AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE BLUFF ROCK MASSACRE

K.M Schlunke

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted to any other university or institution for a higher degree.

Signed

Katrina Schlunke
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INDEX

INTRODUCTION
On Greyness and Granite........................................... 15

IT HAPPENED ALONG THE HIGHWAY
Highway Histories.................................................. 20
Writing (and Reading) the Local................................. 28
The Local Poet and Locuspoetics............................... 37

WHAT KEATING HEARD
The Letter......................................................... 46
Reading On....................................................... 47
An Extraordinary claim?.......................................... 59

MR IRBY’S ACCOUNT
‘Beyond the Limits’ of Location.............................. 70
Memoirs of Massacre............................................ 72
Ambivalence and Massacre.................................... 95
Emergence......................................................... 101
A Short Vocabulary List...................................... 104

THE DISAPPEARING WINDEYER
Windeyer............................................................ 108
Windeyer and the Case of the Disappearing Whiteness..... 109
Everyone is Black at a Distance............................... 115

TOO MANY BLUFF ROCK MASSACRES?
The Honorary Secretary......................................... 125
Tragedy............................................................... 126
Practical Demoniacs............................................. 134
Making it All OK................................................ 137
The Saved Child.................................................. 126
The Top Hat....................................................... 129
And a word from the Government............................ 133
Land, God and Longing......................................... 141
The Cultural Tour............................................... 142

COUNTING DOWN HOME: 10,9
8........................................................................... 144
7........................................................................... 148
6........................................................................... 150
5........................................................................... 152
4........................................................................... 156
3........................................................................... 158
2........................................................................... 163
1........................................................................... 164

REFERENCES......................................................... 166
ABSTRACT

This is an anxious thesis. In writing about The Bluff Rock Massacre, I not only wanted to write a cultural history, I wanted to attempt a textual model of what writing a history might look like that was constantly concerned with how the self that was writing was able to write, was coming into a particular form at a particular time and to make those ontological and epistemological questions obvious within what was written. This necessarily questions the idea that anything as straightforward as a ‘past’ exists but I wanted my ‘past’ to be aware of the context of its own emergence while disputing the univocity of that emergence. I wanted to be transformed by something more than the same/different dichotomy. Therefore, this thesis is a multi-faceted engagement with the many events and people that came to be known as ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. Employing a number of textual techniques it seeks to articulate the ways in which ‘historical’ events and particular places come to be lived out in subjects who are both past and present and in a constant state of becoming.

But an important part of being able to write out the ways of becoming is to have a difficult relationship with narrative. To avoid the threat of ‘resolution’ that narrative has I have chosen excess. Narratives of narratives, narratives on narratives and narrator and narrative co-mingling so that there is no single home for the writing self. The thesis employs official historical records, family histories, tourist leaflets, gossip, field notes and other texts to show the multiple ways in which an event both becomes and exceeds its invention. It is heterotextual.

Implicitly this thesis is concerned with the ways in which the non-Aboriginal can write Australian history after the many Aboriginal interventions into hegemonic history and the ongoing re-appraisal of ‘What happened?’ This historical figuring is therefore questioning what it is to write ‘white’? And is it possible to write in a way that undoes the ubiquitous power of ‘white/non-Aboriginal’? But simultaneously the writing is written on the terrain of post-identity politics and is both queered and performative.

I also wanted this work to be a crafted piece rather than an art object. Having been inspired by the writing possibilities of the postcolonial and the postmodern, I wanted to see if I could actually build one textual model of those possibilities. That was the intent the result might not be so neatly resolved. And naturally particular theorists can’t be held responsible for my textual impersonation and interpretation of them.

Finally the site of this work has been with me a long time and I wanted to carry on a kind of private examination of ways of knowing. Beginning a thesis with the fervent belief that I knew something was a bad idea and it ends in a semi-permeable textual fortress. In
a ‘story’ as narratively unsatisfying as this, it is typical that I’m already telling you how it ends just in case you don’t realise that no fat lady sings.

This work attempts a textual exposition of the questions—How does one write the past when it is also present?; What is a postcolonial autobiography?; What is a postcolonial sexuality/textuality?—rather than answer them.
I don’t know who first told me but I remember the version very well. It was always said that the Aboriginal people were rounded up like cattle (not sheep) and driven over the edge of Bluff Rock. This was presented as a single hideous incident, unconnected to others—isolated. It was all ours.
INTRODUCTION

These writings are an evocation of some, of the many, meanings of ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. For as Tyler suggests, ‘if a discourse can be said to evoke then it need not represent what it evokes, though it may be a means of representation’ (Tyler, 1987:206). This thesis is also an attempt to write an embodied history and what Grace might call an ‘aesthesis’ of memory (Grace, 1996:3). I am attempting to write a felt history that is written with as constant an acknowledgment as possible of the politics of now (Dening, 1996:191-200). All of these claims are other ways of saying that this is a story about how stories are written and told and rewritten and retold and how we make our selves through texts.

The Bluff Rock Massacre is a myth, is a fact, is a truth, is a protean tourist attraction, is a ...

In 1842 Edward Irby and his brother Algemon, their servants and supplies were making their way to Deepwater Station when they passed an ‘imposing bluff’ which they named St Swithin’s Bluff. This name did not stick and it became known as Bluff Rock and was a part of the land that the Irby brothers later leased and then owned called ‘Bolivia’ (Halliday, 1988:147; Irby, 1908:52). In 1844 Edward Irby, his neighbour Thomas Windeyer and Windeyer’s two servants, Connor and Weaver chased and then lost and then came upon, more by chance than by skill, a group of Aboriginal people, probably members of the Bundjalung or Ngarabul peoples who had sought safety in a well hidden spot beneath the very rocks Irby and Windeyer found themselves upon. Hearing movement, Irby and Windeyer lay over the rocks and began firing into the group below knowing that their fire would bring up Connor and Weaver who also joined the slaughter (Irby, 1908:77&90). In 1910 Thomas Keating, former manager of Irby’s Station ‘Bolivia’, wrote a letter in response to J.F. Thomas’s query about The Bluff Rock Massacre in which he told of the armed pursuit of a group of Aboriginal people across country by Irby and all available station hands. Killing some Aboriginal people near a creek, they then chased the remaining members of the group up the back of Bluff Rock and then threw the rest off the top (Thomas Papers CY Reel 1524). During the 1940s a local historian collected oral stories from Tenterfield citizens and asked many of them about the massacre as a part of those interviews (Crawford, c1940). And sometime in the 1970s, following a well established oral tradition that a massacre had occurred, a local historian put together the pieces of historical evidence of Irby and Keating to produce a tourist leaflet about the massacre (Leaflet, Tenterfield Tourist Information Office).

So this thesis is organised loosely about five different sources: memory, published and unpublished diaries, letters, a tourist leaflet and some collected stories from a local historian. This list is itself indicative of the way in which this event is positioned as
ephemeral via ephemera—it gives some sense of the event’s ability to appear and disappear (in its many forms) within history and is an almost hysterical formation of Raymond Williams’ patterns of history, since this event is always in a state of emergence and disappearance. But each moment a particular story appears, the attempt can be made to map it within its own moment of difference while reflectively making of that past my own present. The tension between these two efforts is the stage upon which this particular performance is set.

This work is in indissoluble contact with so many versions of truth that the expression itself must always be understood as a conditional formation; truth as ‘truth’. I am not however suggesting that multiple truths can be collapsed or interpreted to mean no truth, for in each formation of truth there are not only the familiar Foucauldian regimes of knowledge/power but individual and group believers who may be resistant designers but also originary embroiderers. These subjects have stories which must be respectfully listened to. They do not fit neatly into institutional ‘Ethics Guidelines’ and I remain appalled at my inability to hear what someone is trying to say. I am all too well aware of the final mutations and amputations which this ‘translated’ knowledge suffers in this ‘researched’ thesis.

The variety of sources, the awkward efforts at articulating my/the massacre’s/history’s ‘outside belonging’ (Probyn, 1996), the uses of such famously ‘subjective’ texts as emotions and memory, the centring of this rural ‘peripheral’ event and the employment of particular theorists, might mark this work as ‘post’ (modern, feminist, nationalist, ethnographic) or queer. But I wish to call this Australian cultural studies after Frow and Morris (1993:Intro), or, more particularly, given my institutional setting—critical/creative ‘New Humanities’—a heuristic Hodgepodge (Hodge, 1995:35-39). This work is ‘monstrous’ in that it folds in the ‘intractably personal’ and the passionate and moves between works that are claimed for several disciplines but which I employ as possibilities for imagining anew (Hodge, 1995:37; Dening, 1996:205).

In my use of ‘Aboriginal’ I am following Jackie Huggins’s lead, for as she states: ‘My political statement and preference is for the term ‘Aboriginal’ as both noun and adjective. While it is grammatically correct to use ‘Aborigines’ as a noun, these are white peoples rules—the good Queen’s English. Are we therefore playing ‘their’ games in order to define ourselves? (Huggins, 1993:71).

Given the range of ‘primary’ texts, my commitment to poly-vocality and my desirous theorising, the written form of this work remains a compromise. I want this work to be read, I want you to be engaged, enamoured, but I also want to bear witness to the contradictions and constant ‘becomingness’ which cannot be communicated via any single and simple narration (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; 233- and Gatens, [Maras&Rizzo]1995). The form of this work is inspired by at least two different practices. You may identify others.
**Inverted Chopin**

The many essays, stories and ‘radical’ fragments within this work can be envisaged as a series of sites to which the reader is exposed. As such it is the textualisation or perhaps the mechanisation of the virtual. It is the writing down of the common experience of moving the mouse from icon to icon, to the opening up of various ‘windows’ and menus that are travelled to from an originating search title that is ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. This already imagines the reading experience as both a composite set and a series of elisions. What sites, what images, interact with you the reader to define for you the meanings, effects and translations of words, settlers, authors and massacres? Is this reading of yours my ‘original contribution’ to scholarship?

There are of course real limitations and inevitable disappointments in my invitation to read like this. The paper and print that make up this inverted text may not have the rhizonomic possibilities that your reader’s whim might desire. There are no connecting networks which would enable you to quickly refresh your memory on granite types while reading about the bluff, and in this sense the controlling limits of the project are obvious, for it is here that the role of writer as curator becomes all too clear. The words are displayed and organised and you are invited to translate again, but whether I have left enough readerly, liminal spaces to imagine in, can only be decided by you. This is not to suggest in any way that my writing hovers off-stage where the effects of my authorial performance are rendered invisible. At all times I am setting you up, moving you along, sometimes playful, sometimes saturnine.

I have used the neologism ‘inverted’ to refer to the textualisation of the experience of the digital, but I also want to convey some sense of the invert as an early explanation of the lesbian, of Radclyffe-Hall’s male soul unsatisfactorily caught in a female body. This is the way that I imagine that the de-essentialised ‘I’ works in an ‘autobiography’. Precisely because it is in danger of being read as real or unreal, the ‘I’ offers what would be understood in musical terms as an unresolvable dissonance.

This brings me to my second form or analogy, which is that of music, and in particular Chopin’s *Nocturnes*. As much as you know from commentary and the score that each piece is built up from a single, recurring but changing theme you cannot (or at least I cannot) actually hear the original theme. And while attempting the discipline of listening to particular notes, other memories and sensations take over. The notes remind you of another piece, you remember what you were feeling last time you heard it or you feel something, think something, seemingly unconnected to previous experiences of the piece. You may be able to identify echoes of the first theme, you may see that the first theme has now been entirely transfigured, but all the time you are making this experience particular. This listening is a ‘whole’ experience that cannot be separated from its many parts and it invents a singular temporalised place which locates the listening subject. You,
however, are always obliged to recognise your own limits in claiming the music experience as entirely yours. The very inventive possibilities of your own listening depend upon this conditional, particular ownership. How would you re-present this listening? An echo? A vibration? (Tyler, 1987:136) This is for me the best way to imagine the absolute pleasures of the postmodern imaginings and the creative conditionality of the particular.

**Retro-ethical Placement**

This work is also, as I have briefly outlined in my first paragraph, influenced by my trainings, particularly my Masters in Communications and Cultural Studies, and my ‘setting’ within the New Humanities at UWS, Hawkesbury; a post ‘87 (like postmodern and poststructural?) institution that is rigorously transdisciplinary. I am a ‘product’ of the institutionalising of the uninstitutionable and hang like a pardoned and amended Lepke in an oasis of found connections (Lowell, 1965:51).

But I am also writing within a larger cultural and national context. In 1996, very soon after their ‘massacre’ (as various newspapers reported it) of the sitting Labor party, the Coalition took away 500 million dollars from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). There was little public response from the non-Aboriginal population of Australia. While the ABC budget being ‘slashed’ by 30 million precipitated rallies around the country, there was a painful non-Aboriginal silence concerning the long term structural damage that such a cut to the central administrative body of Aboriginal affairs would produce. At the same time the non-Aboriginal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs spoke of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ‘Aborigines’ and the white Prime Minister suggested some ‘Aborigines’ had benefited from being forcibly removed from their parents. Suddenly efforts like mine, yet another ‘white’ history, looked scary. Why bother trying to even gesture at the complicated ways in which massacres and killings of Aboriginal people were carried out, written up and variously circulated when no-one seemed to realise they had even happened?

The texts that I am implicitly critical of, that I think set up ‘massacres’ as yet another silencing of Aboriginal oppositions and presence, yet another excuse to reify non-Aboriginal positionality—suddenly appeared as exemplary. Read this, you silly government leaders/bastards, and when you have experienced some shame and been quietened by the violence of ‘settlement’ then the political and intellectual space might be available to write what I want to write.

Parts of this work *could* be mobilised for a strategic polemic. I am using a diary that gives dates and approximate places of the murder of Aboriginal people. Murder was always an illegal act. Could some sort of material and moral compensation be gained from this? Surely acts like this show the ridiculousness of ideas like ‘continuous occupation’ when people were murdered for the land? Couldn’t this help to make Mabo
more useful to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in such rural areas? Wouldn’t this let people see? But this instead becomes one of the indelible ‘notes’ of this work—why can’t non-Aboriginal people see?

