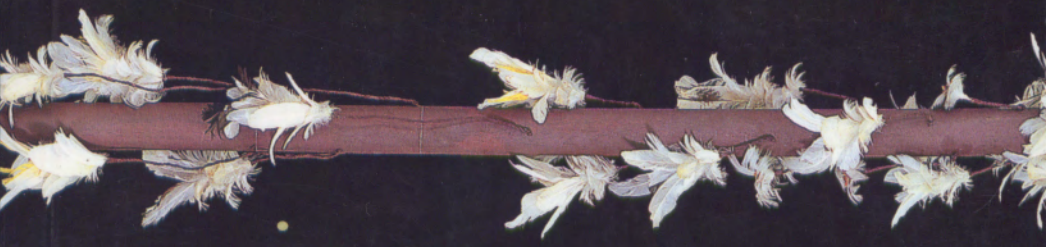
Edited by Claire Smith & Graeme K. Ward

indigenous CULTURES



in an interconnected WORLD

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History, Representation, Globalisation and Indigenous Cultures: A Tasmanian Perspective

JULIE GOUGH

Historically, the West depicted the rest of the world as inhabiting two places, the internal space of the museum with its illustrated journals, globes and labelled specimens, and the external reality of 'Other People'—languages, climates, land, flora, fauna and incomprehensible histories that were regulated to replicate each other once entering the internal world upon collection, capture or invitation. Both these worlds were 'real' in spatial terms—unlike today's third position for representing the 'global', where interaction and two-way dialogues are possible in a placeless electronic cultural space.

Hyperspace is not new. It is a world where time and space horizons have compressed and collapsed. Today it is described as a new experience of orientation and disorientation, with new senses of placed and displaced identity, new relations between space and place, fixity and mobility, centre and periphery, real and virtual space, frontier and territory.

However, cultures experiencing colonisation since the sixteenth century have negotiated two worlds for four centuries. Nations of non-Europeans have existed within their own worlds and the introduced netherlands brought into their universe by invaders. The colonisers brought and forced new language and text, religion and traditions including landscape and costume, education and science, disease and enslavement.

The arrival of these new concepts of existence, which hurriedly became a transplanted reality in the 'New World', brought another universe to the Indigenous occupants of Australia, Africa and the Americas—a world as tangible as hyperspace is today to the West.

When George Augustus Robinson recorded conversations with some Tasmanian Aboriginal people in his journal of the early 1830s he probably didn't realise that he was providing detail beyond the everyday for future insight. Thus, for example, the discussion on the evening of 24 June 1831 (Plomley 1966: 365) is full of alternative readings:

> An aborigine who had been domesticated, asked me one night while gazing at the stormy firmament if I knew the planets Mars and Jupiter, and said if the sky had not been so obscured he would point it out to me. Gave him a piece of paper and a pen and he drew me a ship.

The skies and the ship this Aboriginal person describes and draws, while seemingly disassociated, are integrally connected. When the Tasmanian Aboriginal people at that time were asked the direction to England they pointed to the sky. Perhaps, because the ships arrived from the east (coast), the place of sunrise, England became, in the mythology of our people, a place in the sky and was woven into a part of the cosmology-based belief system of the island. Another contemporary comparative reading of this text lies in the progression from sky to ship in the thinking of the Aboriginal person and thus the conversation. This references the current Western confusion about one's real place and role in the known world, and mirrors the late

eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century inundation crisis of the 'new' and the 'alien' that invaded Tasmanian Aboriginal culture.

New possibilities at the end of this millennium, including common media topics of alien/UFO landings and abduction/bodily interference, are replications of the experience of Indigenous peoples and their loss of control of land and self through becoming the object of scientific and anthropological study, and forced removal from traditional lands and family.

In connecting the stars with a ship, the Tasmanian of 1831 was relegating both entities to beyond the known, intimating that the English ship and its unexpected arrival served to increase the known universe of that time and place, just as current UFO sighting claims serve today to reflect the fears of the almost incomprehensible expansion yet shrinkage of global horizons. 'Globalisation' is another term for a diminishing world where people, places and ideas are increasingly in contact in neutral terrain, perhaps to redress the damage that the colonialist ethic achieved.

Thus, today, while cultures in ruling majorities are learning to juggle Other versions of history, and rewrite these into texts in order to enter a global discourse, these Other cultures have long been in transit and transformation.

