cup, with half their face removed.¹

This is why I needed to see the Broad Arrow for myself. *Less than half a minute, half a face removed*, how could such things be experienced as words? We all know so many words by now—*genocide, death, slaughter, horror, unthinkable loss, limits of human depravity* ... For all

their unsettling qualities, their ability to wound and provoke, these words are deeply familiar, part of the language we have come to speak.

Yet in the world of material objects and sites marked by violence and loss, there exist things and places, which, as Kyo Maclear once wrote, 'have irretrievable counterparts in those experiences for which no records whatsoever exist, those losses precluded from thought or direct remembrance'.² In other words, I had to see the Broad Arrow, or whatever was left of it, with my own eyes. The cafe was my entry point into the world where the events of 28 April 1996 and their extended aftermath existed in forms radically separate from the words and opinions, from the pained and waning recollections, of the day.

On the way to the Broad Arrow three and a half years after the tragedy, I held in my mouth, ready to swallow, words from other people's descriptions of concentration camps, gulags, sites of natural and industrial catastrophes. *Ominous, menacing, unnerving, steeped in darkness and evil.* Yet the Broad Arrow, as I was about to discover, was best described by the word *undistinguished*. Not so much a testament to the omniscience of violence and loss as an eyesore—a plain (read ugly) building dying a protracted, unseemly death. Before the tragedy, locals had a better name for it—Poison Arrow—its culinary infamy marking a quarter of a century of thousands of visitors grating their teeth on Broad Arrow's staple diet of pies, pasties, chips and pre-packed, over-refrigerated sandwiches.

— AFTERLIFE: 1996–2000

The truth is that the Broad Arrow was supposed to be bulldozed into the ground within days of the massacre. In the immediate aftermath, everyone wanted to see it go: relatives of the victims, staff, the site's management, politicians, journos covering stories around what they had so mundanely dubbed 'the death cafe', even the Broad Arrow's former owner Jim Laycock, who, after almost twenty-five years, had sold his business only the year before.

If it were not for the police seeking to preserve the scene of the crime while the investigation was under way, the cafe would have been flattened into the ground within days of the massacre. Yet as the forensic needs delayed the urge to obliterate, the cafe ended up only partially demolished. Its contents were removed one by one. The stained carpet and furniture were thrown out and destroyed. Bloodstains across the walls and the floor were scrubbed clean.

But the shell of the cafe remained. Until, almost four years later, the decision, tortuously negotiated and long-since overdue, was finally reached. The Port Arthur Memorial, it was agreed, would incorporate the remaining walls of the Broad Arrow Cafe. The then Tasmanian premier Jim Bacon, chair of the Port Arthur Memorial Committee, practically had to force the issue. The indecision could have gone on for much, much longer. But, as debates continued, the cafe's gutted shell stood at the site, exposed and derelict, almost starting to blend, some observed, with the rest of Port Arthur's much more spectacular and benign ruins. As



Tasmanian historian Jenna Mead noted, ‘The building itself was un- Port Arthur’s church believably ugly, it was the worst kind of cafeteria, now it is another ruin like all the other ruins on the site. There is a kind of logic to it.’³

There is also a kind of logic to the fullness of Broad Arrow’s unexpectedly volatile after-life, to the four years of unrest caused by the broken walls and the slab of a mundane cafeteria, which had been converted from a sports pavilion circa 1950s. For nearly four years, Broad Arrow’s gutted shell, stripped of purpose, furnishings, roof, pretence of feeding visitors, allowed us to re-imagine the whole of Port Arthur’s ruins.

— AUSTRALIA’S ONLY BONA FIDE RUINS

Following the penal settlement’s closure in 1877, as its relics fell into disuse, as the site was gutted by fires and overrun by ‘weeds and black snakes’,⁴ as the desire to purge the colony of its penal taint took hold of public institutions and private citizens alike, Port Arthur survived, to a large degree, because it could be imagined as something truly unique—the colony’s bona fide ruins. Till this day, Australia doesn’t have a better answer to the ‘classical ruins’ of Europe, to the Pompeiis, the Parthenons and the Tintern Abbeys that she so notoriously lacks. Port Arthur’s church (so pretty it hurts) is still one of the most iconic and photographed structures in contemporary Australia, its image found both in glossy tourist materials marketed internationally and in, of all places, a ‘hot-rod bike magazine: a naked model astride a gleaming bike within the old ruin’.⁵

All across Australia, the ruins of Port Arthur have been unique in their ability to approximate a sense of monumentality, the solidity of foundations, the entrenched continuity of the

European tradition. Other ruins simply don't measure up. Writing about the material remnants of Sarah Island, site of the Macquarie Harbour penal settlement, Van Diemen's Land's original 'hell on earth', Richard Davey speaks of the ruins themselves as 'elemental', nothing like 'the tantalizing images of Port Arthur, almost as it was'.⁶ The ruins at Port Arthur are not elemental by extension; they are tantalising, spectacular, *almost as it was*.