This is a non-Aboriginal story in that it attempts to trace the continuing effects of such a ‘massacre’ within mostly non-Aboriginal sources and inventions. It hopes to provide some idea of the many, many ways people become ‘non-Aboriginal’ and the effects of that positioning. I hope it at least partially succeeds in following Gary Foley’s call for ‘whites to find out where they come from’ (ABC 1996).

**Shifting Sands; The Author and her Selves**

This should be the easiest part to write. Its subject(s) operate(s) the narratives. My ‘self’ is an easily manipulable entity and it should at least invite a momentary pricking of the reader’s prurient ears. But what self? Which of my multiple selves, which aspect of the Mobius strip am I textually elucidating for you? (Grosz, 1993:189). You will soon find out. And you will have to decide for yourself. This project is after all my life. My history was firmly set in the exigencies of the myths I am concerned with. The massacre was always in my mind.

It was the one unforgettable incident of non-Aboriginal brutality that had remained in my small town’s memory. Hearing the story I understood that the killing of Aboriginal people was a rare and unusual thing—a single sort of madness driven by an isolated, psychopathic individual. The names of the people who carried out the massacre were never mentioned nor were the names, even the tribal or clan name, of the Aboriginal people killed. I don’t think any of the tellers or writers actually knew. They probably never asked. I didn’t.

This story was told to me as someone who was from Glen Innes. This massacre happened at Tenterfield ninety kilometres away. I lived on a property twenty kilometres the other side of Glen Innes, but I was nevertheless from Glen Innes when we spoke town typologies. Bluff Rock is not in Tenterfield; it is ten kilometres toward Glen Innes but still it is clearly within Tenterfield territory. This meant I had an extra thirty kilometres to weave into my sense of remove from the incident. Tenterfield to someone from Glen Innes was already another country. Too close to Queensland, Tenterfield (pop.3500) was understood by me as being smaller, more primitive and less important than Glen Innes (pop.6000). Something akin perhaps to Sydneysiders’ imaginings of Glen Innes.

Somewhere where such a thing could happen.

But whenever our family would pass Bluff Rock on our way to the coast I would stare at it and wonder. As I got older I wondered how the horses had got up there, and, given its unevenness, why some Aboriginal people had not got away on foot, but that grey granite drop was always the reply. I began to imagine and hope that some ‘aborigines’ had got away.
Of course I asked why this terrible thing hadn’t been reported to the police and I remember my father saying (incorrectly) that the Myall Creek massacre was only reported because a white man had been killed as well. I think I may also have asked where did these Aboriginal people come from and someone very firmly telling me Moree. This led to a belief that any Aboriginal person I ever saw had originally come from Moree. There was no idea (from school or home) that Glen Innes might ever have been the original home of any Aboriginal group and this was despite the presence of Aboriginal classmates and friends.

But in the classroom and in the small arenas of the ‘local’, classifications became so baroquely particular that the modernist meta-categories failed to make sense. You didn’t ask was someone Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal or whether they were rich or poor but Were you respectable or a tart? Did you play netball or hockey? Did you know my family? Were you an outcast or did you have a group of friends? Were you a townie? What bus did you catch? Were you a suck or a crawler or OK? Were you boring? What were you good at, what were you bad at? Who could you trust? To begin now to rethink this local from within categories of race and gender is important but difficult.

But there is one more admission. When I went back to visit these towns and places while doing this work I kept seeing Aboriginal people and realised that I had never seen ‘so many’ before. The easy incorporation of childhood was no longer possible. Now these individuals were part of a distinct group that needed to be taken account of, that couldn’t be easily dissolved through localness. It was no longer enough to know someone’s mother and that they had won the maths prize. These things were still important, still possibilities of connection, but they now had to be re-negotiated through a different prism. The racialised paradigms with their potential for racism and resistance were now organising my thoughts. Now I was a non-Aboriginal person talking to an Aboriginal person and we had to take it from there.

I don’t think it helped to go back as a lesbian. Caught in the act of becoming postcolonial I was/am tremulously ‘lesbian’. As Butler suggests; in the act of disclosing the lesbian ‘I’ ‘a certain radical concealment is thereby produced. For it is always finally unclear what is meant by invoking the lesbian signifier, since its signification is always to some degree out of one’s control, but also because its specificity can only be demarcated by exclusions that return to disrupt its claim to coherence’ (Butler, 1991:15). So this is not a lesbian pilgrimage but rather attempts a queer odyssey, arriving home only to set off again…

And there is nothing queerer than the experience of a small town. Nothing more demanding of politeness-as-performance and nothing more likely to produce emotional maelstroms. Nowhere is more suited to the thought ‘She has got to be a dyke’ as you re-read all that horse talk and the many women-only spaces of Churches, ‘Clubs’ and ‘Associations’. Nowhere is there a better example of what can and can’t be lived with,
can and can’t be said. You can never be certain where an ally or enemy might be and you feel the physical threat in your heart/cunt/gut all the time you are loving the landscape and readmiring ‘country’ values. An intense dislocation and relocation occurs at the same time and in the same place. You can barely touch your girlfriend in anything like a semi-public place but long to experience the most sensational passions, hidden behind shearing sheds, in anonymous motels further along the highway, on walks along struggling rivers, because they re-awaken your desire for revenge, for something that has become the Big Secret that gives you energy to live in a place like this. You don’t want them to know; you want them to be like you. You long for them to speak your language, which of course some of them do, some of the time. Home is a safety net with holes. You begin to live in an odd world of recognition and mis-recognition. The laugh that you have when you go into the fish-and-chip shop wearing your ‘I can’t even THINK straight’ T-shirt and the middle-aged, over-worked woman behind the counter saying, ‘Oh I know exactly how you feel love’. Who is failing to recognise whom or what? What is it to name oneself? There is as much fear in calling yourself a lesbian and confirming whatever odd idea they may have of what that is as there is in the other voids where your existence appears to fall out of their experience. Home Sweet Home.

More Sifted Sand

We were driving in our Datsun Station wagon and I think I was about twelve. I remember the Datsun station wagon because it was a beautiful dark maroon inside and out and after years, literally my forever, of various blue shades of Holden station wagons this was something special. It was the first car we ever owned with space for a cassette player and it was still a bit unusual to buy a Japanese car. My father had done it on the basis of sense. He thought the engines were more efficient and the price was right. But a farmer in a Japanese car was still something to justify, to talk about, to get right. And we were going to the beach which means we were the sort of farming family that could afford holidays and even with six kids we stayed in motels—very cheap motels. Occasionally, very occasionally, we had a weekend at the beach. Usually this was to visit the Evans Head Country Women’s Association flats thanks to my mother’s work with that group.

But it was the highway, the road out of town, that counts here, for we duly pass Bluff Rock. In those days the highway ran almost straight towards it and I asked again about the massacre. I already knew it but I wanted to test them. I was checking what I took for their courage. I wanted to hear my parents say it—I wanted confirmation, which my father gave me. And again I remember the emphasis that this was not a well known story because no whites had been killed; they were simply the killers.

I knew when Dad said that whites had carried out the massacre that he wasn’t talking about us. We weren’t white in ‘that’ sort of way. I’m not certain in his case if he was
calling upon his German heritage (third generation Australian but the Teuton trace is tough) that put him in a different place with a different history or whether it was the very idea of progressive history that escalated us upward to another place. But I have the sense that white itself was a passé category, no longer useful for it didn’t really make sense. If we were white then the question could be asked; Who was black? and this had become unanswerable. But why?

ON GREYNESS AND GRANITE

Grey

Bluff Rock is grey. There are not many rocks that are truly grey. Many may be grey in dust or striped with mudstone but Bluff Rock is all over grey. It is the true grey of a divisionist granite, made up as it of rosy felspar specks, black mica chips and opaque quartz that you would never call white. Up close it is speckled.

Grey is a colour between black and white which has no definite hue. This means that it is not a distinct part of the colour spectrum, that it has no saturation and is achromatic. It is the colour of ash.

When the world’s people are divided into colours there are black, white, browns and yellows but never greys. The only ‘Grey’ party is that of ‘Greypower’ referring to people united by their aged status and desire for pension reform. But in photography one uses a mid-grey card which is the technical exemplar of white skin. If you are doing portraiture and want the skin tones clear and bright you first take a light reading of the person then of the mid-grey card and adjust according to the reading of the card. This will give you fine white responses but will produce a brown or black subject without detailed lines or shadings. The mid-grey card insists on the non-white subject’s lack of light. When mass photography becomes regulated around whiteness via grey, in the case of British War Office guidelines on how to photograph troops for example, then black faces become nothing but ‘eyeballs and teeth’ (Cryer, 1992:102).

Between black and white has all the uncomfortable resonance of other points of mediation between a powerful dichotomy. Grey sexuality might be bisexuality—sometimes called ‘batting for both teams’—as only someone who doesn’t know the rules might do, an implied treachery.

And yet it is grey that refuses hues. There are explicitly no shades to grey. It disallows any multiple colourings, any fluid identities. Grey cannot be placed as more black or more white. It can’t siphon off the privileges of the white and then swim in the authenticity of the black. Grey is grey.

But this refusal of hue is constantly contested. As if to punish its craven neutrality we employ grey to describe the realms of confusion and disarray. These are ‘grey areas’.
And if someone stands behind and pulls strings through another, doesn’t dare or can’t manipulate from the front, they are the grey eminences (eminence grise). And the grey market isn’t quite illegal, isn’t ‘black but is merely unofficial. All these ‘markets’ are of course covered in green.

So we have unfinished business when I call Bluff Rock grey. It is the most constant of colours and yet it reminds us that it is something that cannot be resolved, that it also stands in a field of confusion.

Granite

Bluff Rock is made of granite. Granite is ‘a granular igneous rock composed chiefly of felspar (orthoclase) and quartz usually with one or more other minerals. It is much used for building, and for monuments etc’ (Delbridge, 1992:763). Its second meaning is great hardness or firmness and yet its name comes from grano meaning grain. Its origins are as contested as those of ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’:

With multifactorial generative processes involving different source rocks and operating in different global tectonic settings, and where there are multifarious interconnections, these can rarely be precisely defined, so that any genetic categorisation must be regarded as a philosophical abstraction; some would say impeding more than advancing understanding. (Pitcher, 1993:297)

Granite can be rough or smooth. If it has been weathered by water and smoothish rundown have been formed, you can slide down these on a wheat bag whooshing as you go. But you can climb up the unweathered side and your sandshoes will grip to the friction rich surfaces like sticky sand, the tiny motes ingratiating themselves with the rubber treads.

In a government publication on Building and Ornamental Stones from 1915, I find the only reference to Tenterfield granite. On page forty six it says:

TENTERFIELD N.S.W.- A beautiful porphyritic stone and unlike any recorded granite. The large flesh coloured felspar crystals scattered throughout a grey coloured ground, produce a very pleasing effect, and give the stone a most attractive appearance. It is a splendid combination, so to speak, of red and grey granite, and has great commercial possibilities. (Baker, 1915)

The front page of this book has a drawing of two Aboriginal men and their bark shelter and the words underneath say: ‘We replace the Bark Gunya with Stone and Marble Cities’. The infinite possibilities of granite.

You forget that you loved granite. Our creek ran around and through granite and then out into basalt holes where the real swimming happened. But it was over the granite that the little waterfalls ran and on its curvy surfaces that picnics were held; Lovers Nook we
called it. Willows dangled into the water and the rocks made perfect islands and imaginary worlds. At my tenth birthday party, we all group took off our clothes and skinny dipped in the pool below the waterfall. My next eldest sister by three years and her friend left on their underpants and trainer bras as their status dictated. But for us what a stew of screams and cries and splashy laughter all rolling over us. But then what an exodus and mad melee when one Donna Hamel found a leech on her thigh and then someone saw my father and Steve riding round the sheep on the ridge. Should we dive and risk leeches or dress like mad? I was overcome by terrible guilt. These rocks, this water, was now the site I thought, of having to say I was sorry. It took me a long time to realise that my parents found it funny. Only I thought of possible immorality.

The grains that make up the granite have been brought together through the heat and pressure of the earth’s crust. They were molten magma that cooled, and millions of years later shows us its tiny cells of existence as flakes and chips and sometimes beads of quartz, felspar and mica.

Granite is used in building. But not as some pliable brick. It is carved into slabs and put upon walls and floors in grand hotels and business palaces. In the home it is unforgiving as a benchtop, where the most softly dropped glass shatters on impact.

Now it has also been proposed as a container for nuclear waste. Its impenetrability to water, its resistance to erosion and great structural strength are seen as very promising for the isolation of highly radioactive wastes. ‘Radioactive wastes placed deep in these rocks are very unlikely to be disturbed by climatic or geological events or by accidental or intentional human intrusion’ (Proceedings, 9:1983). Granite is impervious.

And it is used for monuments. A final blanket of granite is placed over graves. Headstones are carved from it and walls of memories are written on it. It lasts. Even unplanned and uncarved granite seems to attract inscriptions. Where there are tors next to roads they are always written on, proffering as they often do, a granular slate in the shape of an elephant’s backside. And so it’s ‘Thunderbolts Rock’ written over with ‘Chris’ and a small ‘bong on’. Another has had its slate silvered over to emphasise the ‘Hi Honey I love you’, the ‘I Ray love yah’, the ‘Mick Brock’ and on the other side, away from the sight of cars, right across the elephant’s crack, is written ‘The Perfect Crime’. 
IT HAPPENED ALONG THE HIGHWAY
Placing the Massacre

Bluff Rock is a distinctive granite bluff. ‘According to geological theory, Bluff Rock stands above the surrounding area because it has been more resistant to erosion, probably due to it having fewer cracks (termed joints), along which water can penetrate and accelerate the erosion process’ (Halliday, 1987).