In Tasmania, after thousands of years of isolation, my people successfully incorporated dogs, cats, guns, glass, new food sources, new trade networks, travel patterns and a new language into their daily existence within a decade of invasion. This is not to suggest that the 'natives' of Tasmania were passive vessels waiting, seeking or requiring to imbibe the culture and implements of the coloniser to willingly become 'civilised' Christians. In fact these new resources were often used against the coloniser at a time when adaptation became recognised as our means of cultural survival.

George Augustus Robinson, the government-appointed and self-appointed 'saviour' of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, documented the rapidity of cultural change. *The Friendly Mission*, a journal of his five-year evangelical mission around the state, recorded the non-static practices of Aboriginal Tasmanians. Robinson documented on 6 June

1830 (Plomley 1966: 170), for example, that 'the natives train up the English cat to catch opossums'. On 10 November 1831, when several of the fourteen Aboriginal people accompanying Robinson decided to relinquish stashed firearms to him, he wrote: 'Informed that the natives intended using them against the whites as soon as they could get ammunition, and that they often practise with them' (Plomley 1966: 511). Robinson also recorded the carefully wrapped and cared-for condition of these arms, and that some had a specially made sling.

Dogs also were quickly appropriated by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Once taken, it was claimed in the popular press and Robinson's journals, these dogs would not return to White people again. This was alarming to early 'settlers' as the price for a hunting dog was £25 in 1807, which could save a family from starvation. Apart from being trained to hunt, these animals quickly entered the mythology and kinship patterns of Aboriginal Tasmanians.[1]

Globalisation dissolves the barrier of distance, and, today, Colonial centre is encountering Colonised periphery on new terms beyond the culture of dogs and guns. In discussing post-modernity and its accompanying sense of dislocation and displacement, Morley and Robins (1995: 217) referred to Doreen Massey (1992: 9), who saw this current uncertainty as a First World perspective because, for those colonised by the West, 'the experience of immediate destabilising contact with other alien cultures has a very long historical resonance. What is new is simply that this experience of dislocation has now returned, through patterns of immigration, from the peripheries to the metropolis'. Cultural insularity is a thing of the past, and the response to the fear and uncertainty of change that the West is experiencing is the renaming and quantification of the Other as 'Hybrid'—in the new mutant neuro-drama of the 1990s.

At first, some Indigenous people accepted the term 'hybrid' as a welcome external acknowledgment of the cultural changes, development and ingestion of foreign elements from external sources experienced for centuries by most Indigenous peoples. As Arjun Appadurai (1988: 39) commented: 'Natives, people confined to and by the places to which they belong, groups unsullied by contact with a larger world,

have probably never existed.'[2] Edward Said (1978: 332, quoted in Clifford 1988: 274) concurred: 'The notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically "different" inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence, proper to that geographical space is a highly debatable one.'

According to these cultural theorists, cultural hybridity is increasingly the experiential norm, and in this context, according to Morley and Robins (1995: 130), 'any attempt to defend the integrity of Indigenous or "authentic" cultures easily slips into the conservative defence of a nostalgic vision of the past'.

Hybridity, however, is a potentially dangerous notion, a scientific disclaimer of authenticity or originality, a reactionary term that Western societies allocate to other cultures in order to develop the binary codings necessary to elevate Self and subjugate Other: East and West, Black and White, Pagan and Christian. Western societies are nostalgically gazing back to a revisionist history and invoked purity of their own place and people in which the popularity of the heritage industry, with the return to sites, practices and customs, is evidence for the fear of unnamed Difference, and the recognition that Difference is not apart but now a part of the everyday—vocal and within society.

By accepting the label 'hybrid', while Western societies devise some notions of their own cultural purity, Indigenous people relinquish the power to name themselves. To identify as biological mutants is to negate the means to cite strength, unity and continuity within a changing framework as our viable existence. Adaptability is not hybridity. Indigenous people are caught in a seesaw dialogue of existence within Western language—the choice to accept Self as hybrid or Self as the pure, untainted, unchanged Other. Neither is viable, and both are charged periodically with accreditation according to the needs of the West.

Once drawn and measured and deemed harmless, the historical Other became an object of study to reflect and gauge Western attitudes, beliefs and practices. Periodically spotlighted by the West today to articulate and assess societal self-worth, Indigenous cultures are used to highlight 'the way it was' for Western peoples—a lament of falsely recollective nostalgia for some lost sense of spiritualism, family, place,

unity, and so on. This notion of Indigenous purity is as damaging a construct as the hybridity ruse, because Indigenous people apply these externally constructed criteria to create a new unliveable self.