Yet the venerated tradition that Port Arthur seems to single-handedly embody is anchored to a potent archetype—an average Roman seaside town by the name of Pompeii. Destroyed by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 AD, Pompeii became frozen in time, entombed in its own ruins, its history seemingly suspended. The excavations of the buried city, which began in the first half of the eighteenth century, have persisted to this day. What researchers seemed to have uncovered was a city paradoxically protected against oblivion by its catastrophic demise. In Pompeii:

the remains are so vivid and so apparently complete that one quickly gains the feeling of being in a town whose inhabitants have temporarily gone away, but could come back at any moment. This immediacy of the past is no doubt among the main reasons why Pompeii continues to fascinate us, and, why, almost 250 years after its discovery, it still attracts more visitors than any other archaeological site.⁷

Just like Pompeii, the ruins of Port Arthur were framed to evoke a past that was both spectacular and so distant that it would appear to be gradually merging with nature itself. As Pompeii had allowed its admirers to derive comfort from the inevitability of the eventual dissolution and absorption of grand cities and historical traumas by soil and air, so the much more recent ruins of Port Arthur were meant to distance generations of settler Australians from the ongoing violence of colonialism, to embody the absolute rupture between the convict past and the settlers' present. While Australia is literally covered with the sites of abandoned settlements and 'ghost towns', such ruins can never be imagined as classical, Pompeii-like. Instead of representing the colonial past as continuous and majestic, they embody a sense of non-Indigenous Australia's historical transience, marking the places where colonialism, in the words of Bruce Clunies Ross, 'was forced to retreat'.⁸

Yet the emergence of the newest set of ruins at Port Arthur in April 1996 has unsettled the imagined grandeur of the site. While the fate of the Broad Arrow Cafe was debated for almost four long years, gone was all that was spectacular and comforting about Australia's number one ruins. 'As the windowless ruins of Port Arthur are the key to origins of European Australia', wrote Torquil Canner, the designer of the new Port Arthur Memorial, 'the ruin of Broad Arrow is the key to this point in history'.⁹ To me, the fate of the cafe's shell also turned out to be the key to evoking the site's past, to feeling my way all the way back to the prehistory of the site's afterlife—the moment when Port Arthur's destiny, just like the destiny of the

Broad Arrow more than a century later, was literally anyone's guess. With survivors alive and the histories of loss and destruction raw and unhealed, the story of the cafe's ruins took away a safe theoretical perspective and a safe distance in time. Embodying the very essence of being torn between wanting to erase and wanting to keep objects inscribed with trauma, ruins, as it turned out, were a way of doing both.

When Norman Klein was writing a book about sites of memory in Los Angeles, he imagined ruins to be akin to 'scars', for they refer to

the sensation of encountering something that stands in for what is off the map. The hand touches the welt of an old scar on the side of the face. The mass feels unnatural. It bears the memory of surgical violence—a physical piece of evidence, but evacuated of meaning.¹⁰

Klein's is a popular, and wonderfully articulated, view of ruins as kinds of 'fakes'. Yet, Port Arthur teaches us that there is another way of thinking of ruins as scars. 'Port Arthur's symbol in the wake of the massacre', says the peninsula's sculptor Peter Adams,

was the fallen oak leaf, the autumn oak leaf ... What happens when the autumn leaf falls off the tree, a little scar is formed on the end of a twig to protect the emerging bud so it survives through the winter and blossoms in the spring. That little scar is called the cicatrix, that's the botanical definition of it, and the cicatrix also means the scar of a healed wound, not the open wound, but the healed wound, so that notion of scars is important in the growth ... in allowing us to blossom again.¹¹

Loss does not herald a full stop. History gets punctuated by ruins in all kinds of ways. Take the longer story of Pompeii, for instance. In the eighteenth century, the excitement around the excavation site at Pompeii centred on the expectation that the uncovered town would be near-perfectly preserved by the layer of ash under which it had literally been buried. Pompeii was to be a perfect ruin—evocative, imposing and instructive. As the excavations proceeded, a very different picture emerged. The dug-up ruins were not ideal, but marked by traces of extensive damage and reconstruction from a massive earthquake that had destroyed half of the city seventeen years prior to the infamous volcano eruption. The ruins were further damaged by the excavations themselves, as well as by four major earthquakes in 1805, 1857, 1936 and 1980, which brought further damage and destruction to the excavated city.

To take on the full story of Pompeii means to recognise that in Pompeii, there is not one moment of loss. The city is lost and recovered and lost again. Its ruination is ongoing, always in the present. Similarly, there is not one single moment of loss at Port Arthur. No Hour Zero. The hurt comes in waves. The ruins keep crumbling. The memories of what has happened come to the surface only to disappear again. Sometimes, it seems, the afterlife of objects and



'The Harmony Day', Port Arthur, 21 March 2004

places marked by violence and loss proves more volatile, more illuminating than their entire prior existence.

— THE STAYING POWER: 2004

This is about memory. Eight years after the tragedy, I am back at Port Arthur interviewing people for 'Hindsight', Radio National's social history program. It's Sunday, and a national 'Harmony Day' festival, celebrating Australia's rich multicultural heritage (rich as in too sweet, too much, somewhat queer?), is being staged at the site. Which means that there are locals coming to Port Arthur, not just tourists. And a German choir.

Please marvel openly at my open-ended approach. 'Does the site have a contemporary significance?' I ask tourists, hiding my microphone away from the wind, in hope of some thoughts on the relationship between the present and the past. 'Wasn't here some kind of terrorist attack some time ago?' answers a rosy-cheeked international visitor (in the best 'Harmony Day' tradition, I won't specify where this visitor came from). Memory is a funny thing. You'd think that eight years wouldn't be that much of a time lapse, but for many overseas tourists, it seems, the memory of what happened at Port Arthur in April 1996 is already difficult to hold on to.