It stands over the New England Highway 10 km south of the town of Tenterfield in the New England region. At least that is how I can locate it for you. Closer to Glen Innes you might be told it is on the Tenterfield Road; at Tenterfield it is on the Glen Innes Road; from properties in the east it is described as in the Bluff Country and from the west as being up from Pye’s Creek Road. Its situation is therefore dependent upon the position of the speaker and whether or not they are locals of a particular sort or travellers who link the bluff exclusively to the experience of travel along the New England Highway.

It is known as the site of a massacre of Aboriginal people in the 1840s. These people were probably a part of the Bundjalung or Ngarabul groups, although the Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia also suggests that the Gumbaingir and Nganyaywana peoples lived in the area (Horton, 1994:321). Versions of that event are recorded in local histories, tourist information sheets and in the work of a local bush poet—it is also passed on by word of mouth. The version of these events that is most widely circulated and has the most power of becoming a discourse in the Foucauldian sense is that which is printed on an A4 leaflet and is readily available from the Tourist Information Centre in the main street (which is also the highway) of Tenterfield. This single page of Visitor Information begins with three headings: Visitor Information (fourteen point font size), Bluff Rock (eighteen point font size), Location and History (fourteen point font size).

Then there are two sub headings: Bluff Rock and The Massacre.

‘Bluff Rock’ is followed by a short description of where and when and by which non-Aboriginal colonial it was first recorded. These ‘namers’ were the Irby brothers ‘who passed the huge granite rock while moving to Deepwater Station from Tenterfield Station in 1842. They named the outcrop St Swithin’s Bluff as they passed it on St Swithin’s Day’ (Information Sheet) but this never seems to have entered common parlance.

‘The Massacre’ subheading is followed by an initial sentence which reads: ‘The truth of that day remains clouded by many conflicting versions’. It then dates the massacre as occurring in 1844 and goes on to deploy two major sources as evidence of what happened—the Keating version and the Irby version. The leaflet ends with a single sentence: ‘The truth will be forever in the bosom of one of the most impressive landmarks along the New England Highway’.

I am interested in these two sentences: ‘The truth of that day remains clouded by many conflicting versions’ and ‘The truth will be forever in the bosom of one of the most
impressive landmarks along the New England Highway’. The information seeker, the tourist, the local and some hybrid of these—the reader—must travel between these borders to map in the touristic ‘sense’ of the massacre. Meaghan Morris suggests of the presence of this leaflet that; ‘A more sophisticated tourist operation would obliterate that immediately’ (Morris, 1993:269). I should be careful here since I can’t be certain we are talking about exactly the same leaflet since the efforts to dis-locate Tenterfield’s tourism from Bluff Rock and toward the ‘Wooolool Wooolool Aboriginal Cultural Tours’ have been consistent and considerable. But in terms of ‘transparent’ tourist sites; ‘pseudo places’—the story and siting of a massacre of Aboriginal people quoting the seemingly psychotic ‘pioneer’, well satisfied with his ‘superior’ slaughter does not have the easy pleasures of the touristic familiar. The story operates too clearly as ‘real’ and demands something more than the easy pleasures of ‘pseudo’ sites (Boorstin in Morris, 1993:245).

Because the leaflet is unlike other tourist sites, it has to work very hard to control this representation of a still largely absent (particularly from tourist situations) regional history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colonial relations. What follows is one reading of the work these words are doing on this page in their effort to manage meaning, to contain massacre.

A Visitor’s Information

‘The truth of that day remains clouded by many conflicting versions’. Here there is a possibility for the reader/tourist to become the unclouded ‘truth’. While history, that unreliable plethora of conflicting stories, has failed to arrive at a single truth, the invited viewer of the bluff can see for themselves their own truth. Their own action in visiting and in viewing, symbolically resolves the conflicting stories by transforming the Bluff from something to be known to something to be seen. The sign/sight of the Bluff, energised by its relationship to the history invented by the leaflet’s narratives, remains in its muteness the imagined site of other known but uncirculated counter histories and marks ambiguously the absolute silences of unimagined and/or unknowable histories. But what do I mean by putting ‘ambiguous’ and ‘absolute’ in the same sentence? Does the silent Bluff quite rightly mark the inability for historical understanding of massacre to reach closure? Is silent looking an adequate response to the many, many acts of horrific colonial violence against Aboriginal people? Or does this silence simply produce the viewer as one more voyeur who is excused from attempting to engage with the ways in which such a history was produced? Is this silence one more way of saying that what happened was inhuman, beyond knowledge and therefore can’t be precisely explored? By becoming attached to a pre-existing series of sights, determined by other Tourist Information sheets, the need to know these other histories is at least momentarily overcome. You don’t have to know, you are just a tourist? An ethical solution?
That the ‘truth’ is clouded simultaneously prevents the reader/tourist from having to see a truth of violent white invasion/settlement while signalling the availability of the position of neutral truth seeker. But lest this be too heavy a textual burden and the seeking too fraught, the truth is also explicitly revealed, for ‘The truth will be forever in the bosom of one of the most impressive landmarks along the New England Highway.’ So the bluff itself becomes both the site and sight of truth possibilities deep within its inaccessible bosom. The bluff prevents our erudition. Our knowledge is impossible since we can’t ask the bluff. Nature’s essentialised silence won’t let us know what happened. Far from being unreadable or hostile, the Australian landscape spreads itself around us as a sheltering blanket of quiet, keeping history well away from ‘us’.

Some of the stories which might allow some movement from this dead end, that might connect the bluff to a different history and the possibility of the viewer respectfully knowing it, are those of the local Aboriginal people, but these are not addressed in this leaflet. Instead, between these sentences the ‘historical’ evidence of Keating and Irby is used.

The Keating Version

The account from the tourist leaflet reads as follows:

One time Overseer at Bolivia Station, Thomas Keating, in describing the massacre as it had been told to him by an old man at Bolivia, told of Aboriginal attacks on shepherds and sheep. Keating outlined how men on Bolivia Station were mustered and armed, then set on the track of Aborigines to Pye’s Creek on the western boundary of the property. According to Keating’s story the Aboriginals were then attacked at Pye’s Creek and they fled across country to Bluff Rock where they were thrown from the top, killing most and injuring many. None of that tribe, which survived, were ever seen on Bolivia Station again.

This account is taken from a letter Thomas Keating wrote in 1925 to J. F. Thomas who was seeking information about Bolivia Station and the massacre for his own records of the history of Tenterfield. Keating’s original letter is difficult to read. There are few full stops or capital letters, the handwriting is spindly and sometimes faint and the spelling and style are difficult to penetrate at times. At crucial moments in the narrative the words are unfathomable. For example, after detailing the pursuit of the Aboriginal people across and up the back of Bluff Rock he writes without full stops:

The men got up to the top of the rock and threw the blacks off the rock onto the ground at the bottom the front part of the rocks was a great hite from the ground below a lot of the blacks guh (?) goh and a lot more crippled none of that tribe was ever seen on the station after after that drive but there were a part fixed tribe on the station. (Thomas, CY Reel 1 524 )
The perceived accuracy of Keating’s memory of another old man’s story some eighty years after the event depends on his localness. It is his being-there-ness, his location, his position as ‘one time overseer’ that inspired Thomas to write to him and upon which rests the narrative force of his story within the tourist tale. Tourism demands that its sites be simultaneously open and closed. Open enough to insist on a visit, on going there, to arouse a curiosity to see for one’s self, and closed so that the site doesn’t fall into a sea of possibilities where any and every meaning can be gained from the site. Tourism is, if you like, meaning management. It needs to employ a series of engagements which can reshape and re-deploy themselves about crossecting (crossing and connecting) discourses such as history, identity and place and within the textual possibilities of doing so, shape those encounters in terms of the pleasures of stopping, viewing and learning (Horne, 1991:1-5; Crick, 1991:6-19).

Of course it is never clear what might be or should be called tourism and what history, and in many ways they are both awkward and unsatisfactory holding yards that fail to acknowledge their shared, intimate lives. However, for the moment I am insisting on an artificial separateness which designates ‘tourism’ as the circulation of particular information leaflets like this one and an active effort to stop and start travellers within tourist spaces, and history as being one part of the possibly shared cultural capital through and around which the tourist will experience the tourist site. Keating’s extract intends to motivate the tourist/reader and possibly the local now and then to pause at the Bluff Viewing Area with barbecues, toilets and picnic shelters and look at the rock, but it also serves a number of other functions.

Keating’s story as recounted in the tourist leaflet depicts an extermination that is viciously complete. Aboriginal presence is responded to with a colonial power so overwhelming that resistance is impossible. The bonded labour and squatters are made so powerful that they can literally throw the Aboriginal people from their land—‘killing most and injuring many’ and none of the survivors was ever seen on Bolivia station again. This then was conquest, ‘uninhabited’ terra nullius made manifest. This version of the massacre does not engage with the possibility of Aboriginal resistance, except in terms of generalised attacks on shepherds and sheep and these were quickly responded to by this overwhelming white force. Neither does it explore the recorded differences between Aboriginal groups—they have become one. The fearfulness of the attacking whites is never alluded to and the fiction of the disappeared Aboriginal people so useful to non-Aboriginal land ‘owners’ is perpetuated. Is the reader/viewer to be comforted by this? Does it presume a ‘settler’ identified reader? Much more obviously, it presumes a fossilised past.

The inventive possibilities of the past are not allowed to creep into the present. You can prove the impenetrability of the colonial past by looking at the silent bluff. Perhaps
Keating’s story also disavows the authenticity of continuing Aboriginal existence around this land since the ‘real’ Aboriginal people who ‘really’ belonged to this area were all overcome, killed or frightened away. Aboriginal people are granted a place, are named on the tourist leaflet as being there but then they are joined to the all too familiar history of vanquished peoples. The leaflet places the reader/tourist in a modern present that is radically distinct from the simple awfulness of the bizarre past. Thus both the persuasiveness of the discourse of ‘progress’ and the pleasures of ‘passing through’ become retold and continuously re-enacted within the narratives of history/tourism and the act of gazing at the bluff. The divided highway, splitting travellers into directional flows, becomes a fast flowing band of modernity shouldered by ‘history’. Is this transient space exactly that of Australia’s representation of its colonial past? A rivulet of speed surrounded by a landscape that is invoked as silent?

Keating’s version of the massacre, which describes the event as an isolated incident hides both the stories of the successful efforts of Aboriginal people to prevent ‘settlement’ and the increasingly systemised work of ‘settlers’ and governments to remove Aboriginal people through the use of poison, police and bureaucracy. There is also nothing of the compromises and sometimes successful agreements, dependent upon exchanges of labour and land which, while agreed to then, fail to be granted any legal meaning now. These are not links that work within a desire by tourism promoters to have tourist/readers consume the sight but in a contained, sporadic and isolated fashion. This is a ‘history’ moment occurring amongst a range of other, differently emotionally managed, tourist possibilities.

But let us turn back to Keating’s letter and what had to be transformed in his original text to make the information leaflet, the tourist map, work. First of all Keating’s ‘a lot of the blacks goh and a lot more crippled’ as a result of throwing the ‘blacks onto the ground’ has been translated to a single image of many Aboriginal people being killed by being ‘thrown’ off. This seems an incredible act for men whom he says were given arms and ammunition and had already shot some Aboriginal people where they were first discovered at Pye’s Creek. Does he mean they were first shot and then thrown? But then what of the ‘crippling’? Had ammunition run out? Why thrown at all? Thrown would seem to indicate a Herculean task of lifting and tossing, except if they were the bodies of children. But perhaps he was meaning ‘throw’ in a more general sense where bodies were rolled off the top. Why not pushed in this case? Is it simply the embroidery to make a ‘better’ tale? To make incomprehensible monsters of the colonists? To hint at a certain heroism? ‘Throw’ can be easily mapped onto the bluff if one looks at it from the viewing site. Bluff Rock looms up and seems to have a clear and distinct edge from which people could easily have been thrown or pushed. But when one climbs to the top, courtesy of the local farmer, the ‘clear’ edge is broken by undercliffs, and the spots from which a party might gather to do this are small indeed. The scrub is thick and the ground very
rough and rocky. But perhaps this throwing and crippling with its partiality and incompleteness points towards the lack of success; after all, why isn’t everyone ‘simply’ killed? The ambiguity in the original needs to be edited for the tourist version to enable the distant fascination which will stop but not implicate the ‘passing trade’.

It is the final section of Keating’s letter that had to be expunged—‘but there was a part fixed tribe at the station’. This means that some Aboriginal people continued to live there; it means that the Aboriginal people of 1844 were not an homogenous entity and it means the massacre was only one small part of a complicated colonial system. It suggests a relationship—even continuity—with the massacre that is unable to be assimilated into the design of this tourist moment at least.

_The truth of that day remains clouded by many conflicting versions._

_The truth will be forever in the bosom of one of the most impressive landmarks along the New England Highway._

**Irby’s Account**

The tourist leaflet then turns to an extract from Irby’s ‘Memoirs’.

Commissioner MacDonald reported that in October 1844 a shepherd had been killed by Aborigines on the Irby Station at Bolivia but no retaliatory action was mentioned in the dispatch. However Edward Irby himself, when writing of the incident, describes how one of his shepherds, Robinson had been killed by Aborigines and how four men had set out to find the culprits. In these few simple words he described in his journal the terrible deeds of that day:

‘The blacks saw us coming and hid themselves among the rocks. One in his haste dropped poor Robinson’s coat so we knew we were onto the right tribe. If they had taken to their heels they might have got away, instead of doing so they got their fighting men to attack us. So we punished them severely and proved our superiority to them’.