Jimmie Durham (1983: 2, cited by Fisher 1989: 12) described this ambivalent loyalty to a shadowy self/nationhood in his book *Columbus Day*: 'One of the most terrible aspects of our situation today is that none of us feel that we are real Indians... For the most part we feel guilty, and try to measure up to the white man's definition of ourselves.'[3] This unrealistic ideal of unchanging authenticity to which the Western postmodern world periodically longs to return can become a burden to Indigenous identity, which Kobena Mercer (1990: 69) described as 'the sheer difficulty of living with difference'. This is where expectation and explanation of self are invented and trapped in language.

Integral to my own art-practice is the knowledge that the stories I wish to unravel are usually only documented in the language, the tongue, and therefore the inferences, opinions and bias of the non-Indigenous observer. My reasons for often using the English language within my work are several, and include taking issue with the position of this language as the main means of representation of people's stories within Australia, regardless of cultural inappropriateness.

My suggestion is not that any other written language can fill this void, rather that the use of alternative visual/vocal language forms may help in offering other interpretations of stories without the inherent historical/cultural boundaries of the English language, and that if used within these possibilities the English language will appear the interloper rather than the omniscient inventor. I wish to draw attention to the confines of this language in the recent past in serving only categorisation, locational and other descriptive means when applied to Indigenous peoples—language as a device for control and placement, to render safe, to understand, to name and thus to 'know'. A re-use at this point of language fracture is a means of drawing attention not only to the ongoing misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples but to the basic misunderstanding this stems from.

Another reason for my working from this English-language frame-

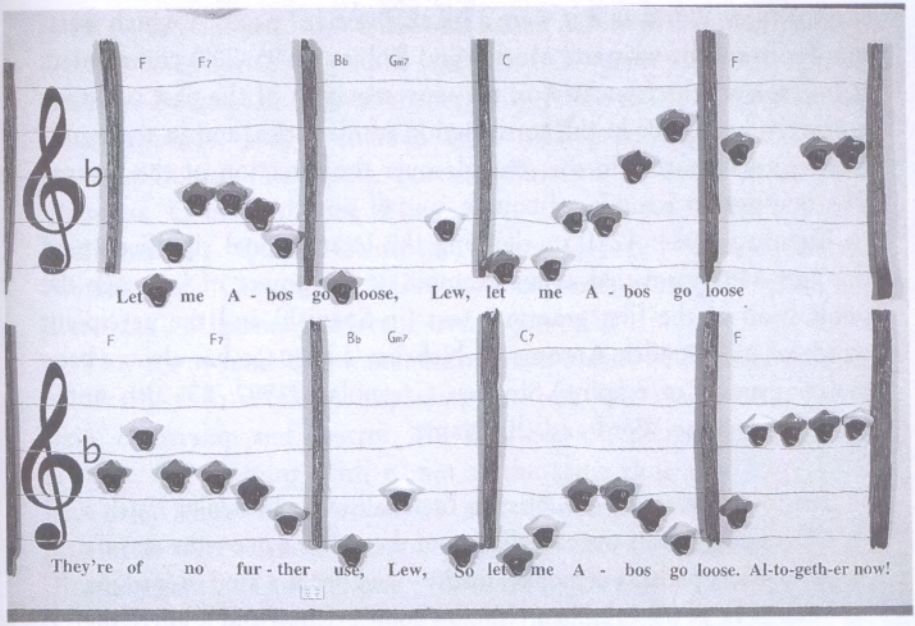

Figure 5.1 'The Trouble with Rolf', plaster Aboriginal 1950s stockmen head wall ornaments, huon pine fence posts, fencing wire, text, variable dimensions (244 × 520 cm), 1996

work in teasing the visual from tempered words is to acknowledge that this is the position where I began some years ago in not consciously recognising my own Aboriginality, and thus experiencing stories with any Aboriginal content from the distortions of perspectives in school texts, missionaries' diaries, anthropological/scientific studies, musical referents, books, newspapers or television documentaries. For the same reason, my research and work is based on situations affecting my own family or it is that of open public record.