'I am here for the convict heritage experience', a visitor from Victoria says in a loud, confident voice. No funny stuff, just the chains, sweat and blood of the national beginnings. Does it mean that you can pick and choose what you come to Port Arthur for? Is it like going to Bali's Paddy's Bar, rebuilt and re-opened after the 2002 bombings, just for the beer experience?

— DEAR CRAIG: 1996

Dear Craig,

This letter acknowledges that I am entering the premises of the Broad Arrow Cafe as a matter of my own choice and free will. I have not been coerced or pressurised in any way or form by the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority.¹²

Dear Craig. Something was shattered right at this point. In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the site's management sent its employees back into the cafe for food preparation purposes, covering its arse with a legal disclaimer. Of the young girls, kitchen hands working at Port Arthur, some found themselves staying inside Broad Arrow for up to two hours, sent in to use the remaining kitchen equipment. During their breaks, you could spot them, almost without fail, hiding behind the buildings, crying. The cafe may have been scrubbed clean of bloodstains and stripped of the furnishings, but the floor, the floor remained the same. Louisa Street, nineteen at the time, hated every second she spent walking it.¹³ The management only stopped sending the girls in once a number of formal complaints were lodged. You can't blame Martin Bryant because big bosses have no mercy.

The events of 28 April changed everything. Nothing was spared, not even the simple stuff, like the flow of daily work. On the tours of Port Arthur, the majority of guides now walk right past the Broad Arrow. Without stopping. The visitors heckle, of course, persist with questioning even when the guides' faces close in. The visitors want to know what happened. But the guides don't talk. A lot of them simply can't. 'Here is a brochure', they say, 'it's all in there'. Dorothy Evans, the site's interpretation officer, put the brochure together to stop all the questioning. Nothing floral. *Just the transcript of judge's summing up. His words. A list of facts.*¹⁴ Now the guides have, at least, a bit of protection.

But the mystery of Broad Arrow, call it morbid fascination if that makes you feel better, persists. Just watch all these people in the wake of the shootings unable, it seems, to keep away from the cafe. Here they are—sneaking in, larking around the ruins, and, satisfied that no one is watching, souveniring mementos of Broad Arrow's downfall. Here is an authentic bit of *the death cafe*, dust and dirt from the most violent place in the whole of Australia.

— DECISIONS, DECISIONS ...

Not much time had to pass before the collective resolve, the almost biological need to be rid of the Broad Arrow, gave way to intense, aching questioning and resentment:

The Cafe has become both a trigger and a target for volatile emotions. For many the sight of the building brings out the painful memories of the day, including the staff who have to confront the Cafe daily. For many Australians, the building symbolises their own vulnerability

—one day, without warning, they could be victims of intense violence. For Tasmanians generally, the structure, is a profound reminder that ‘Tasmania has lost its innocence’ ... For residents of the Tasman Peninsula community, their ‘home’ has been violated ...¹⁵

Yet for some of those whose loss has forever been tied with the Broad Arrow, the cafe’s destruction would be akin to the desecration of a grave, nothing less than a sacrilege. Besides, wasn’t the cafe, some asked, made into a site of great historical significance precisely by virtue of its connection to the tragedy? Yet what about all those people whose loved ones were killed outside the cafe? Wouldn’t the Broad Arrow make a lousy memorial for them? After all, while figuring as a symbol of the tragedy, the cafe represented only half the massacre, with fifteen people, including two young girls and their mother, killed elsewhere on the site and at the Seascope Cottage.

The more time elapsed, the less clear it became not only how to help survivors and staff, but also how best to honour those killed. The intensity of emotions, the irreconcilability of views, are deeply, profoundly telling. More than anything else, any place, any object, any physical or emotional remnant of 28 April 1996, the shell and ruins of Broad Arrow materialised the possibility that the trauma of the massacre would become a permanent, inescapable reality at the site and on the Tasman Peninsula as a whole, that, in the words of historian Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, the tragedy would be relived continually, incessantly at Port Arthur.¹⁶

But what were the alternatives? In Hiroshima, the material remnants of the nuclear explosion have been treated by many of the bomb survivors as ‘living witnesses’ to their trauma.¹⁷ The significance of these witnesses, says Hiroshima survivor Kuboura Hiroto, is particularly important, because they are ageing and dying. Yet that ‘which loses shape also loses spirit. When it disappears from our sight, it disappears from our memory.’¹⁸ Could it be that as a living witness, Broad Arrow alone could bring forth in survivors and visitors alike a kind of embodied, piercing interaction and remembering that would steer the spirit, the essence of what had happened, away from being lost?

It is a current psychological consensus, almost a truism these days, that the full impact of trauma reaches us only through belated recognition and re-experiencing of the event. The nature and impact of that belated recognition at Port Arthur has been tied intimately with the primary setting of the carnage. It was, in fact, the cafe’s fate that, in no small degree, was going to determine the forms memory and meaning would take in the aftermath of the tragedy as well as the possibilities and practices of mourning. In the words of writer and academic Cathy Caruth, ‘historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all’.¹⁹ The Broad Arrow is, forever now, part of this chain of forgetting and remembering at Port Arthur.