The description of Irby’s account carefully exposes the hypocrisy of the colonial government. The Crown Land Commissioner (responsible at this time for the welfare of Aboriginal people) only reports that a shepherd had been killed but says nothing about the retaliation. This suggests several things. Firstly the leaflet is presenting the idea that there was a systemic racism underpinning this one-eyed reporting and, secondly, it assumes Irby reported the whole incident to MacDonald but MacDonald failed to report the whole thing to Governor Gipps. Either the higher bureaucratic order (MacDonald) suppressed the retaliation in sympathy with Irby’s action or the suppression resulted from his own value system which saw ‘retaliation’ as ‘not counting’. Another possibility is that Irby never actually reported his actions.
'In these few simple words he described in his journal the terrible deeds of that day': Here the leaflet is stepping into a surreal Conradian darkness. It having already been established via Keating’s account that the Aboriginal people were thrown from the bluff, Irby’s words like ‘punishment’ and his boast of ‘proving superiority’ are so incommensurate that they are indeed ‘simple’ words battling the ‘terrible’ deeds. Since Keating’s account leaks into Irby’s it is difficult to read Irby’s story of punishing fighting men and proving superiority as anything but horror. How could anyone account for the act of throwing people via the calm rationale of a need to ‘prove superiority’? It is precisely the writing of this account that makes it so particularly effective. If the narrative had been one of a slow descent to savagery, a descent into an other world, then the act might be read as some final, dreadful epiphany but no, Irby’s narrative is rational, making matter of fact and sensible his horrible actions. This hints not at ongoing and insistent ‘frontier’ warfare but at the penumbral possibility of the Holocaust where death made ‘sense’. There a fantasy could arise that there was no emotional cost to death, where death could not be felt, where death was a ‘rational’ response. And here within the landscape-becoming-colonialism arose the manifestation of rationality without humanism. Where ‘sense’ invented people who didn’t count, who could be punished by any means, to whom no rules except the purpose of ‘proving our superiority’ existed. In these acts, thus imagined, we have the invention of a particularly Australian ‘other’. This is not the ‘other’ of Said with its layers of discourse and representation but an impenetrable Fuseli nightmare hanging always in the corner, never available to re-readings and counter inscriptions. Irby is the frozen abject, the atavistic threat breathing over non-Aboriginal possibility. The invented chasm between now and then, between the tourist/reader and Irby, is both sustained and gently questioned by this leaflet. What can and can’t be said in ‘tourist space’?

Yes, ‘a more sophisticated tourist operation would obliterate [this] ‘immediately’ but perhaps it is also as Visitors Information that some encounter with this ‘other’ can be attempted (Morris, 1993:269). The space of this leaflet is after all, marginal and transient, where Irby’s response will arouse a piquant horror, a nod of knowingness, sharp pain or some other possibility and then the visitor will move quietly on. It is another ‘ordinary’ tourist story, like the bushranger and the goldrush. It is a part of the rescued possibilities from the past that might work to stop the passing cars. And true or not, able to be known or not, is it better than nothing being said at all? Does a commitment to ‘tourism/history’ thereby become an ego-saving necessity for the passer-by? Is ‘bad’ history good tourism? Is ‘bad’ tourism good history?

But where exactly was Irby when he was instigating these acts? How does he fit geographically with Keating’s account? Irby writes earlier in the same journal entry:
We ascended the range near Sugarloaf, crossed Collin’s Creek, mounted the range on the other side and saw smoke rising about eight miles away in a north easterly direction... We made straight for the hill from which we saw the smoke. (Irby, (1844) in 1908:88)

Keating, you will remember, suggested that the Aboriginal group were found near Pye’s Creek and were chased across to the west. Irby too uses the bluff as a constant marker of his position but fails to do so here, even if we can re-read river to be mountain and bluff to be some rocks. We are clearly in two very different locations. There appears to be no connection between Keating’s and Irby’s account of Aboriginal massacres. They are two separate sets of death. So what we have is a complicated, hybrid event—a single massacre generated from at least two violent colonial encounters and a distinctive granite bluff.

What does the ‘Tourist Information’ pamphlet produce? What do we produce as we read it? What relationship is there between this leaflet and the words of one of the Aboriginal Land Council Workers: ‘You just have to go up there, the spirits are there. It’s a bad place’. And the words of the local farmer who ‘owns’ the land the Bluff is on—‘It’s rough country’.

*The truth of that day remains clouded by many conflicting versions.*

*The truth will be forever in the bosom of one of the most impressive landmarks along the New England Highway.*

*It’s rough country*

*It’s a bad place.*
WRITING (AND READING) THE LOCAL

The task of family history is apparently different from that of the tourist leaflet. Generally family histories are originary, reticulated governances that insist upon an association with a particular past according to the (assumed) unavoidable fact of your recorded birth. Tourism, however, requires a subjectivity that is contextually invented and conditionally mobilised. That is, one travels to and through tourism but one always travels with a family history. While the tourist site invites spectatorship and temporary association, the family history asks for permanent presence and incorporation. Family histories that are written within a particular locale invent a particularly located subject which becomes the ‘local’ who in turn intimately vivifies the immediate geography. While ‘local’ is a term that can carry the simple sense of being familiar with a place—‘knowing’ a place enough to direct a visitor for example—it is also a term that denotes an effective relationship with that place. A real ‘local’ must be ‘born and bred’ but more tellingly have connections back into the colonial history of the location. The colonial proofs exclude Aboriginal people of the area who, in a bizarre, carnivalesque manoeuvre, are too local to be local. The local subject is stitched to the place via a series of familial movements that work intermittently within the organising framework of a progressive, modernist history.

‘Local’, family histories, particularly those of rural Australia, rarely have a simple connection to ‘progressive history’. Looking back normally involves looking toward a seemingly greater prosperity and larger land holdings after the initial travails of actually ‘pioneering’ and ‘settling’ the land. These tales automatically exclude Aboriginal people, whose land tenure becomes an incommensurate imagining that bobs uneasily around the edges of all these claims to ‘localness’. Their presence must be remarked upon since this is one more proof of the length of time that a family has been in the area. But the stories are usually tales of loyal workers, ‘humorous’ anecdotes at the expense of some imagined Aboriginal proclivity or serious comment on the effects of white ways on ‘true’ Aboriginals. All of these show some sort of engagement with the range of racist discourses now variously identified as the antipodean reversal, Noble Savage, Romantic, Anthropological etc (Brady, 1996; Muecke, 1992; Attwood, 1992). There are of course many other exclusions, including any real effort to position the ‘family’ in any broader context. What prejudices did they embrace or eschew? What exactly was their status? How were they understood by others?

These intimate histories are therefore so particular in their purpose that they act as private initiators into historical beingness. Some writers will write their families as something that can stand in for Australian History to some extent but these are not local stories. They do the work as Judith Wright has done of historicising the process of making family history (Wright, 1959 & 1981). Local family histories do not place the subject into something as large as ‘history’ or even ‘Australian history’ since it is
understood without ever being said that individual ‘families’, while producing the occasional public figure, remain unimportant in any larger schema. They are not truth. However, they do invent for the present day subject an historical subjectivity. I become that history because I am from that history. My links have been carefully traced from that time onwards; I ‘know’ who I am. A family history privatises history into incomprehensibleness to all but the ‘inside’ reader. Meaning circulates around a small geographical area and among a small selection of families. Names of properties? Ah, that is where grandmother played tennis. Machinery? Grandpa had the first Ford truck in town. And on it goes. And so other histories become overshadowed and sometimes erased by this ‘real’.

I am interested in the way that local family histories in general and mine in particular can be read as parallel narratives to the one described within the A4 Bluff Rock leaflet but I am also interested in what happens when this invented subject—‘the local’—comes to read a ‘tourist’ leaflet.

**A Pioneering Family**

‘A Pioneering Family’ is a small section of a book entitled *Mother of Ducks*. As the author (who was my mother’s cousin) says in Author’s Note, ‘Mother of Ducks’ is about people, many of whom, I knew and loved etc’ (Newbury, 1986). The book is ‘Wholly Set up and Printed by McMahon Graphics, Glen Innes, 1986’. The local credentials of this book are therefore impeccable. Like the tourist leaflet, its purpose is to tell the local and in so doing invent the local. Which non-Aboriginal families came here first, how does here come to mean historical right, real title to place?

The small section on John Eckersley Newbury, my Grandfather’s Grandfather (my Great Great Grandfather?) begins with the wonderful lines: ‘This is a story of a family (my emphasis) who were never to gain distinction in any grand manner, unless it is that they have the distinction of being the first pioneers in that particular corner of New England, their children, the first (sic) to trample the grass in the area’ (Newbury, 124:86). ‘Family’, unlike ‘the truth’ of massacre, is a traceable certainty. Birth and death certificates—the state’s and then the individual’s means of tracing and retracing legitimacy—carry enough of the idea of scientific ‘fact’ for this to be understood as a truth, albeit a limited one.

White individuals of the 1850s had names and access to a limited state machinery which processed subjects into historical figures. Unlike the nameless murdered Aboriginal people and the power employed by Irby (or MacDonald) NOT to report their deaths and so let them enter official history, this family, ‘my’ family, had every reason to record children, marriages and deaths since these were explicitly linked to the legal practices of taking land. Children, seemingly of any age, could be registered as owning particular selections and in this way the legal size of any piece of land could be extended.
with every birth. The wife, unable to name land as hers until 1861, could however
provide the legitimate tools of future expansion. The family therefore does represent a
limited truth of colonial expansion. To propose that births are an accurate or ‘truthful’
account of all sexual liaisons is a ridiculous idea. But perhaps this replacement of the
usual family tensions and divisions with government records becomes an odd source of
reassurance? Genealogical ‘histories’ are a hopeless starting ground for lesbian, gay and
Aboriginal histories, full as the records are of ‘unmarrieds’ and utter silences.

The final paragraphs of the ‘A Pioneering Family’ story are a record of the lands now
owned by some of the fifteen children that John and Bridget Newbury raised. These
properties included: Green Glades, Paddy’s Land, Red Braes, Aboomla, Snow Flake,
Mt Mitchell Station, Glen Brook, Wattle Grove, Kookabrookra, Glen Rock, Yuthneath, The
Flags, Ryanna, Belfield, Woodland, Bill Meehan’s, Braleigh, Fermount and
Ward’s Mistake. Paul Carter (1987) has taught us to look carefully at the way places are
rhetorically spatialised through their namings and these properties are no exception. As
befits the generation of selectors (who both created and bought properties) most of these
property names have pragmatic and personal names. The pragmatism (and implied
optimism) is there in the Fermounts and Brooks and Woodlands and the reproduction
of white presence is already occurring in Paddy’s Land and Bill Meehan’s. As for an
Aboriginal presence and/or history only Aboomla and Kookabrookra carry it on.

‘Aboomla’, apparently meaning ‘home of the warriors’ (Newbury, 1986:126), is a
rhetorical appropriation that conveys both irony and pathos. However it is the more
general naming of these lands as ‘properties’ that is most indicative of the state-supported
establishment of this land in their ‘owner’s eyes. Some anxiousness to make this point
might be discerned in the ‘Paddy’s Land’ and ‘Ward’s Mistake’. The latter of these
records Ward who pegged out a large bit of land only to be told that it was already
selected. ‘Paddy’s Land’, which on first reading appears to mark an Irish presence, was
in fact a salute to an Aboriginal guide, called (by whom?) ‘Paddy’ (Newbury, 1986:98).
In very specific namings the particular acts of non-Aboriginal people are given presence
and space, while Aboriginal efforts remain generalised (place of undifferentiated
warriors) in a translation of a language that does not widely enter the settler population.
‘Aboomla’s’ meaning is therefore only sporadically understood even in its everyday
usage.

This same sort of naming management is pursued in the tourist leaflet’s account of the
massacre. The leaflet refers to ‘the Aborigines’ and it uses an early diary that mentions
the name of the individual white shepherd, Robinson, which is in contrast to the generic
‘blacks’. So while the naming of the massacre adds one of the possible acts that are
missing from the enormous ‘success’ of the Newbury children in acquiring land, the
leaflet’s very style sets up a continuity of familiar expressions and namings that insist on
the shared but variable totality of white experience. The organisation of the Visitor’s
Information leaflet positions the massacre as an act of a squatter, symbolically distanced from the ‘families’ of the selectors.

Genevieve Newbury refers to the Bluff Rock Massacre as ‘nothing short of barbaric’ and writes of other incidents where the viciousness of the ex-convict troopers is displayed (1986:121). This draws the more familiar lines between convicts and all others as the real root of any cruelties to Aboriginal people. Somehow the very ‘familyness’ of family history domesticates and so quietly ‘civilises’ history.

I remember that my mother told me nothing about Aboriginal people. She told me a bit of family history (her side), took me with ‘Aunty’ Genevieve to graveyards, houses and ghost villages in the dry backblocks. On this dirt our importance was supposedly written. I loved it. Once I remember being put in the far back of our station wagon so that an Aboriginal woman, Mrs Cutmore, (whom I now know was one part of an important Moree family) could put all her family into the car to be taken to our little church to be baptised. I hope this was Mrs Cutmore’s idea. I remember my mother’s cooking, the smells of cake, the smells of dinner but I can’t really remember my mother’s smell, although I remember being hugged and held in her arms. Family history was a light matter, like my mother’s light curiosity. She wanted to hear people’s stories; she had no answers; she taught us to be good. Everyone knew her; the ripples of family and association spread all around us. But people must like you; don’t go too deep; don’t claim truth. It was much more important to be liked than to be clever.

A ‘family’ reconstitutes an extraordinarily uncritical history. Not only can we not judge history since it happened ‘back then’ but it was also ‘we’ who did it. This produces in turn the idea that anything that happened in the area is somehow knowable and explainable, nothing is ever quite extraordinary enough to become the truth, that is, ‘official’ history. Local history is ‘gossip’. And I use the word gossip not in any derisive way but in acknowledgment of its intimate productive qualities. It produces local history via the idea of knowing the ‘real’, much more down to earth story, where great imaginings turn into practicalities and local personalities. An example from Tenterfield is Meaghan Morris’s account of a local who would ‘swear’ that Henry Parkes had never given the federation oration there but simply ridden through the town, relieved himself and gone on his way (Morris, 1993:264). These sorts of histories do (when they are able to break out of their locality and circulate in a larger system) have the effect of challenging, undermining or at least multiplying the versions of history available and no doubt do have the power to be both subversive and playful. Classic postmodern device and/or ethnographer’s dream?