Michel de Certeau (1988: xxvi) described the discourse of power as emerging to transform the space of the Other through the conquering force of writing, of mapping and naming: 'From the moment of rupture between a subject and an object of the operation, between a *will to write* and a *written body* (or body to be written) [this] writing fabricates Western History... This is *writing that conquers*, it will

use the New World as if it were a blank, "savage" page on which western desire will be written.' Morley and Robins (1995: 209) commented: 'Control over the franchise on the representation of the past is always a powerful resource in the construction of identities, and in the mobilization of resources in the struggle over the direction of the future.' The question at issue is, of course, one of power.

Todorov (1984: 123), in claiming the international significance of the year 1492, provided as his example of the power of language the publication of the first grammar text (in Spanish) and the percipient words of its compiler, Antonia de Nebrija: 'Language has always been the companion of empire.' Stephen Greenblatt (1992: 83) also noted the power of the Word and the Name: -

> The founding action of Christian Imperialism is christening. Such a Christening entails the cancellation of the native name—the erasure of the alien, perhaps demonic identity—and hence a kind of 'making new', it is, at once, an exorcism, an appropriation and a gift...the taking of possession [and] the conferral of identity are fused, in a moment of pure linguistic formalising.

When George Augustus Robinson endeavoured to 'civilise' and remove the Aboriginal population of Tasmania to Bass Strait, he included renaming the people and places he 'discovered' as a vital part of his appointment. Our people usually held three to five names, specially given at certain ages according to the natural phenomenon best suited to that individual—which could include place, plant and animal terms. Robinson doggedly replaced the names, and thus integral identifying symbols, of the people he 'collected'. To document his own learned aspirations and self-worth, Robinson listed the new 'given' names in his journal of 15 January 1836 along with his justification for their bestowal: 'I gave names to some of the Aborigines, their adopted names [given mostly by sealers] being the most barbarous and uncouth that can be well imagined. The natives were highly pleased with the change: it was what they desired—see list annexed' (Plomley 1987: 878–80). Thus Big Billy (adopted name) was renamed Alfred

(now twice removed from one of his actual names of Plerpleroparner), Doctor was renamed Alpha (actually Woorrady), Little Jacky renamed Buonaparte (Trembonener), Big Jacky renamed Constantine (Moreerminer), Jacky renamed Ajax (Maleteherburgener), Towter renamed Romeo (Towterer). Further 'christenings' included 'Friday', 'Princess Clara', 'Queen Elizabeth', 'Queen Adelaide', 'Queen Andromache', 'Queen Charlotte', 'King George', 'King William', 'Washington', 'Colombus', 'Milton', 'Cleopatra', 'Omega', 'Hannibal', 'Leonidas', 'Algernon', 'Hector' and 'Nimrod'.

This act of renaming was the European means of deliberately (linguistically then actually) displacing the original tenants in order to claim ownership and control. The land and the people had therefore no past, (re)emerging with names at the same time that the settlers had titled their new properties and districts in Tasmania. These provinces were, derivatively, named after 'home'—England: 'Kent', 'Buckingham', 'Cumberland', 'Dorset', 'Devon', 'Westmorland', 'Glamorgan', 'Somerset', 'Pembroke', 'Monmouth', 'Cornwall' and 'Hobarton'. In fact, to become the promised land rather than purely the familiar, towns and places were called 'Paradise', 'Golconda', 'Jericho', 'Bagdad', 'Stonehenge', 'Jerusalem', 'Tiberius' and 'Mangalore', to suggest a sense of history that the land here was not recognised by the settler/invader culture to have.

Accompanying this desire for a familiar place to understand was the expectation that the coloniser would be understood by and in turn understand the Indigenous population. The English language, as absolute determinant of power, leaves us today with a diary account, of 10 August 1830, by Robinson expressing English amusement when told that two Scottish shepherds, 'on seeing the natives and imagining they would understand Gaelic, [one] went to them and spoke to them in that language, and finding he was not understood seemed much surprised'. These first White people arriving in Tasmania had no other experience of Other people that had challenged their own sense of centrality in their universe.