When the British first came to Tasmania, in 1803, Palawah called ‘the white men ... *Numerá*.²⁰ *Numerá*, which means *ghost*.²¹ In a matter of decades, the myth of extinction had turned Palawah people themselves into *Numerá*, transforming living, breathing people into shadows, mystical apparitions, ghosts. As shadows, Tasmanian Aboriginals were forced into adopting a different ontological status to that of settler Tasmanians. In other words, their *being in the world* had to be radically different. ‘We who are not here’—the name of an oral history project by Aboriginal people of the Huon and Channel in southern Tasmania—tells of the essence of being a shadow, of being present only through one’s absence.²² Yet there is a price for turning living people into ghosts. In shoving colonised people into shadows, the very being of the coloniser had also become transformed. Here, to quote Homi Bhabha, was a proud colonist, a brave explorer ‘tethered to ... his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being’.²³

A coloniser, it seems, could not exist without his shadow.²⁴ A state of haunting was, furthermore, nothing other than a precondition of any colonial settlement. In Australia, this state of haunting manifests itself most clearly in what Ross Gibson calls the ‘persistence in the memory’.²⁵ People are killed, places are erased, histories are rewritten, but the memories do not seem to disappear. Gibson saw such persistence marking the faces of settlers in North Queensland, the kinds of faces, which, in themselves, were just like ‘landscapes’ too.²⁶ Examining group photos taken in the years leading up to Federation, Gibson noticed a multitude of ‘faces forced awry by spiritual strain ... Many of these people had seen too much violence during the days of land-grabbing and it had disturbed them to their souls.’²⁷ What Gibson saw in settlers’ faces, the ones formed on the frontier, ‘persisting, wasting no vigour’, keeping to themselves whatever they know, and in his own face too, was a kind of marking, the thickest blend of local history.²⁸ And then we have places, whole areas, marked by the same *persistence of memory*, by the local history of *disturbance to the soul*.

In Indigenous communities throughout Australia, there exists a firm belief that places of haunting should not be neglected. In Arnhem Land, in northern New South Wales, on Bass Strait islands, in other parts of Australia, the ‘site of the nearest massacre was “always known” and was seen as an important landmark’.²⁹ ‘Aboriginal communities’, writes Henry Reynolds, ‘usually know the location of such haunted places’.³⁰ These places are not going away. They need to be known and marked. Yet non-Indigenous Australians, in the words of Reynolds, are ‘uneasy and ambivalent about the “scars in the landscape”, those known sites of multiple deaths where significant numbers of Aborigines were killed by the settlers’.³¹ We are also, it turns out, no less ambivalent about places such as Port Arthur, where settler Australians killed and tortured convicts. Our unease is hardly surprising, for physical sites

of violence and inhumanity implicate us in the histories they are destined to carry. They offer us minute details, small, seemingly trivial things that make depravity appear habitual, familiar, plain—the ‘banality of evil’, Hannah Arendt called it in relation to a genocide of Jews in twentieth century Europe.³² The ‘heart of darkness’ is in detail.

The point is that places of haunting, recognised or pulsating from under the ground, require massive reverence and what anthropologist Deborah Rose calls ‘care’, the daily labour of honouring and mourning and re-engaging of these places with ‘everyday life and time’.³³ ‘When events like Port Arthur and Columbine High School happen it sucks the holiness out of a place ... People need to reclaim the spaces that are unholy’, wrote an American priest, Father John Mellon.³⁴ In years following the massacre, local residents remember with fondness those events that took them close to re-claiming Port Arthur. Most people recall Neil Cameron’s ‘Festival of Journeys’ staged for the local community on the site in October 1997. As the peninsula’s most eminent writer Margaret Scott relates:

The healing effects are really quite obvious—you have people coming to this place, which was lighted and warm ... you have the driving back of the dark. Lots of people came who wouldn’t have otherwise come because they wanted to see their child in a play or they wanted to see a grandchild carrying a lantern ... This was connected to the site, of course, it was connected to being able to go there and not feel it was haunted.³⁵

‘I think what’s missing here is the people’, said Dorothy Evans, who worked as the interpretation officer on the site in the aftermath of the tragedy.³⁶ A year after the tragedy, Martin Flanagan wrote these words:

As I was leaving the peninsula beneath a bruised black sky I entered a small valley illuminated by a shaft of yellow light and realised I have always loved this place but that now I do more so. It is drenched in what it means to be human.³⁷

It is through the loving of its people that the site could slowly become reconfigured as ‘drenched in’, not negating, ‘what it means to be human’.³⁸

Yet for Palawah people, Port Arthur is, to this day, seen as different. It is understood as a place of haunting *and* avoided. ‘I think it’s because Port Arthur is very much a place of European experiences’, says Palawah intellectual Greg Lehman.³⁹ According to Lehman:

The community is aware that Aboriginal people were incarcerated at Port Arthur and that a number of people died there. Not a lot of details are known about who those people were ... Because of the history of removal of Aboriginal people from the mainland of Tasmania, the opportunity to have any knowledge about individuals that were associated with Port Arthur through oral history has been broken.⁴⁰

The feeling of alienation has been intensified in the aftermath of the massacre. ‘For Aboriginal people’, states a 1998 report on the Indigenous values of Port Arthur:

there is a strong feeling that the Aboriginality of the Port Arthur Historic Site has been crushed by the nature of the post-invasion, convict period record of the area, in particular the brutal treatment, including confinement, of human beings ... the process of re-connecting with the Port Arthur Historic Site area is made extremely difficult by these feelings, irrespective of the range of known values and further potential, but as yet unassessed, values. This particular sense of alienation from the Port Arthur Historic Site appears to be widespread within the Aboriginal community.⁴¹