The twists and turns identified in the family history become something again when read against/with the tourist leaflet. The leaflet was also written by a local historian but the meaning of the text is transformed when formulated as ‘Visitor’s Information’. Where ‘the family’ acts as the organising motif of the ‘The Pioneering Family’, the imaginary
‘visitor’ must do the same work for the leaflet. Where the family history is able to transform anecdote into truth for its intimate audience, the leaflet acknowledges that real ‘truth’ will never be known. Both, however, are organised about an idea of journey. To become a ‘visitor’ and so pick up the Visitors Information leaflet requires some sort of travelling away from home to somewhere else. The pioneering family is however required to journey toward a home, inventing the ‘local’ as they ‘settle’/theive.

The journeying to New England is written in the family history as a series of anecdotes. ‘Also seen were huge mobs of kangaroos which showed no fear of humans’ and ‘She [Bridget, my Great Great Grandmother?] never had any fear of the natives who were often to appear around the early holding at Cooks Creek’ and ‘On the journey to New England, Bridget cooked in her camp oven and was forced to feed her baby on mare’s milk as none other was available’. This is not dissimilar to a visitor’s map of New England where Tenterfield is Bald Rock and Bluff Rock and Glen Innes becomes the Standing Stones. Each town touristically individuated like the journey of John and Bridget, each stop having its own story. But the individuation of the towns must be publicised, must circulate, while the private placements of Bridget’s journey stay, to use a sinister expression, ‘within the family’. The pioneers’ journey however, must always end with permanence, with property ownership while the visitor must continue to journey, having only seen, not acquired the sights/sites.

However this ‘permanence’ or ‘settlement’ of ‘the pioneering family’ cannot be understood as truly so since it too shifts. Partly this is because its history remains starkly anecdotal and in part unspeakable. It is a fragment of a non-existent whole. The intimacy of the family anecdote creates a particularly placed and imagined corporeality of history. It is Bridget’s personal lack of fear, it is her taking the milk from the mare and giving it to the baby that demands that we (the fragmented, imagined family subject/audience) feel attached to this event. This attachment is not through the ‘truth’ of public history but via the much more effective surfaces of tale and travel. These surfaces of history are of course a philosophical and historical miscegenation that engages with the freedom from the psychologised, essentialised subjects that Grosz and others have suggested and tries to marry those bodies with time? What happens to time when I try to live out, leap over and ignore these private, placed histories? Do I still ‘belong’? (Probyn, 1996)

In family histories ‘our’ historically owned subjects must be able to move between place and situation in an historical tour that gives us in turn access to a slide show of our historical ‘soul’. The formation of such historical subjects through this video clip of anecdote and occasional formal photograph, letter or diary will and can invent subjects with claims to an essential past of belonging but this is always unstable. Within such a small territory the competition for the inscribable surface is intense. We may be told that x and y explorer were discovering to the east but ‘we’ know Bridget was already feeding her children mare’s milk the year before. Then of course another family member might
murmur in the background that they thought John Eckersley Newbury was in fact a convict not a remittance man, that in ‘fact’ their grandfather was the first one in town with a car and on it goes. The intense struggles over surface within families, means that to speak of the past is to run into other families’ business. Therefore all claims to the ‘local history’ are always contested, often actively. Time and so history are no longer a ‘locus or container’, we are time (Tyler, 1987:136). Whose family memorabilia gets to go in the local museum? Who gets to make ‘first settler’ claims? Who is indisputably from the area?

History is a part of an unfolding invented by imaginative temporality and locality rather than distance from the present. Family histories, with their doubtful, obvious purpose and transparent claims of bias, are wonderfully available sites for the generation of particular subjectivities. But what about this thing called ‘local’ when connected to family histories? Would the Foucauldian argument be that very small communities form their own local controls that in turn invent regimes of local knowledge that are limitedly but powerfully circulated? Do we see claims to ‘truth’, scientific knowledge or the facts of the unconscious replaced by the ‘truths’ of first families, the silences of illegitimacies, the equally powerful no go areas? Are these discourses less available to be resisted because of their locale? Does the complexity of living the ‘locality of culture’ (Bhabha in Probyn 1996:34) outdo discourse? I agree with Bhabha that my family histories like his ‘locality’ are ‘more around temporality than about historicity’ (Bhabha, 1994:140). As such do the stories of Bluff Rock read more like family histories than anything else? Complex, hybrid, organised silences amid swathes of chatter?

How many sorts of discursive power can we identify in the Bluff Rock stories? Are the categorisations and reporting techniques of governmental power meeting the ‘aristocratic’ (wealthy landowner/feudal?) versions of power? Are these two models of power co-existing alongside the ‘popular’ memory of free and bonded labour who tell stories rather than write them? Is this awkward triumvirate organised not about the control of bodies or sex but a ‘place beyond the boundaries’? In Irby’s daily diary perhaps we are also witnessing the battle of narratives, particularly written ones, over the limited reports to government and the other local, orally circulated, stories. When Keating’s story becomes a written story it can enter other arenas of circulation but in what state? What happens when place and not bodies become the site of contested subjects? What happens when one part of the contest for ‘land’ rules within a subject position invented by feudalism, another by the established etiquette of the group’s land and a third enmeshed in governmental designs of labour? These are (some of) the families of history or the productive subjectivities and knowledges produced by ‘local’ history when we are able to invent ourselves in them. No ‘truths’ but plenty of partiality (Clifford, 1986).
To read the Visitors Information Leaflet on Bluff Rock as a local subject invented (in part) by my particular family history produces a range of counter responses and excuses. The first is, I wasn’t really there. I was half way to Germany.

Liminal Longings
In my own childhood, with a distinctly ‘foreign’ name like Schlunke, the name was never understood as such for I was really a Newbury. My mother not my father centred me there. My Schlunkeness, my ‘Germaness’, was therefore of an eerily pure kind. Possibly only in such locations could ‘German’ come to simply mean as it did to us at or at least in our childhoods, music and writing. My father, as a Second World War soldier-settler, remained something of an import. His ‘Germaness’ explained in part his preference for listening to Bach and reading rather than playing sport; and why he rode, according to my mother, ‘like a pommy’. Germany when understood as Schlunkeness gave me access to much more exotic myths than Bridget and her mare since on this ‘side’ there was persecution, internment, suicide and I hoped the possibility of a castle or two. It breathed an exotica not to be found in New England. This feels now like the most extraordinary misreading. It was as if Australianness had made up something called Germany only tangentially related to the country itself. A more ephemeral example of Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (1983)? There was no tradition, within my father’s family at least, of returning to Germany and so there was no updating, no insistence on a particular meaning of Germany. The Red Baron and Bach were contemporaries of mine. No language, no culture, no time. ‘Australia’ and being Australian was a site of active invention only because I couldn’t be anything else.

There were traces of this ghostly ethnicity in the kuchen my mother cooked from my Aunt Margherita’s recipe and my father’s two German phrases: Ich Liebe and Good Night, the German of which I have now forgotten. Perhaps my father was sent to the Pacific Theatre rather than Europe in the war because of institutional doubts about the security of someone with a name like that and then again perhaps not. My father wondered. Possibly four generations of life in Australia was considered safe enough. Perhaps this is what happened to ‘ethnic identity’ after too many years? The single authenticity of it all just ran away. Constant mutation would not be denied.

My father’s parents had tried very hard to establish an ongoing Australian/German identity throughout the 1890s and 1900s and the established German community had the power to do so. My father had endured whole years with one Christmas trip home to be able to attend Concordia College, the Lutheran school in Adelaide. The long-term plan was that he would become, as the youngest son, a Lutheran pastor. But coming to Glen Innes with no Lutheran church for thousands of miles, he localised to Presbyterianism and grazing.
But away from ‘home’ I was usually understood first as in some way ‘German’. I was often asked if I was born there which, given my New England mythology, I used to find highly insulting. A German student at university pointed out how she would pronounce Schlunke and I embraced its validity. She could have been wrong. Until this moment there had been constant confusion when I said that Slunky should be spelt Schlunke. Everyone in my family pronounced it differently, a private, embarrassed joke. We didn’t know how to say our own NAME! How German WAS it? (Abish, 1982).

Away from ‘home’ people would also ask where the name was from and I would say Brandenburg. Since this was often a polite way of asking if I was an immigrant this created a peculiar relationship with a then divided city that I had never visited. And given that our originary village was in East Germany I was now faintly connecting myself to one of the most xenophobic and violent states in Germany. Brandenburg is now famous for its new ‘35 strong special helicopter-borne mobile police unit to combat racist, un-German, violence’ (Guardian, Feb 1 1998:3). Left-wing, lesbian and ‘foreign’, I stood a good chance of being beaten and kicked if I went ‘back’ to Brandenburg. I felt something of a fake—a Newbury disguised as a ‘Schlunke’.

There were these odd traces of Germanness but to actually link it to the German state was something I had not the slightest interest in doing. I was interested in how Germans were treated in Australia. I did care for the history of that community but to imagine that this connected me to Nazidom was not something I wanted to be associated with. Modern ‘Germany’ should simply have been distributed around the world.

But access to this ghostly Germanness also presented me with fragments for my conditional keeping. In 1990 the film The Nasty Girl came out and its portrayal of the slow discovery of the Nazi history of a small town was not forgotten by me. The need to say something, the requirement to witness is the only gift a German name bestows. This again comes back to location.

My next door neighbour is struggling to write a history of her mother, who is the daughter of a survivor of the Holocaust. Her mother was, in the vernacular of genocide, a ‘hidden child’, that is she survived by being hidden in a forest. As a part of this story my friend visited her mother’s village (then part of Poland) and the death camp that had been set up near by. She has (holiday? tourist? historical?) photographs of the village and camp. One photograph was of the village cinema. A nice deco building. This had been where her mother went to the cinema but it became the last local gaol where Jewish women were put before being sent to the death camps. She has a photograph of a man on a bike taken at the ruined death camp, green grass and trees making it look like a park with rail track and wire. This man said he had been a boy at the time and had taken vegetables to the guard’s kitchen from the village. He said ‘Oh those silly Jewish women who put on their lipstick’ as they got off the train. She has a photograph also from the same ‘local’ death camp of four small children playing with their dolls, playing mothers
and fathers under a tree in the ruins of the camp; they had no idea where they were playing.

There is another photo from another place, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, and it is a monument called The Valley of the Destroyed Communities. It is made of big sandstone boulders organised into a labyrinth and it has the name in English and Hebrew of every town in Europe where Jews were killed and communities disappeared. The photo is of her mother standing next to the name of her town. What would such a maze/map look like if it included each town where Aboriginal people were killed, each reserve, each death in custody? It could not be the only monument since sites of Aboriginal victories in the frontier wars would have to be memorialised somewhere, as would the ongoing gathering places as Aboriginal knowledge is rediscovered, re pulled together. But how could this be said?

Superficial Monuments
To drive past Bluff Rock is to see nothing but rock. To stop at the viewing place is to acquire a name but no history. To go to the Visitor Centre and ask for a leaflet is to be given a story of omnipotent white power. This is not enough. The existence of the visitor’s leaflet is a gesture toward telling a history that continues to be unwritten on the Australian landscape. Is it human to drive over killing grounds? What is it like to be displaced from our surfaces and ‘depths’? Of course this is a philosophical impossibility. Surfaces exist. They cannot displace you, you can’t be displaced from them, they are written all over you. You can’t be trapped or alienated. You can (actively, never simply) only be. What the leaflet denies you, however, is the possibility of positioning yourself in this landscape. Dependent on the silences of the countryside as a prophylactic against history, the leaflet prevents the creative generation of a subjectivity of belonging. If the past is a fiction of the present it nevertheless still requires placed generation. Subjects and their stories need a cultural context, that is a discursive location. But the leaflet intentionally renders the bluff landscape (almost) sterile—devoid of the possibility of generating located subjects that ‘know’ the bluff. But remember that ‘(almost)’, because even the most restrictive reading of the bluff when it is set amidst the speeding tourisms of highway attractions trying to catch the passing surfaces of attentions, viewings and transacted cash, cannot foresee how it might be understood. That final lack of control in how this tourist tale might be read,that is a superficial monument—indeterminate, discontinuous and contingent.
THE LOCAL POET AND LOCUSPOETICS

Massacre of Aborigines at Bluff Rock 1844
by Col Newsome

The rich lands ran enough stock
But the white man wanted more!
The dark tribe met at Bluff Rock
When the whites made open war
Squatter, settler, herder,
Rode out that day to kill,
Rode for rape and murder,
Rode on the devils will
But the tribe had danced to a frenzy
In the death corroboree!
Oh! Couldn't those pale faced men see
What the sad-outcome would be?
The tribe, a death song chanting,
Ran to the Bluff Rock rim,
Where it fell in a cliff, not slanting,
Straight down, and its depths were dim,
Decked with daub and feather,
Husband child and wife,
The dark ones leapt together
As they had been in life!
Sweethearts, sisters, brothers,
They all leapt hand in hand
In-laws, fathers, mothers
Leapt for the spirit land!
Did his destruction shock him?
Did the white man feel remorse?
Looking down from the crest of the rock rim
Astride his sweat-stained horse
Where the dead dark tribe distorted
Their limbs all twisted lay?
The stock horse shied and snorted
And the white man rode away.
A stench rose up to the high-way,
All animals left the place,
And the teamsters made a by-way
Round the bones of the martyred race.
No sign to tell the violence
Once enacted there,
The white man keeps his silence,
In shame we all must bear.
Let us probe no more this mystery
The powers refuse to name,
An event from Australian history
The whites exclude in shame.
Bluff Rock! Clear as glass where
New England Highway wends,
A million tourists pass there
Yet none may tell their friends
This tale of words in magic,
While listeners hold their breath,
Of the dark tribes splendid tragic
Noble leap for death.
When you pass there, hold your breath, keep
One brief moment still,
Remember the dark tribes’ death leap
From the crest of the Rugged hill.