Tasmania's White history is an interpretable text because of the predilection for naming, listing and collecting. By so readily textually

inserting the known onto their unknown, invoking the desire for their past habitat to re-emerge onto the new Van Diemen Landscape, the settler was also invariably ready to reinvent. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart has kept a most contentious diorama on display—periodically concealing it, or placing current disclaimers of past display policies on its glass window, which allows a contemporary glimpse into the institution's perception (*c.* 1930+) of Indigenous Tasmanians. Like a photographic still from a television documentary, three plaster Aboriginal figures surround a large lobster, endlessly awaiting meal-time. The couple and their small child stand alone, ideally immortalised and falsely suggesting that insular Western family units predominated. Is this a deliberate error, to humanise the race after the fact into a modern Western family folkloric representation with more melanin?

This form of diorama mirrors the wax museum where historical figures are adjacent to the mythological folk of the fairy-tale time; space, place are compressed to present the jumbled memories of one particular culture. To recast Truganini in the role of relaxed campside mother and 'wife' ignores all the facts of a person, who, like her countrypeople of the time, were constantly fleeing gunshot, rape, chaining, and every other possible form of abuse during their lifetimes.[4] This is a window into what could have (almost) been for her and us if White settlement hadn't occurred, but having been made by the usurping invaders' descendants it is more a victory cry of the museum and its public, who have captured us in every medium. Rather than suggesting any apology, these displays were built to cast us as mute curiosity.

In the re-creation of Western history within fictional film, 'authentic' documentary, and written portrayals, non-Western participation has been portrayed as inconsequential, of 'natives' caught in an intangible non-urban landscape, enacting some kind of ritual with plant or animal matter, not planning, deliberating, or appearing coherently 'involved' in an ongoing 'existence'.

This unreal place, this never-never, is in fact how colonists often viewed and depicted this land. Alongside or amid the natural history

of the known world, the peoples outside 'civilisation' were a curiosity to be acknowledged, partly in order picturesquely to plot the journeys of the East India Company and the earliest explorers. This confidence in depiction of the Other was also maintained in the practice of communicating with the Other.

Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur arrived in Hobart[5] to find settlers fearing that vast hordes of murderous natives would beset them at any moment. One plan proposed to him by a settler/artisan was instigated from 1828. It comprised the affixing of painted wooden pictograms to trees in order to communicate that fair play and equal treatment of the native population was the new policy. White woman holding Black child and vice versa, Black and White men and dogs in harmony, and justice displayed by a White man being hung for a Black murder and vice versa. (It seems dubious to me that my forebears would have had the time and will to interpret these images while dodging gunshot.)

What is interesting about the idea of affixing notices to trees is that the mythology the Whites were inventing about the Aborigines depicted them as forest beings akin to the folkloric gnomes of the European tradition. William Anderson, who was on board the *Resolution* during Captain Cook's third voyage, wrote in his journal of a first meeting with the Tasmanians after the *Resolution* anchored at Adventure Bay, Bruny Island, on 28 January 1777:

> Many of the largest trees have their trunks hollow'd out by fire to the height of six or seven feet where they evidently live at times, from the hearths made of clay to contain the fire in the middle, which leaves room for four or five to sit around it so that what the ancients tell us of fauns and Satyrs living in hollow trees is here realiz'd. (Beaglehole 1967: 786)

Thus the cast for the memories about these people was being set to portray them not only as subhuman but inhuman, even animalistic.

Bonwick (1870: 399) eulogised the Aborigines as gentle creatures: 'The woolly-haired Tasmanian no longer sings blithely on the stringy-

bark Tiers, or twines the snowy clematis blossom for his bride's garland... Oh! if he were here, how kindly would we speak to him! Would we not smile upon that dark sister of the forest, and joy in the prattle of that piccaninny boy?' Bonwick (1884: 14) also recounted Peron's adventures in Van Diemen's Land: 'While wandering among the bush flowers of Tasmania, and admiring the sylvan charms of that Isle of Beauty, he encountered a company of Diana's forest maidens, to whom, in the distance, the French Officers waved their handkerchiefs.'[6]

The flute-playing Robinson, writing on 19 March 1830 (Plomley 1966: 133), even cast himself as the antipodean Pied-Piper with the Aborigines as his mesmerised childlike-followers, his sable friends, sable adherents and poor creatures: 'They all seemed anxious to go with me to my tent and when I set out twenty five of them accompanied me, laughing and dancing.'

This is the teleological history of Tasmania, that doctrine of final causes where developments are due to the purpose or design that is served by them. The portrayal of Tasmanian Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century as feeble forest nymphs dancing into an inevitable decline is an unacceptable text, unrepresentative of our subsequent re-emergence as a community maintaining traditions yet accepting change.