For Greg Lehman, the point is that ‘Port Arthur doesn’t have a lot of reverence for the individuals who suffered there ... doesn’t have much reverence for the human experience’.⁴² These individuals ‘have been packaged up into a group of people called convicts’.⁴³

— REQUIEM FOR RECKONING

The haunting that marks Port Arthur also needs to be reckoned with on the level of words and ideas. Yet when specific historical losses, such as the genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines, are discursively transformed into absences, then they cannot be reckoned with. The conflation of absence and loss, according to Dominick LaCapra, results in endless melancholy.⁴⁴ For LaCapra, absence is, as a rule, situated on a transhistorical level. It is not an event, but, rather, a condition, a constitutive part of an experience or an identity, a structural trauma. Loss, on the other hand, is, first and foremost, historical—it has dates, places, lives torn apart. LaCapra warns against the conflation of the two phenomena:

When absence and loss are conflated, melancholic paralysis or manic agitation may set in, and the significance or force of particular losses ... may be obfuscated or rashly generalised. As a consequence one encounters the dubious ideas that everyone (including perpetrators or collaborators) is a victim, that all history is trauma, and that we all share a pathological public sphere or a ‘wound culture’.⁴⁵

The conflation of the two notions in Tasmanian history into what one of the island-state’s most renowned literary exports, Christopher Koch, calls ‘the pathos of absence’ has worked to construct the entire Tasmanian public sphere as pathological, while rendering specific historical occurrences irreconcilable, confined to shadows.⁴⁶ Remembering his Tasmanian childhood in the 1930s and 1940s, poet Vivian Smith spoke of

a puzzling sense of loss or absence which I started to feel from a very early age. There was the history of Tasmanian aborigines and the exterminated tiger; there were decayed and

abandoned and mouldering and haunted houses; factories and buildings that had been condemned; there were abandoned ships decaying in the Ships' Graveyard at Risdon ... I am sure I do not exaggerate when I say that I grew up in a place that was haunted and weighed down by an oppressive past and a stagnant present ...⁴⁷

More than half a century had passed since Vivian's childhood, yet it seems that the *pathos of absence* continues to mark and mask the state of Tasmania, including its most recognisable landmark.

At the same time, in Tasmania, the absence at the core of the colonial identity is turned into loss. The conversion of absence into loss 'gives anxiety an identifiable object—the lost object—and generates the hope that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome'.⁴⁸ That identifiable lost object is a fantasy of a golden colonial moment before Aboriginals were slaughtered and skins of Tasmanian tigers were sold for one pound each.⁴⁹ What is lost could be regained. The Tasmanian tiger, for instance. The fate of the tiger, said to be fully extinct by the 1930s, has given rise to persistent popular fantasies about the tiger's survival as an elusive, semi-mystical predator.⁵⁰ In works of fiction, exterminated tigers could be imagined as existing in some kind of underworld or shadow-world. In Julia Leigh's *Hunter*, the main protagonist fantasises about an 'entire tribe of tigers—so crafty that they have avoided the human gaze for years ... an underground tribe of tigers ... an Atlantis'.⁵¹ In Heather Rose's *White Heart*, brother and sister Ambrose and Farley create an imaginary country, which they call Mantasia, in which 'everything was possible. Magic always worked and there were tigers behind every tree'.⁵² Both novels, *White Heart* and *Hunter*, published in 1999 and 2000 respectively, have the main protagonists determined to prove that the Tasmanian tiger is still alive. The play *Natural Life*, directed by Michael Kantor in 1998 and partially inspired by Marcus Clarke's novel, has 'thylacine, otherwise known as the Tasmanian tiger, or by its Aboriginal name, Corinna' as its recurring motif.⁵³ 'For the Aborigines we have the myth of extinction; for the Thylacine, we have the myth of survival', writes Carmel Bird. 'Must we be so perverse?'⁵⁴

Where there is loss, as opposed to absence, there is also a possibility of redemption. Redemption is what is at stake now in the project at the Australian Museum's Evolutionary Biology Unit, in which a Tasmanian tiger is being cloned from the DNA of a thylacine pup preserved in alcohol in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ The much publicised and heavily funded project resonates, according to Professor Leslie Head, with the 'twin themes of resurrection and national identity'.⁵⁶ Rebirth, resurrection, bringing back from the dead, reversing the extinction—those are the terms in which the project's ambition has been publicised to the general public. It was as if to bring back 'the thylacine was to somehow assuage our collective guilt over the environmental degradation of the past 200 years'.⁵⁷ This is not far-fetched, at all, as the notion of civic duties was explicitly evoked during the unveiling of the project.