(Newsome, 1981:12)

The poem reworks the massacre as a heroic and resistant leap by the Aboriginal people themselves when faced with the overwhelming odds against them. Thematically it can be linked to Waltzing Matilda and Thelma and Louise with that shared desperate bravery of leaping rather than giving the ‘white men’ the satisfaction of killing (or catching) them. This is a very effective counter-mythology when linked to the quote from Edward Irby’s diary (that appears at the end of the poem) which writes of the murders as a demonstration of his and so white men’s superiority. Choosing to jump allows the Aboriginal people to be resistant ‘forever’, proving their superiority and potentially links the Aboriginal people in this white, bush poet’s terms with the resilient heroes of other unequal encounters like the swaggy with the squatter and the shearer with the bank manager.

The murderous white subjects in this poem are not simply Irby the squatter but symbolically all white men. ‘Squatter, settler, herder’—all classes, all types are collapsed into one by their greed for more and more land. The only white (ish) character that is able to respond emotionally in any way to the deaths is the horse which ‘shied and snorted’
and in a much more pragmatic way ‘the teamsters who made a by-way, round the bones of the martyred race’. The story of the massacre, while it remains silent and excluded, is understood as creating a shameful burden to bear for all whites, here represented as the ‘white man’. But if it can be heard, if the reader does pass the place and knows then ‘hold your breath,’ and be still and remember ‘as you pass’.

‘Keep one brief moment still’ on the highway. This seems an astonishingly quaint request. Post Speed, (the film and Virilio (trans) per Morris, 1993:246), it is now a difficult imagining to memorialise and monumentalise within a movement along a highway. Highways are about travel at speed from one point determined by accommodation, food, tourist space to another point determined by accommodation, food, tourist space. At best, monuments on highways are the elegiac plastic posies marking ‘Noel’s Corner’, ‘Sally’s Place’ etc, the small Cassandras of car crashes past and those to come. Part of their effectivity is that we speed by them—the glimpse resonating in a more heartfelt way with what it is to drive than the guided tour with notes. To ask for a moment’s stillness on a highway is to implicitly ask for a moment’s silence—to stop. It makes sense to suggest that if something could be made, billboard? large cross? that stopped the highway tourist, that made them read the history, then some of them would fall silent, would reach for the odd comfort of quiet. But this response assumes we know the history and none of these histories are available at the viewing area of Bluff Rock. Only the silent BBQs and thunderbox toilets. But if the car did stop and the history was told in the version of this poem what might the effects of that silence, amongst so many silences, be?

I am ambivalent about silence. Its conditional nature is not easily expressed. For example what do silent, bowed, heads at an ANZAC day think? Is a careful litany of rights and wrongs passing through one’s mind? I’m not being quiet for the rapists, and certainly not the murderers, and not Ruxton, or those who built the bomb…Is my resistant silence noticed? For the collective effect still insists on the overall worth of the lives lost for at least this moment. Does this matter? Does this public effect take anything away from the private possibilities? What do we do when we contemplate? What do we do when our contemplation is organised to some extent at least by narrative and natural monument in concert? ie when reading the poem or the history and looking up at the rock? Is this sort of silence an effective space if we understand effective as leading to a change in how ‘tourists’ will understand this country? Can silence be pedagogical?

The version of the massacre that this poem is asking us to monumentalise, to contemplate in silent attention, is also quite different from the other versions outlined in the existing tourist leaflet. It insists on Aboriginal agency, the culpability of white men (which becomes a shame ‘we’ all share) and the powerful effects of silence, which prevents ‘us’ telling friends. The poet himself is suspicious of how many Aboriginal people might have actually jumped: ‘Perhaps the story of the number which jumped to
their death against those slain was grossly exaggerated, to placate MacDonald
[Commissioner responsible for Aborigines] who judging by his record, would have
enquired’ (Newsome, 13:1981). This version assumes that Irby reported the deaths of
the Aboriginal people but that he reported that they had (mostly) jumped. This mass
suicide was a very public event, and the poem suggests, should have warned all the men
present that their greed for land and destructive raids were driving Aboriginal people to
absolute desperation. As a poem perhaps should, this gives the deaths a social and
emotional context that is much, much richer than the ‘simpler’ tales of retaliation for non-
Aboriginals killed. Here the sacrifices are for the ‘spirit’ of the land, which suggests
layers of community and cultural destruction of a mythical proportion. It is precisely this
sort of death that invents martyrs, dying as they do for their very beliefs rather than
simply because they are ‘Aborigines’ as the non-Aboriginals (of that time) may have
wanted to imagine them.

It is fairly easy to track the invention in this verse of one sort of Aboriginal discourse:
the ‘Romantic Passion’ (Muecke, 1992:23-35) or at least a heroically inflected version of
that. The chanting, the daub and feather, the frenzy and the death corroboree all
contribute to the generic nature of the ‘dark tribe’ who are able to access particular
powers for self destruction from their exotic practices. However, the romantic image of
embattled Aboriginal people is affected by its position within a poem that (1) begins with
the implication that it is white greed that has invented or demanded these reactions and (2)
the poem’s own existence within a ‘bush’ genre. The ‘romantic’ Aboriginal wrapped in
‘historical distance’ becomes here an additional Aussie underdog whose truth like that of
shearers, horse breakers and other bush folk, requires the witnessing and memory of ‘old
hands’ of ‘three or four generations’ (Newsome, 1981:14).

**Positioned Out of Place—Again**

It is difficult to map out the surface paths of this poem, so entangled is it in my own sets
of prejudices—the very sets of prejudices that gave me life. First of all I have to convince
myself and perhaps you (although more definitely me) that this poem is able to be
critiqued. It is from too far away, too outback from the ‘centre’ of the eastern seaboard,
too rural, too simple—it is uncirculated. To take it seriously, to put work into it, requires
some acknowledgment of the place such poetry made for me. ‘Such poetry’ you
understand, is rollicking, rhyming bush verse by (most importantly) a ‘local’ white poet.

As a child, an important step in the establishment of your budding intellectual and/or
middle class/teenage credentials was to consider such poetry ridiculous. I knew it was not
‘real literature’. My mother liked it, which was a sure sign of its lack of literary
credentials, and my father found it humorous in a gently patronising fashion. It had
nothing like the effect of Wilfred Owen or Sylvia Plath or even parts of Shakespeare on
my life—I knew to stick to the Europeans and the Americans for true culture but also they
‘spoke’ much more directly to me. The last thing I wanted was anything local, after years and years of media immersion, particularly books and T.V. films, I was a (limited) globalised subject. Not liking this poetry meant I had taste. Taste, as Carolyn Steedman has so well explored, was a passport to other, imagined worlds (Steedman, 1986). But what sorts of worlds?

Later, I also had access to the Birmingham School and I could rewrite this sort of experience. No cultural forms were without interest, even fascination. To understand the cultural forms was to understand the ways in which people made sense of their worlds. But bush poetry? Urban male youth gangs are O.K., as are teenage girls reading romance but old, ‘local’ bush poetry resists the discovery of resistant subjects; they are already cliches. It refuses to exemplify the genealogies of modernist media and its postmodern effects and its readership is so unknown that it doesn’t even constitute an effective discourse. Col Newsome’s book had a print run of 2000 according to his printer but I couldn’t discover how many were sold (Leigh Interview, 3rd Mar 1997). Although its print run doesn’t point to it being a piece of mass culture, if all or even half those numbers were bought by Tenterfieldians or Glenn Innesites it would constitute something of an emblematic text. The last four lines of the poem were added above the Tourist Leaflet account in an edition of the Tenterfield Tourist News in about 1983, which suggests its power as an additional or counter reading to the ‘historical’, but also its easy incorporation into the touristic and mythical. But if it were read by this local population and what sense was made of it are much larger questions which can be raised but not answered. Perhaps it is more relevant to position it as ethnographic artefact read by an insider/outsider, trying with explicit discomfort to follow its surfaces.

To position myself to do a critique of this work is to take up a position that isolates me from my own ‘localness’ (assuming a fruit salad such as myself can reclaim, continue to claim, ‘localness’). If I examine this poem using my word tools and critical practices from cultural studies, am I making unreliable theory the only home I will have? Of course...

But what does or might the critique of the poem actually do to the poem and so in part to the poet? By critiquing it, I am translating it from one audience to another. I am letting this poem go into a niche market of readers who have other agendas. In taking it out of the ‘local’ and into the critical I may be destroying the very thing that makes it ‘work’— that is, its location. If I am to say anything about the poem then it must be ethnographically, critically ‘aware’. But how can I do that when my own position is so chronically disputed? I’m afraid the author is being chewed up by being.

But if I leave the poem, sitting in its own invention and don’t engage in any way with what it says, I am continuing its existing peripheral (in critical terms) state, I am denying that it can affect me, suggesting it doesn’t invent new ways for me to work. I invent in the process a narrow version of theory which I usually despise. So let’s begin again.
(What a surprise; the now otherworldly, now anonymously classed author is allowed to write on!)

**Writing Again**

Within the poem itself (ignoring for a moment the endnotes), there is an attempt to grapple with the violence of ‘settlers’ and their legacy that is not confronted in the tourist leaflet. The forced or chosen leap takes up about half the poem and the rest is a musing on what the effects of those deaths are. The audience is assumed to be non-Aboriginal; ‘in shame we (my emphasis) all must bear’ (line 49) and it grapples with the act of not only saying but promoting the unsaid act that has led to this shame.

‘A million tourists pass there, yet none may tell their friends’ (line 49). This poem presents a sort of impossible tourist imagining. A haunted tourism of silences and ghosts and non-Aboriginal shame. As such it is the sayable bridge between simple promotion, ‘Visitor Information’, and a desire to know and respond to history as an intimately felt phenomenon. This demand also challenges what the rewards of small town tourism might be: not the quaint shops and natural phenomenon but a centre and source of history. The financial rewards for this are less easy to discern but tourism always has its intangible side. The first effort is simply to stop the highway traveller and then the demands of human existence will account for the rest in take-away food and motel beds (Watson et al, 1996).

The notes at the end of the poem challenge what is poetry. The notes demand that you read the poem not only for its rhythm and effect but to contextualise it, take action from it, understand its present currency. The three lines in italics at the end of the poem quote Irby: ‘We punished them severely…’ and Keating: ‘After shooting some, the men got up to the rock and threw the blacks off the rock to the ground below’ which are both sources the Visitors Leaflet uses. However, Newsome adds a third: ‘Old hands including “Beardy” George Stewart, reared by the Irbys said, “Some were thrown over, others jumped”’. This third source provides the impetus for the poem, and being a less available but personally known source, is probably considered more truthful by the poet. After these three quotes the poet goes on to write:

For years New England tourist promotion bodies have searched our highways for locations of interest which tourists may find fascinating. What a laugh. They have ignored Bluff Rock, which towers majestically above the New England Highway between Glen Innes and Tenterfield. There used to be several signs pointing proudly towards this outstanding landmark. These were, strange as it may seem, pulled down just after my poem depicting the massacre was circulated. (Newsome, 1981:14)
Connected to the poem, Bluff Rock had already become ‘majestic’ and in tourist terms, when coupled with the poem, an ‘event’. Its sheer physical presence demands (the tourist promoters hope) an explanation and a possible route in to other of the town’s offerings. But the ‘towering majesty’ of Bluff Rock is not quite clear cut. It doesn’t quite match the overwhelming size of Uluru or even of Bald Rock—a competing natural phenomenon—and close friends and even supervisors, seeing it from the highway have described it as ‘a bit disappointing’. I always respond (as residual local? atavistic New Englander? fanatic? looming marginal subject?) that you should have seen it before the highway was changed, when the poplars framed it and the highway drove straight toward it. As if it was once larger, as if their failure to see is temporal rather than contextual. They of course haven’t learnt how to see it, they aren’t ‘locals’ but tourists with an infinitely expanding vocabulary of comparison depending on what other sights they have seen. Is it larger/smaller/?more majestic/?less towering? than the Taj Mahal/?Uluru/?Grand Canyon/?Great Wall of China/?Niagra Falls? etc. This does, however, foreground the need for the clear signposts to tell people that they have passed something, that it is something. Its significance needs the close framing of the massacre. Nature is not enough but history is too much? Does bad tourism make good history?

Newsome is interesting here, suggesting that the signposts point ‘proudly’. Town pride? Tourist pride? The things one finds ‘highly honourable or creditable’ according to the Macquarie Dictionary (Delbridge 1992:1418). Is this true of sign posting? When understood in terms of town promotion this would seem to make sense. What local features are chosen to be underlined, highlighted? What makes up the symbolic sense of the town? But when the signs become too particular, too explicitly enmeshed in history (at least according to Newsome), they have to go. The sign becomes too heavily weighted as ‘sign’. Pride, etymologically linked to the valiant and gallant, suggests a judgement that can’t be sustained when connected to something more than a mere sight. If it was true that the signs were removed after Newsome’s poem circulated, it suggests that there was an explicit idea of town promotion at stake. Tenterfield must be a ‘good’ town. It must be a benign site of possibility outside of time. This idea of timeless quiet, of tourist sanctuary, is destroyed by an association with ‘real’ violent history.

The taking down of the signs suggests a lack of faith in the ahistorical possibilities of tourism. Why can’t the promotion simply work harder as Newsome says and make this potentially ‘fascinating history ‘work as tourist spectacle? After a brief history of other local massacres and some speculation about why Irby wasn’t prosecuted by MacDonald (Irby’s wealth and relation to the Royal family), Newsome finishes his notes accompanying this poem with: ‘American districts don’t hide their history of aboriginal massacres. They exaggerate them. And the tourists love them. Particularly the children.’ This has a mournful quality to it. I read it like a long titled, over-run haiku:
American Districts Don’t Hide Their History
Of Aboriginal Massacres

They exaggerate
them. And the tourists love them.
Particularly
the children.