The colonising artists and writers not only attempted to rupture Indigenous culture via distorted representations but also recast time in order to invent an acceptable version of colonial events. Writers such as H. Ling Roth (1899) and James Bonwick (1884) rewrote history after the fact with the knowledge and task to either absolve (Roth) or condemn (Bonwick) Tasmanian colonial society of the guilt and complicity of attempting racial genocide. By describing Indigenous Tasmanians as shadowy spectres in the landscape awaiting an inevitable and convenient Darwinian demise in the language of Victorian lament for the lost innocents of a primordial garden, these texts lacked room to include the appendage of our cultural survival in Bass Strait and pockets of mainland Tasmania.

We were written out of the future in an act of manageable closure by the writers, artists and poets of the nineteenth century. Artists such

as Thomas Bock, Benjamin Dutterau, Robert Dowling, John Glover and Fanny Benbow all painted, sketched and modelled Tasmanian Aborigines in the landscape, or as placeless portraits in a desperate attempt to catalogue the Indigenous presence as Rousseauian and pastoral, or as missing-link anthropological art-works where depiction of emotional states was scientifically valid.[7] These studies were based up to 50 years in the past, when corroboree and open campsites were a possibility, before guerrilla warfare raged openly.

History, according to Eric Wolf (1982: 5), 'is a term often used as a synonym for a particular, retrospectively constructed, genealogy of the West'. The fact there are now so many universally accessible divergent stories of the same events from a multitude of viewpoints is rather harrowing to some historians. Nancy Harstock (cited by Massey 1992:3) asked:

> Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us, who have been silenced, begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then, the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic...[that] just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be adequately theorized?

My interest lies in combating, or at least questioning, the single-viewpoint perspective of history maintained by fixing Indigenous peoples in a landscape as unmoving, unchanging, undeveloping, non-participating, singular and two-dimensional.

The museum is a global decentred space, where the original site (as perceived by the West), provenance, 'discoverers' and their dates are delegated as primary facts about the objects collected because the actual significance and function of collected items was often considered either arbitrary or indeterminable and unfathomable. In the museum space, the collection was a metaphor for control and containment of the unknown 'global Other'. Today, the 'global' is the postnational, in which large corporations and systems exist beyond any geographical border. The syndication of television programs with many nations

transmitting their own pseudo-identical quiz shows is part of the 'enforced sharing' of cultural values and related conformity in language, behaviour and 'rules'.

Global collective learning suggests that here is there and then is now. Everything is together, untenable, bigger than you or me. Everything is available but nothing is complete, authorised or authenticated. According to Susan Stewart (1984: 152), a souvenir is about remembering, while a collection is about forgetting. By starting afresh due to the 'difference of purpose' accorded a deliberate grouping, a collection recontextualises itself through reverberating internal dialogues that are set up because of time and space anomalies between its components.

Often, by using the 'collection' in my art-practice, with its components of reproduction, multiplicity, recognisability, nostalgia, ownership, I intend to connect the household with the museum, the scientific exploration of minute difference with the continuity factor of basic behaviour through time. Central to my work process is the maintenance of a sense of humour within myself and most pieces. My use of humour is linked to the inclusion of familiar objects in the reworking of stories, and is my means of further displacing borders, such as where-funny-meets-awful, or of releasing tensions within a Remembering that allow for fears and positions of uncertainty, involvement or even complicity to resurface in order to connect the viewer psychologically with the story.

The installation *Magnum as Cook in the Time/Space Continuum* (Figure 5.2) contains a triptych of photo portraits of my immediate family in 1970. Surrounded by collections of Pacifica, shells, dresses, lights, souvenirs, we are centred above the 1970 Cook Bicentenary Melbourne telephone directory, its angled-on-lectern-ledge presentation suggestive of a biblical tome. We are captured, contained and therefore exist within the framework of this identifying and locational device of colonialist propaganda. This telephone book's cover and accompanying commemorative souvenirs are falsely indicative of a united national complicity and agreement with Cook's hallowed position in Australian history, when in fact he can be 'celebrated' only in White histories.