According to Professor Archer, one of the scientists overseeing the project: ‘Australians have a moral obligation to try and bring the species back because it was early European settlers who directly caused their extinction’.⁵⁸

What could be gained by bringing back to life ‘the monster whose fabulous jaw gaped open at 120 degrees, the carnivorous marsupial which had so confused the early explorers—“striped wolf”, “marsupial wolf”?’⁵⁹ And as to the thylacine itself: ‘where could this poor creature possibly survive but in the contemporary equivalent of a glass case? Dubbo Zoo perhaps? On an isolated island? Behind a big fence?’⁶⁰ The tiger cloning project does not ultimately aim to reconstruct the tiger, it aims to reconstruct and rewrite Tasmania’s past by restoring colonialism to its imagined pre-genocidal roots. Unsurprisingly, the project comes at the expense of many other Australian species currently on the brink of extinction. Their extinction could be prevented ‘by changing our land management practices, especially by harnessing the sums of money referred to in relation to the thylacine project’.⁶¹

Absence, according to LaCapra, is something one needs to learn to live with—it cannot be removed. Loss, on the other hand, can be mourned and transcended. The quest for transcendence underpins Heather Rose’s *White Heart*. Ambrose, the novel’s main protagonist, is a mountain man, half-hunter and half-monk, his whole being filled with ‘the aching for tiger’.⁶² One day his sister, Farley, sees the glowing around him. She intuitively understands the glowing as a sign of her brother’s transcendence of his humanity born out of the transcendence of the tiger’s extinction myth. ‘He became the invisible seeking the invisible ...’⁶³ When Ambrose finally finds the tiger in a cave, it is a skeleton of a pregnant thylacine with ‘two miniature skeletons, half foetal arcs of spine and oversized head, four legs apiece curled into body’.⁶⁴ Following his discovery, Ambrose dies on the floor of a cave nursing the tiger’s remains. He positions himself so that the tiger’s pregnant tummy could touch his. ‘Your babies, he said to the bones. Your babies.’⁶⁵ Both Ambrose’s life and his death, it seems, only make sense when he becomes one with his tiger.

Yet towards the very end of *White Heart*, on page 304 to be exact, after Ambrose dies in a cave, the whole narrative is revealed to be a lie. Ambrose actually dies at sixteen, while trying to save his beloved grandfather, Papa Kempsey, from drowning. Both of them perish under the water, as the grandma watches helpless on the shore. To counter her brother’s paralysing absence in her life, Farley keeps Ambrose alive in their secret world of Mantasia. The brother becomes ‘a wonderful rugged brave fearless awesome man in the wilds of Mantasia’.⁶⁶ Farley ‘imagined him with the tiger. Both extinct. Both mythical. Both mourned and missed.’⁶⁷ Farley could only properly grieve for her brother by transforming him into a mythical figure existing in a mythical land that is Mantasia.

In the neo-colonial narratives of redemption, the mourning is similarly enabled by the creation of mythical lost objects—mythical races and species. Only when, in colonial



Port Arthur Memorial,
March 2004

understanding, Palawah were all dead, only then their presence on the land, now relegated part to history and part to myth, could finally be acknowledged and their extinction mourned. With Truganini's body safely tucked away (first in the ground of a female convict prison, later behind glass in the Royal Society of Tasmania museum), settler Tasmanians and colonialists at large could finally express remorse, feel the vicious wastefulness of the past violence towards the now mythical race, seek absolution. Mourning is both difficult and paradoxically reassuring, for the closure it signals promises cleansing and, ultimately, redemption.

Yet the search for redemption and transcendence of the colonial past and present, just like Ambrose's transcendence of death, is a lie. Perhaps an opportunity, if not redemption, lies elsewhere. The work of haunting, writes sociologist Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters*, 'is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life'.⁶⁸ Could it be that the work required of us is that basic? To give Port Arthur, the place of horrors and hauntings and histories and picnics and cheesy 'Harmony Days', an opportunity of an 'undiminished life'...

— NOTHING MORE INVISIBLE: 2000

On 28 April 2000, four years after the tragedy, the governor-general unveiled the memorial designed by Hobart landscape architect Torquil Canning, inviting locals and visitors to walk through the roofless remains of the cafe, to walk by a wall made with local stone, by native trees and shrubs, and a reflective pool in the middle of the garden adorned with Margaret Scott's words: 'May we who come to this garden cherish life for the sake of those who died/Cherish compassion for the sake of all those who gave aid/Cherish peace for the sake of those in pain'. As Canning explains, the memorial did its best to acknowledge



that people will be living with it for the rest of their lives. There won't be a point when they will just heal. A lot of memorials make that assumption that it's all in the past. It's acknowledging that this is still going on. I am using local Tasmanian native plants. It's quite exciting. Three years and they will be really powering away and starting to change the spaces, five years it will be two-thirds of the way.⁶⁹

Peter Adams's Memorial,
Windgrove, Roaring Beach.
Photo courtesy of Peter Adams.

Soon enough another memorial to the massacre at Port Arthur sprung forth on the Tasman Peninsula. Built by Peter Adams on his 'Windgrove' property at Roaring Beach, the memorial made no reference to the Broad Arrow. As Adams says:

If Martin Bryant had first gone to a coach bus, would you turn the bus stop into a memorial? The fact remains that the memorial is about remembering and healing. It is not about immortalising the Broad Arrow Cafe.⁷⁰

'For the memorial to have any long lasting significance', states Adam's design brief,

for it to be relevant in the year 2046, and for it be a vehicle of deep healing for all people—especially the families of the victims of April 28—... what is built has to be designed a round the parameters of inclusiveness and universality.⁷¹

To Adams, the memorial had to speak to all of the traumatic histories embedded in Port Arthur—colonial dispossession, convictism as well as the legacy of Martin Bryant. Perhaps, too, an acknowledgement of the fact that the 1996 tragedy became a catalyst for nationwide gun law reforms would have made the memorial at Port Arthur genuinely 'relevant in

the year 2046'. But as it stood at Port Arthur, gradually turning itself into another picturesque ruin, was the memorial doomed to become, in the much-quoted words of Robert Musil, nothing less than 'invisible'? Reflecting on Musil's dictum—'there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument'—historian James E. Young wrote:

It is as if a monument's life in the communal mind grows as hard and polished as its exterior form, its significance as fixed to its place in the landscape. And it is this 'finish' that repels our attention, that makes a monument invisible.⁷²

In 2004, four years after the unveiling of the Port Arthur Memorial, many visitors coming to the site have to actively seek out 'some reference to the place, where it all happened'.⁷³ Tours do not go through the memorial, so it is up to visitors both to remember what had happened and to make their way to the shell of the Broad Arrow surrounded by plants and a reflective pool. This, of course, is not simply a reflection of the memorial acquiring its invisible finish. The memorial committee, after all, was particularly cautious about the impact of the ruins of the Broad Arrow on those visiting the site. The professional medical advice suggested that the remains of the cafe possessed an ability to heal and to re-traumatise in equal measure. The solution was to position the remains so that they would not be readily apparent to visitors. In other words, visitors would have to make a conscious decision to enter the cafe's shell.

While the fate of the Broad Arrow was a focus of intensely conflicting emotions, the memorial itself seems to be largely anti-cathartic. It is neither hated nor loved. People on the peninsula do not seem to see it as an integral part of their life—as an obvious place for reflection, gathering, consolation. Some of those who work at Port Arthur believe that the memorial is too big and that, in its present shape, it is likely to become a liability in the future. As to the visitors, eight years after the tragedy, I was struck by how many walked right past the site—to them, the memorial blended right in with the rest of the site. The plants were pleasing and unspectacular and another shell of a partially demolished building seemed decidedly inconspicuous.

Perhaps, as James E. Young once wrote, the question is not about how people are moved by memorials if at all, but rather, to what 'end have they been moved, to what historical conclusions, to what understanding and actions in their own lives?'⁷⁴ What possible understandings await those who will enter the memorial by virtue of accident, curiosity or inner necessity in the years to come? That nowhere is safe ... that nothing has changed ... that human memory is fickle as?

— LOVE AT LAST SIGHT: 2020

What did the outgoing Chaplain North say to the incoming Chaplain Meekin?: 'You will find this a terrible place, Mr Meekin ... It has made me heartsick.' But Chaplain Meekin is an

optimistic sort of lad. 'I thought it was a little paradise,' he replies. And adds, 'Captain Frere says that the scenery is delightful.'⁷⁵ And so goes the definitive text on Port Arthur—Marcus Clarke's *For The Term of His Natural Life*, one of Australia's all-time bestsellers and still, one hundred and thirty years later, the most commanding literary condemnation of Australia's convict origins.

Marcus Clarke's vision of a terrible little paradise had stuck to Port Arthur. Clarke may have been a crusading mainlander, the tales he told may have been not much more than, in the words of Tasmanian novelist Richard Flanagan, 'a melodramatic collection of clichés', but countless people looking at Port Arthur saw what Clarke saw—a monument to cruelty and depravity amidst a sublime, ravishing landscape.⁷⁶ Writing for the *Age* in the aftermath of the massacre, Leo Schofield saw 'the palpable melancholy that no amount of interpretation and cosmetic changes could erase from this fearful place', considering it 'almost too perfect a venue for last Sunday's horrors'.⁷⁷ 'It is so beautiful, Port Arthur', commented Melbourne historian Janet McCalman, 'which makes its aura of evil all the more terrible ... the whole place reeks of human cruelty'.⁷⁸ Perhaps, Les Carlyon mused, Port Arthur was cursed:

Long before ... Sunday, Port Arthur was perhaps, after Macquarie Harbour on Tassie's west coast, the least innocent piece of dirt in Australia. It is saturated with misery. And now that it has managed to upstage its dark past, you begin to wonder whether it is jinxed.⁷⁹

Yet on 28 April 1996, as Port Arthur stood, violated, shamed, exposed, a strange surplus of negative energy was aroused from the site, bringing, in the words of anthropologist Michael Taussig 'insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery'.⁸⁰ Despite the ensuing darkness, the light cast by the tragedy has kept on seeping through the site, as the shock (and after-shocks) of that day illuminated the whole of Port Arthur and the histories it has sheltered. 'Something profane occurred at Port Arthur', wrote Tasmanian writer Martin Flanagan, 'but so did something sacred'.⁸¹ Perhaps, this sacred was not separate from the profane, but embedded deep within. A deeply religious man, Father Glenn Cumbers felt in the very heart of darkness, inside the Broad Arrow only hours after the shootings,

I remember thinking, in a sense, that God was already there. There was this peace, this calm. Like, I'd been to road accidents where there were people screaming and yelling, but inside Broad Arrow was this calmness.⁸²

Walter Benjamin, who I suspect would have been really taken by the history of the café's afterlife, spoke of a physiognomical gaze, 'a way of seeing, which involves the ruination of a thing so as to look deeply within it'.⁸³ It is to this looking deep within, in defiance of

indifference and distaste, that the Broad Arrow had moved me ever since our first meeting and it is to this kind of looking that Benjamin gave this enchanted name—a look of love at last sight.