These final sentences, at least in my (mis)reading of them, gesture towards the stupendous possibilities of tourism but also the possibly profound dangers of playing too much with ‘history’. The poem’s vision of exaggerated massacres I understand to be one of concentrated dramatic putsch. The hundreds of attacks and counter attacks, ethnocentric stratagems and ecological manipulations would be collapsed into a single Aboriginal Massacre, called perhaps the ‘Battle of Bluff Rock’. I am imagining the noise and dust and stunts of film (perhaps in tower high Imax Maxivision?) where both sides are ‘equal’ and the final victory is made hollow as the Aboriginal people choose to leap. The attempt is to make every audience member (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) aware that something was lost to everyone.

But this ‘feel good’ (reconciling?) ‘exaggeration’ collapses the scales of destruction. Can the loss of land and cultural links be compared to the invention of ‘guilty’ historical subjects (non-Aboriginal) who are cinematically exorcised? And in particular does this stand a chance when it would have to be motivated by profit and so infotainment with an emphasis on the ‘tainment? Would Aboriginal resistance, while being admitted, become for ever fixed as futile and would the children simply enjoy the stunts, the gore, the play and make no further connection? If children, as my neighbour’s photos show, are already playing in the grounds of deserted death camps, what could an ‘exaggeration’ do to ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’ that the reality of the 1940s ‘man-made mass death’ didn’t? (Wyschogrod, 1985).

There is something suspicious about evoking children at all. This thing called ‘child’ has become such an exponentially expanding compost pile of adult futurism and expectation that the assumptions of their pleasures can only be wild presumption. The ambivalence of the word ‘particularly’ quite nicely covers the split fears of the ‘child’ as innocence offended and guilty savage. Macaulay Culkin versus Lord of the Flies. But let us return to ‘exaggeration’ as a stratagem of tourism since it is precisely this that seems to be absent from the existing presentation of the event.

Fabulist exaggeration in tourism via the Big Banana, the Big Pineapple and many others are comfortable cliches of tourism. Their specific untruth makes their availability swell (Barcan, 1996). But both the leaflet and this poem, neither of which may fully satisfy the dictates of rationalist and so ‘provable’ history, nevertheless have truthful
rather than untruthful effects. They can compete as versions of an event and as such court
the difficulties that Newsome has already experienced. Speaking and writing of the event
continues to have ‘local’ effects. The relationship between the actions and the tellings are
still actively meaningful; they may not be true representations but they are effective ones.
The most definitive way in which these representations work as effective ‘truth’ is their
use of evidence from both Irby and Keating. These sources are combined in both pieces
and supported in the poem by further (and similar) memories from an ‘old hand’. Located
truths.
WHAT KEATING HEARD
THE LETTER

West Avenue
Glen Innes
30th March 1925

Dear Mr Thomas,

I have your letter of the 25th of March 1925 asking me let you have any particulars I know about Bolivia. I will now send you what I heard about the station before I took charge & what took place after I took the management of the station over Mr Irby and his brother bought the station off a man of the name you mention in your letter, he & his brother Algernon was dead some time before I went to Bolivia. The black was very wild and wickat the time Mr Irby took the station over big mobs of them. They killed two men on the station, the last man they killed was an old sheppard, he was sitting on the bank of the river near his hut one morning early washing his shirt a black fellow sneaked up behind him and hit him on the head with a nula nula, a short stick with a nob on the end of it (last eight words added in above the sentence) the blacks youst carry to kill thing with after they killed the sheppard they took the sheep that he was shepperding out off the yard & drove (Page 2) and drove them through some rough country to a place called Pyes creek on the western bounday of the Bolivia holding as soon as the dead sheppard was found an the sheep missing Mr Irby musterd up all the men he could get together on the station an supplied them with fire armes & amunition the(n) followed the tracks of the sheep through some rough thickly timbered country and found them on Pies creek the blacks had them rounded up killing them opening & taking the caul fat out of them and greacing ther heds with some of it a roaling some of it up to carry away with them they were having quite a jolly time as soon as they seen the mob of men they cleared & as they were acros Pyes creek to get away from the mob some of the men had a running shot (?) at them they knocked a few of them over slit (?) then lay where they fell, the bla (blacks) then mad(e) across country to the Bluff rock & the party of men after them they (crossed out) the black climbed up to the top of the rock, it was fairly easy to climb the rock on the back part of it (Page 3) The men got up to the top of the rock & threw the blacks off the rock onto the ground at the bottom the front part of the rock was a great hite from the ground below a lot of the blacks goh and a lot more crippled none of that tribe was ever seen on the station after after that drive but there were a part fixed tribe on the station Mr Irby & his brother bought the station from a man with a name lik the one you mention in your letter Mr Irby gave it the name of Bolivia I dont know why there was no silver ore found on the station for some years after he bought the station, The first silver was found on Pyes creek on the western boundy of the station at the time the line
was livy(?) built to Tenterfield I do not know the year or the date of Algernon Irby's death I think he was buried on Bolivia

This information I got from an old man on the station, who was woking for Mr Irby from when he first bought the place & from what I could learn from Tom, old hand about the place I thoug (thought?) what he told me was true I have no pho to of Mr Irby, Mangle who built the mill for Irby at the bluff river bridge has been dead some considerable term. (Page 4) Mrs Irby's eldest daughter married Mr Car who was managing the AJL(?) Bank and was(?) in Tenterfield at the time, the last time I heard of him he was an inspector for the Bank & living in Sydney, you can get his address from the Bank in Sydney & if you call & see him he & Mrs Car will be able to give you a lot of news about the doings on Bolivia for long time before I took charge. Mrs Car is nearly (certain?) to have some of her father's photos & perhaps one of her uncles I took charge of Bolivia in the year 1879 I managed the station for 12 years the left (then left) & came here to Glen Innes to live & started an auctioneering business Mr Irby gave his son Edie(?) the management of the station after a time things began to crook on the station Mr Irby got married & placed the station in my hands for sale, I sold it for him to Mr Edward White of Martindale(?) station near Muswellbrook Mr Wite sold it after a time.

A Mr Greenwood owns the station now. I hop you will be able to mak this writing out my hands is still a bit shaky

Yoursfully(?)

Thomas Keating (J.F. Thomas, Papers 1882-1941:CYReel 1 524)

All italics are mine, spelling and grammar per original

J.F. Thomas, who made the request for information to which Keating is responding, is another tourist site or at least his grave is. As the ‘Tenterfield (and District) Visitor’s Guide’ states:

Grave of J.F Thomas

The grave of Major J.F. Thomas lies in the Tenterfield Cemetery. Major Thomas earned world fame at the South African War in 1902 for his defence of Harry (The Breaker) Morant. He settled in Tenterfield at the end of World War I and was the owner of the ‘Tenterfield Star’ newspaper for 16 years

The response Keating gives is a tour de force of the ‘local’. There is a deep rich mixture of who owned what when, the murder of a shepherd, the details of Aboriginal use of sheep, the many murders at Bluff Rock, the naming of the property, discovery of silver, the arrival of the railway line as a marker of time, where to find other family members traced through the husband’s work, the need for photos, the eventual fall of the station—these are his local sources. And he places himself firmly in the picture. He mentions his
responsibility for the sale of the original Irby property and the current owner of the property. He is a local.

**History and the Heard?**

The efforts of the tourist leaflet and, in a sense, the local poem are organised around the idea that Bluff Rock is to be looked at. It is the image of Bluff Rock that centres the discourse. When we read Keating, however, he presents us with what he has heard not what he has seen and also what took place after he left. In this way his continuing connection to place is established as is the veracity of his report. Of course his hearings once they become writing also become something to be seen and interpreted but it is the ‘heard’ rather than the sightings which are privileged.

Keating’s letter is also a letter between placed people, two locals. Keating is providing particulars of his location which Thomas presumably wishes to map onto his larger idea of the local. He believes that what happened at Bolivia has relevance to the whole area of Tenterfield. Keating begins the story of Bluff Rock with the idea that there were ‘large mobs’ of ‘wild and wickat blacks’ when Irby took over. This is certainly something that I never heard in the 1960s and 1970s; remember, all Aboriginal people ‘came from More’. The Aboriginal people of the Glen Innes area had been ‘disappeared’ between the 1920s and the 1960s and yet their actions in the 1840s could still be recalled by Keating in the 1920s. But in Keating’s letter they are represented in a very particular way. All non-Aboriginals become men and all Aboriginal people become ‘blacks’.

‘Blacks’ is what happened when you moved away from the known Aboriginal workers on the station to a time when they were ‘wild and wickat’ something already connected to a heard rather than an experienced reality. Wild and wicked now carries with it some sense of fantasy but is perhaps better understood as elemental. But when I suggest that wild and wicked was evoking the power of the elemental, like the wind, I don’t think Keating is trying to reduce the presence of Aboriginal people to something outside humanity, but to the essentially uncontrollable. Wild and wicked is to have the freedom to be wicked, that is to have the power to act against ‘men’, to be outside their control. This does not deny the essential racism of the text but points to the corresponding fear that produces such oppositions as ‘wild and wickat blacks’ and ‘men’. I wonder too if ‘black’ like ‘white’ is being employed as a typology of his past when once ‘Australians’ were ‘black’ and ‘white’, when once that could be easily assumed.

**The Last ‘Man’ Killed**

“The last man they killed was an old sheppard’, sitting on a river, washing his clothes and he was attacked from behind. These are the words of innocence, old, washing, and the words of cowardice—‘sneaked up behind’. But more than that he was the ‘last man’ killed. After this it would only ever be ‘blacks’ who were killed. Of the two ‘men killed
on the station’, this was the last one. Even after the shooting and the throwing it is the comparable uncertainty of ‘none of that tribe was ever seen on the station after that drive’. They were not the last ‘tribe’ and even of that ‘tribe’ although they were not seen on the station, there are no claims to getting ‘the (very) last man’. So while particular and distinct white men were killed, Aboriginal people are named by Keating as indistinct tribes and ‘blacks’. Later, when this individuation does occur—in some of my non-Aboriginal childhood memories at least—it is at the expense of being ‘black’ or ‘white’. (Then you were known as the boy who topped the maths group, now you would be a particular Aboriginal person. I was fourth in the same class but now I am non-Aboriginal and as whiteness works, not all that particular). To be local in the 1960s and ’70s was to be neither. Outside the school, not all that far west from us, the freedom ride bus was heading for Moree and we didn’t hear a thing.

The shepherd is killed with a nulla nulla and probably because Keating worries that Thomas won’t understand what one is, he writes a description in above the line. In 1925, before the popular circulation of anthropological texts or Aboriginal writing, a ‘nula, nulla’ needs to be explained. To know about nulla nullas is to be in contact with oral histories that concern them such as this. They are not museum pieces that have a local currency, they are remembered rather than material artefacts at this moment. This suggests that the history of Aboriginal people (rather than Aboriginal history which suggests a history written by or in conjunction with Aboriginal people) existed away from the local (in city institutions, books in institutional libraries) and in the memories of locals who had been told experiences. It might also reflect Keating’s limited interest in books and in fact shows nulla nulla to be one of the best known of the weapons of the Aboriginal martial arts that have tripped out of books and into common usage. Its appearance in a variety of texts on Aboriginal people and in poetry and prose including ‘Such is Life’, 1903, (Graham, 1989:374) may support this. Its etymology, which is attributed to the Dharuk (Delbridge, 1992:1220), would mean it had a very early translation probably, as the Macquarie Aboriginal Words suggests, from the Sydney language ngalangala: club with mushroom shaped head (1994:67). The Bundjalung language has a word for a club with a knob rather than a mushroom on the end which is murundarj so Keating’s description could well be recalling an actual weapon of that specific group of Aboriginal people put together with the better known word.

**Coffin Boxes**

But who and what were shepherds? Why were they killed? What did they and their flocks mean? These old, ‘innocent’, shirt-washing ‘men’ slept in coffin boxes. A coffin box or night watchman’s box was what the shepherds of the Australian 1800s slept in whilst watching the sheep by night. It was a six-foot-something box with sides of variable
height. Sometimes the sides would extend up to four feet and be roofed by bark shingles while others had quite shallow sides and were entirely open above (Glasson, 1942?). All versions had two handles extending out both ends like a permanently poled sedan chair so that it could be carried from sheep camp to sheep camp. This was also the way in which real coffins were often carried at the time so the journey to each camp would have always had this funereal echo. The box usually had legs, although one was reported as having a wheel while still others did not rest on the ground but were attached to the moveable fences or folds that held the sheep. If there was only one shepherd per mob of sheep that same person slept in this contraption at night but if there was an established out station with a hutkeeper the hutkeeper usually became the nightwatchmen (always cited as a white man but it is also known that hutkeepers were often women, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and that Aboriginal people were very quickly employed in the shepherding process) and slept in the box while the shepherd rested in the hut (Anderson, 1967:35; Hughes, 1852:130). In New England the employment of Aboriginal labour as independent units of shepherds and hutkeepers doesn’t seem to have begun until the late eighteen forties and fifties when labour shortages were exacerbated by the reduction in availability of convict labour and the attraction of the goldfields. However as shepherds and labourers employed with non-Aboriginals, Aboriginal people were very quickly incorporated into station affairs.

What was the relationship of these boxes and their inhabitants to the larger colonial project? What work did the shepherds do that one could simply emerge in Keating’s account as the final ‘man’ killed? The coffin boxes seem to symbolise the classic dislocation of the non-Aboriginal’s relationship with the land. The boxes’ distance off the ground and their occasional attachment to the moveable fences surrounding the sheep appeared to spell out spatially a desperate stitching of the shepherd to the only existent signs of colonial structure, the sheep fold. I wondered why the shepherd didn’t simply have a tent pitched, and saw in that, the refusal to engage with the palpability of the ‘Australian’ soil. What was preferred to that engagement were a few boards of hard wood and legs of saplings which instituted a known space on an unknown but now mediated surface. So these boxes become, were ‘always’, a collection of stories about the surfaces of the body of ‘Australia’ and their formation in a conditionally colonised space.