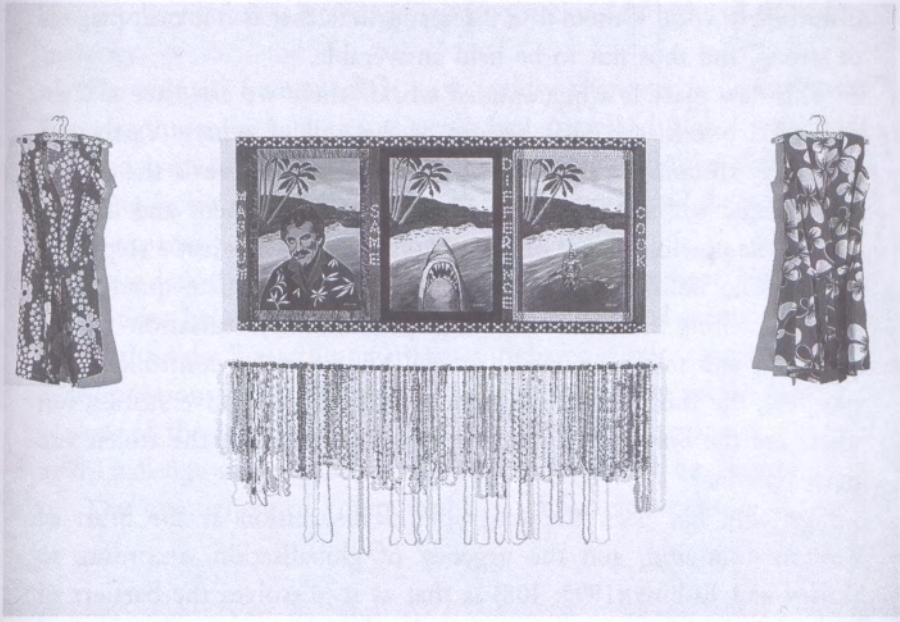

Figure 5.2 'Magnum as Cook in the Time/Space Continuum' (detail), mixed media installation, variable dimensions, 1997

This installation also comprises a triptych based on a 'found' painting of *Magnum P.I.* (Tom Selleck) in Hawaiian-print shirt and landscape. My suggestion is that through the television program, 'Magnum P.I.', television viewers last decade received most of their cultural knowledge of Hawaii and the Pacific—just as Captain Cook performed the same role of cultural purveyor and distortionist of the New World two centuries ago.

Today, confusion about the 'real' continues, and has encouraged a new path of communication to develop with the potential to articulate beyond what is essentially a Western inability to resolve relationships coherently with an ever more present Other side of the world. However, the language projected by this medium is readable as one of fear, and centres on words such as 'borderless', 'peripheries', 'hybridity', and may be a further attempt to relegate disturbances and

disturbingly vocal Others to a place and time that is not real, original or strong, and thus not to be held answerable.

This new place is a quarantined world where we can have a Website voice, one that is switched on at the will of others. Vastly and differently distanced from that of the seven seas, there is the chance for dialogue within this superhighway, but concealment and detachment is the possible stance of any waiting voyeur. It is just a step from asking 'Who holds the power to tell whose history?', to questioning 'Who is telling the stories of the present?' Globalisation in the newsprint and television media is well known to be controlled by a very few; the Internet has the potential to tell alternative stories, but where are the borders between the real and invented, the stolen and given versions?

Spatiality has been the geographical disposition at the heart of Western dominion, and the urgency of globalisation, according to Morley and Robins (1995: 108) is that as it 'dissolves the barriers of distance [it] makes the encounter of colonial centre and colonised periphery immediate and intense'. This, suggested Homi Bhabha (1989: 35), is cultural translation: 'Where once we could believe in the comforts and continuities of Tradition, today we must face the responsibilities of cultural Translation. In the attempt to mediate between different cultures, languages and societies, there is always the threat of mistranslation, confusion and fear.' Edward Said concurrently pondered the position of self and other. In Said's view (1989: 216), 'the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question [is] of our relation to others, other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies'.

This fear of mistranslation and the accompanying loss of control of language and its means of distribution lie at the heart of the anxiety bordering this new spatial terrain where distance and time are lost. The prescriptive meanings and powers endowed by certain institutions are dissolving in the buzz of hyperspace and disassociating peripheries, and the power of representation and its current debate about who may speak judicially about what, whom and how is an acknowledgment

that representation is no longer an unquestionable right of the ruling majority.

The cultural framework is now rapidly changing for nations that have traditionally held the power bases. Increased global movement coupled with a now vocal and articulate once-colonised Other is an alarming factor in the recognition of a sullied past and the negotiation of an expansive future.