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4. William Senior, in *Travel and Trout in the Antipodes* (1880), quoted in David Young, *Making Crime Pay: The Evolution of Convict Tourism*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1996, p. 29.
5. Peter MacFie, 'Historians as Trouble-makers: Cultural Heritage, Tourism and the Public Historian', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1993, p. 44.
6. Richard Davey, 'A Tapestry of Heroes', in Carol Patterson and Edith Speers (eds), *A Writer's Tasmania*, Esperance Press, Dover, Tasmania, 2000, p. 76.
7. Jean-Paul Descoedres, 'Preface', in Jean-Paul Descoedres, *Pompeii Revisited: The Life and Death of a Roman Town*, Meditarch, Sydney, 1994, p. v.
8. Bruce Clunies Ross, 'Landscape and the Australian Imagination', in P.R. Eaden and F.H. Mares (eds), *Mapped but Not Known: The Australian Landscape of Imagination. Essays and Poems Presented to Brian Elliott LXXV 11 April 1985*, Wakefield Press, South Australia, p. 225.
9. Torquil Canning, 'Hallowed Ground', *Landscape Australia*, no. 1, 2001, p. 40.
10. Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*, Verso, London and New York, 1997, p. 12.
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13. Louisa Street (worked in the cafe kitchen at the time of the tragedy), in Louisa Street and Bruce Montgomery, 'Australia: Writ in Remembrance', *Australian*, 28 April 1998, p. 11.
14. Dorothy Evans, Interview with the Author, Port Arthur Historic Site, 22 February 2000.
15. Brian Allison and David Scott, 'In the Wake of Tragedy: Port Arthur', *Museum National*, February 1997, pp. 7–8. In 1997 Brian Allison was the curator of the Port Arthur Historic Site, while David Scott was the site's conservation manager.
16. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, Interview with the Author, 1998.
17. Quoted in Lisa Yoneyama, 'Taming the Memoryscape: Hiroshima's Urban Renewal', in Jonathan Boyarin (ed.), *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1994, p. 124.
18. Quoted in Lisa Yoneyama, p. 121.
19. Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, p. 8.
20. Greg Lehman, 'Desire for Uncertainty', *Island*, no. 79, Winter 1999, p. 9.
21. Greg Lehman, 'Life's Quiet Companion', *Island*, no. 69, Summer 1996, p. 55.
22. Robyn Friend, *We Who Are Not Here: Aboriginal People of the Huon and Channel Today*, Huon Municipal Association, Huonville, Tasmania, 1992.
23. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Interrogating Identity: The Postcolonial Pre rogative', in David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Anatomy of Racism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 187.
24. The words of Frantz Fanon, whose work is at the heart of Bhabha's article, echo the words of Tasmanian Aborigines—'we who are not here'. 'The Negro is not.', writes Fanon, 'Any more than the white man' (Frantz Fanon, quoted in Bhabha, p. 183). Bhabha sees the full stop in Fanon's sentence as an act of displacing 'traditional

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 28. Gibson, p. 45.
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 38. Greg Lehman, Interview with the Author, Parks and Wildlife Services Tasmania, Hobart, 25 February 2000.
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 43. Lehman, Interview.
 44. Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 4, vol. 25, Summer 1999, p. 700.
 45. LaCapra, p. 712.
 46. Christopher Koch, 'Literature and Cultural Identity', *Tasmanian Review*, no. 4, 1980, p. 3. For Christopher Koch, a novelist who saw shadows everywhere in his home-state, Australian literature, as a whole, is haunted by the spectre of absence. That absence is the absence of the centre, and the struggle to come to terms with it is what, for Koch, characterises the best in the work of Australian writers. To have 'two worlds'—the old European and the new 'Australian'—is to have none.
 47. Vivian Smith, 'Growing up in Hobart', *Island*, nos. 34/35, Autumn 1988, p. 17.
 48. LaCapra, p. 707.
 49. See Parks and Wildlife Services of Tasmania website, *Wildlife of Tasmania*, <<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/wildlife/mammals/thylacin.html>>
 50. The conflict between settlers and thylacine culminated with the introduction of sheep to Tasmania in the 1820s. In 1830 Van Diemens Land Co. introduced thylacine bounties. Fifty-eight years later, in 1888, the Tasmanian Parliament instituted its own system of bounties that lasted until 1909. What is generally accepted as the last thylacine was captured in 1933 and sold to Hobart Zoo, where it died in 1936. In 1986 the thylacine was declared extinct by international standards. See *Wildlife of Tasmania* website.
 51. Julia Leigh, *The Hunter*, Faber and Faber, London, 2000, p. 118.
 52. Heather Rose, *White Heart*, Anchor, Sydney, p. 256.
 53. Martin Flanagan, 'History's Voice Still Haunts Us', *Age*, 28 March 1998, Saturday Extra, p. 4.
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 55. See R. Devlin, 'Late Tiger May Tread Again in a Leap Ahead', *Age*, 4 November 2000, p. 17.
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 57. Head, p. 17.
 58. James Woodford, 'Message in a Bottle: Tiger a Step Closer to Life', *Age*, 5 May 2000.
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- Monument', *Representations*, no. 26, Spring 1989, p. 71.
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76. Richard Flanagan, 'Another Country: A Short Soul History of Tasmanian Writing', *Island*, no. 86, 2001, p. 93.
77. Schofield.
78. Janet McCalman, 'Weekly Column', *Age*, 30 April 1996, p. 17.
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80. Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1999, p. 3.
81. Martin Flanagan, 'Lest We Forget'.
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