This dialogue of globalisation is largely being held by Western institutions because the given order of all things held sacred and monumental by the Western power-structure base is under threat and being held questionable by this articulate Other who now speaks both languages of the colonial accountant and the cultural preserver and who will challenge unwelcome intrusions and depictions by outsiders.

The uniqueness of computer-based global networks is that their

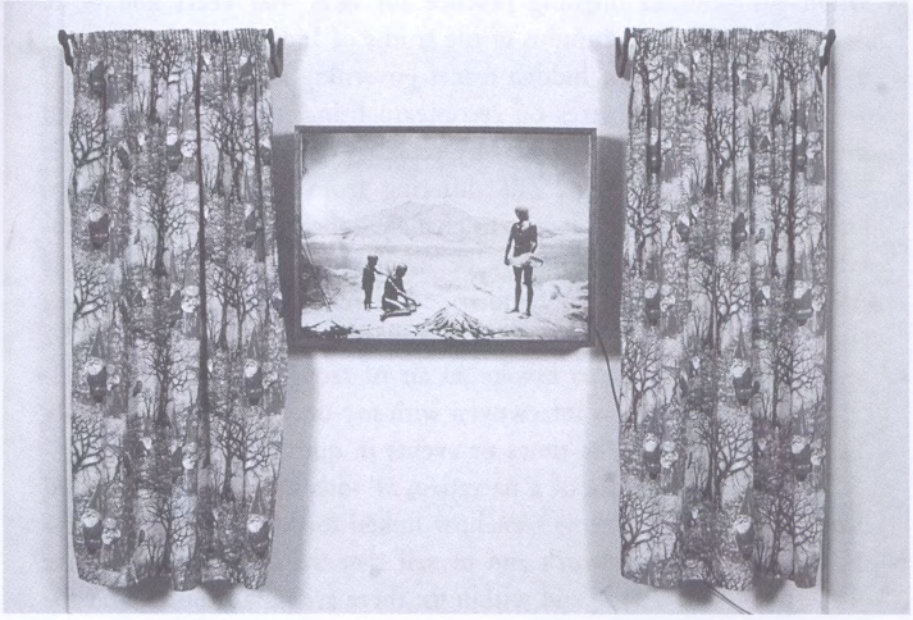

Figure 5.3 'Folklore', curtains, lightbox of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Diorama, lightbox 90 × 120 cm, 1997

centre is not necessarily governmental and, similarly, their audience is not preselected or known. Communication can be at a peripheral unnamed hyperplace, the information unregulated, and people can choose their own levels of interaction.

Perhaps the Western search for meaning in the new and integrity in the self must initially be a review of the past for a final recognition of Western culpability in invading many histories and challenging Other cultures' integrity. While the Western world may be excessively searching in a global context for itself, smaller communities are trying to consolidate and identify selfhood and strengths in a process of localisation.

Other dimensions and other spaces, which are also part of the conceptual challenges that globalism can be said to promote, are also linked to the spurious Western spiritual search for an international place and identity. The selective borrowing of aspects of the religious and spiritual belief systems of Indigenous cultures by Western civilisation has been an ongoing practice for over 400 years and is an irreverent external corruption of the truths of Indigenous connections to land, nature and the hidden forces governing it.

My art-practice centres on recontextualising historical stories and the cultural meanings of objects by retelling documented events from an alternative perspective, one differing from that of the Western historical 'record'. My intent is to challenge the recorded past by subversively reworking it from my personal viewpoint of the 'invisible Aboriginal'. Through using familiar and therefore safe/non-threatening visual materials such as domestic, schoolroom, medical, holiday/souvenir icons, I hope to invoke an air of recognition, of a momentarily returned nostalgia interwoven with my unexpected and possibly disturbing version of the times or events in question and on view.

This action of re-use of a narrative, as with incorporation of used materials in my practice, is somehow linked to the perhaps unsatisfying notion within my work and myself that there can be no closure of the past—it is among and within us; there are no absolutes, and the sense of discovery that impels me does not lead to the satisfaction of being able to locate the 'real', the 'truth', the 'facts', only yet another

approximation of them—my own. Any links suggested between the events I depict are as tenuous as those proposed historically; however, in reworking the past from the viewpoint of the Other, my work is physically proposing cultural continuity and growth within rearticulations and realignments as a cautiously viable alternative.