The sense of this space for the coffin-boxed individual depended upon the task of shepherding. A tent was connected to a series of other endeavours such as those carried out by soldiers and explorers where the movement was always metaphorically forward but the movements of the shepherds were much more peripatetic. Their movements were back and forth but with no firm centre since the sheep pens or folds they were returned to at night were by nature transportable and were always being shifted to ‘clean’ ground. The nightwatch box itself was built for its moveability and could be placed next to the weakest link of the fold or flock. During times of particular anxiety the box was placed
within the fold with the sheep. It thereby marked off a region of humanness in relationship to ‘sheepyness’ that had already crossed the moving liminal markers of the sheep folds.

The more substantial, roofed, watchbox had a peephole at the end of the box which allowed the shepherd to check on any danger. Given the size of the peephole, about ten centimetres diameter and the rectangular shape of the box itself, the shepherd was restricted to a very specific area to safeguard. Their focus was restricted entirely to the small domain of sheep. The sheep had invented the shepherd’s function, the sheep contained their gaze. As with the panopticon the viewer is unseen but here the watched are disciplining the watcher into a relationship of worker. The peephole had no power over the dingos or Aboriginal people, for the disciplinary possibility of the gaze collapses without its institutional framework. Given the restrictions of the peephole, shepherds often also employed a series of bells of different pitches which they attached to particular sheep ‘leaders’ and if the sheep were startled or left the flock the shepherd could respond. At night the shepherd apparently came to understand the sounds of sheep contentedness and restlessness and could sleep accordingly. These boxes in their naming, coffin box or night watch box, signalled this device’s complicated relationship to night and death, sleep and death, and the social hierarchy that literally put convict labour in coffins. Night was when the sheep were vulnerable to attack away from the sunlit purview of the shepherd and the best means of ensuring their safety was via a sometime sleeping figure in a coffin, metaphorically half dead! It seems a very evocative image, the figure in the coffin box, watching the night anxiously through the sounds of the sheep. Inside the box, then, the sheep imposed an aural and visual regime that invented this thing called shepherd. But the shepherd had other meanings as well.

Shepherds, like Keating’s shepherd, were reported as killed by Aboriginal people. There were many reasons for this. The most usual would appear to have been as a countering act to the persistent staying on of shepherds in land that was not theirs and their refusal to conform to Aboriginal expectations of appropriate behaviour. Often there were actions around the shepherd huts, including a showing of force at a distance and sometimes the visit by an older male member of the Aboriginal group which could have been warnings but when these failed to be acknowledged or acted upon a spearing or clubbing would usually follow. Shepherd killings were also often connected with rapes or other acts of violence and/or insult against an Aboriginal person which brought on a response deemed suitable to the initiating act of violence. Since the shepherds were intimately connected to the sheep there may be a series of sheep-connected reasons for the attacks on shepherds given that mutton and flour became one of the earliest recognised currencies for obtaining Aboriginal labour (Butlin, 1994:216).

Within non-Aboriginal and non-shepherd accounts, the Australian shepherd was most often represented as being inherently doubtful and all too powerful:
With all its boasted steadiness of climate, bad seasons occasionally occur and lead to sickness among the flocks and in addition to the usual chances of loss arising from this cause in other countries, there is (in Australia) a still more dreaded mischief resulting almost unavoidably from the moral constitution of its society. A convict-servant who has a pique at his master, has it often entirely in his own power to subject the flocks under his charge to some one or other of the serious diseases to which sheep in all countries are peculiarly liable (Blacklock 1841:230).

who quotes from Lang’s Historical Account of NSW:

The chief source of wealth and prosperity of the colony is thus in great measure at the mercy of the most worthless of men (1841:231)

The work that the shepherd did was understood in contradictory ways. Frederick of Maitland writing to the Sydney Morning Herald in 1842 on the topic of Religious Instruction in the Bush

...urged the necessity of this highly important privilege (that of religious instruction) being afforded to those, who have left the comforts and conveniences of civilised life and have become half savages whilst following the primitive occupation of shepherds.

However Melton, quoted in Abbott’s The Pastoral Age; A Re-examination, wrote

If fine wool production were encouraged, since it has a far larger potential market than that of local agriculture, settlers would be able to employ large numbers of convicts so relieving the government of the expense of their upkeep. Furthermore the solitary life of a shepherd far removed from towns and town temptations would hasten the rehabilitation of felons. (1971:163)

What was the meaning of the shepherd in the squattages, in the land ‘beyond the boundaries’ as it was officially understood? Was it a haven, far from the ‘temptations of town’ or was it something that turned men around, made them re-enter the primitive state? The idea that shepherding was a ‘primitive occupation’ that turned men into ‘half savages’ contains many possibilities. It is in the first instance a salute to the power of the land and may include an unspecified reference to the adoption of many Aboriginal practices to survive in the bush. It may also have been a less overt hailing of the power of the land which could not yet be lived in by non-Aboriginal peoples without transformative consequences. The evocation of ‘shepherding’ as a ‘primitive’ occupation may be an invention of colonial Australia.

The pastoral tradition beginning with Virgil depicted the shepherd as intimately connected with God, if not always to the benefit of the shepherd. However by the 1740s the romanticism of the shepherd was already being satirised by Restoration poets like
John Gay who wrote his pastorals in a mock-classical style about contemporary shepherds in their ‘low aspect’ (Price, 1973:293). His poems were themselves parodies of another poet who pastoralised to excess—one Ambrose (Namby Pamby) Philips. These poems however have more to do with the depiction of lewdness and ignorance and are not set about fears of the repercussions of the work of shepherds.

It is only when shepherding is carried out within the colonially invented world of the ‘primitive’ that the shepherd risks a movement back into ‘savagery’. Perhaps in both the evocation of primitive occupation and the idea of the life of a shepherd as restorative, ‘far from the temptations of town’ we are seeing two versions of an express desire that shepherding like convictism be a world apart. Its distant bush location simply extending the marginality of people already marked as such. The ambivalent effectivity of the bush (to restore and to destroy) reflects the contradictory ways in which the ‘bush’ had to be represented to bear at once the possibilities of containing innocent, noble indigenes in a pastoral idyll and convicts in a ‘landscape of damnation’ (Indyk, 1993:838). Although one writer sees the result as a descent into savagery and the other as the restitution of the felon this may be partly explained by the very real possibility that they were talking about different shepherds. For shepherds in the 1840s were not always assigned convicts. As Edward Irby, the other Bluff Rock ‘source’, wrote in 1841,

> There are a number of young men, who came out with small capitals, not being able to get into establishments, have remained in Sydney till their money was all gone, and then forced to turn shepherds... (Irby, 1908:43)

And a more general comment comes from Boyd in the *Old Colonials* where he is quoted saying:

> I've been getting lower and lower till at last I became a shepherd. It is a lonely life.
> [Reprint 1974:15]

Shepherdry became in Australia (and perhaps was always) an unstable social category. It was in the interplay of the meanings of sheep, the regimes of their care and productive possibilities of sheep rearing usually in conjunction with a convict labour system that shepherds came to be understood as shepherds in a particularly Australian way. All of these meanings arose within a symbolic system that attempted to reinvent Aboriginal presence as Aboriginal absence.

**The Meaning of Sheep**

Sheep were also granted a series of meanings which in turn were inscribed through the practices of the shepherds. Sheep, as distinct from their ‘savage’ and/or reforming
shepherds, were granted an almost spiritual dimension when read in relationship to colonial Australia:

Both the climate and the soil appear by nature intended to produce fine wool and fine animals too, even from the worst beginnings (Blacklock 1841:230)

And Cunningham’s *New South Wales* suggested:

The Australian climate changed the character of the Spanish fleece. The wool has become softer and more elastic and while having diminished in density it has increased in length so that the weight of the fleece has only slightly altered. (Coghan, 1892:350)

Here the sheep is granted a naturalised place in the colonial system. Australia ‘naturally’, through its climate and land, is able to produce a superior fleece—something that the convict based colony could never do; something fine from even the ‘worst beginnings’. Unlike Australia’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population, sheep were able to make natural good out of a land that was often understood as representing an other-world-ness and place of impossible return (Said, 1993:xvi & a critique Carter, 1987). Wool however not only returned but was requested to return to its European homeland, finer and longer than when it left. Finally this place called Australia was making productive sense.

This ‘sense’ was however predicated upon two existing conditions: cheap convict labour and land and pasture that was already being used by Aboriginal people. In New England the pasture land included large areas identified by early explorers as ‘park like’ expanse. This expanse was created by regular burning by the Aboriginal users in a successful kangaroo attracting practice. These expanses were then seen and understood as ‘most suitable’ for sheep. Sheep with their habit of close cropping were unable to share the land with the kangaroos and this would appear to have been reciprocated since an early sheep management guide suggested that sheep dislike feeding after kangaroos as much as cattle after sheep (Armstrong & Campbell, 1882:237).

Sheep were killed by Aboriginal people but whether this was because they were destroying the kangaroo attracting qualities of the grass (something improved pastures rapidly inverted), or because they became a useful food source or for some other reason it is impossible to say. Many times the sheep appear to have simply been chased off one area of land where their presence was unacceptable to the Aboriginal occupants to another area of land where their presence was tolerated.

The possibilities of the sheep in combination with the Australian climate excited some. Armstrong and Campbell wrote this of the incipient wool industry:

... the immense capabilities which this industry is almost certain to develop become too great and magnificent for human realisation. (1882:2)
So the ambivalently understood shepherd in his coffin/night box and flocks that were erratically at home and away and in a constant process of inventing new centres with moveable gates to return to—were linked to the awe-inspiring possibilities of incommensurable production. But these different spatial and temporal realities were understood in relationship to, as Stuart Hall describes them, the ‘over-determined effects of Eurocentric temporalities (and) systems of representation and power’ (Chambers & Curti, 1996:251). Specifically sheep and shepherds had to be linked to a more generalised standing still—positive progression, called settlement, which, was the antithesis of an invented Aboriginal ‘non-productive nomadism’.

Shepherding Space

Aboriginal people had to be recast as part of the new ‘productive’ possibilities through essentialist explanations of their incapacity to produce. Originary myths had to be written. One of these myth makers was Richard Windeyer (cousin of the Windeyer who was Irby’s fellow ‘expeditioneer’) who wrote ‘On The Rights of the Aborigines’ in 1842:

I pictured to myself the human race spreading in the hunter state from its nativity in Asia, over the surrounding tracts—the multiplication of the species—the progressive scarcity of game—the increasing conflicts between individuals for the spontaneous fruits of the soil until at length some parent seeing his children pinched by want or some young man able to maintain himself but longing to have a companion hit upon the idea that by rearing instead of devouring some of the wild lambs and kids that fell their way or by planting a fruit tree or grains of corn and preventing their destruction during growth they would obtain a more certain supply of food. But all who had the right of hunting over the land would not give it up. Those who wished to reap the rewards of labour would then join together to restrain the hunter from killing their tamed animals or breaking the fences of their cultivated grounds. Their doing so would constitute the first society.

Windeyer puzzles over why this pattern did not occur in Australia and decides that the ‘wherewith to begin, were not’. He continues:

The kangaroo was perhaps capable of domestication to a certain extent but having no fruit, corn or root to live upon during the process it was impossible for the wild hunter of food to stay long enough in one spot to attempt the task. The possession of a few roots which would repay cultivation is the advantage which has induced the New Zealander to gain the title he has to certain portions of the soil occupied by him. As it is not to be supposed the Australian ever laboured without an object and we may be certain that he never did what we have seen affords the only foundation upon which the right to appropriate land from the common flock can rest, and that he is, as regards title to the substance of the soil, in precisely the situation he was when driven ages
back upon a shore to which nature herself had denied the elements out of which society was to arise.

These writings assisted in the invention of the basic racist myths that allowed and made necessary the denial of Aboriginal people their right to land. His argument depends upon his 'proven' case that Aboriginal people could not claim 'exclusive possession' of the land since they were not sedentarily occupied with producing food from it. I must clarify here that Aboriginal people cannot be understood as nomadic (see Carter 1987:347), but this was an observation and term used to control the meaning of Aboriginal presence by the colonists. As Chris Falzon points out, 'No Aboriginal groups were nomadic. Nomads moved in order to maintain the same conditions of pasture for animal herds, Aboriginal groups in order to exploit a range of different resources' (1994:794).

But Windeyer's foundationalist tale also blames nature herself for her lack. In the quoted extracts nature is represented as the 'she' of the dry womb which fails to provide that kernel of civilisation—the root vegetable. He thereby invents in the first instance a land that requires, needs the introduction of a range of civilising foods. While Windeyer refers to corn and goats, in Australia in 1842 these ideal 'kernels of civilisation' are taken up by the possibilities of the sheep. Sheep (!) become marked here as the fertile, penetrative male which fill an emptiness which nature herself has left. The sheep are not raping but reproducing, fertilising, the land. Carrying that problematic female gender, nature needs to be constantly filled due to the familiar psychoanalytical lack but here written as 'pastoral' absence. The pastoralist is therefore understood as doing 'supranatural' work in his provision of the 'elements of society'. This biblical task will claim and contain and ultimately transform the land into a productive entity finally committed to the creation of 'culture'.

But Windeyer's polemic also has a special spatial and temporal setting. In the midst of what may have been, pre-invasion, an Aboriginal cornucopia, Windeyer insists upon the inscribing of an Aboriginal incapability in a particularly temporal fashion. The Aboriginal in Windeyer's thoughts failed to stand still, to stop and plant and reap; to 'do' something which would give 'them the soil of the country to our exclusion'. This is traced to a history necessarily progressive, whereby once the earth was capable of 'furnishing spontaneously and without culture sufficient support for its inhabitants' but as population increased and resources became scarce the land 'could not have received proper cultivation from wandering tribes of men continuing to posses it in common'. This is the antithesis of an economy of any sort. A place where all and every need is met without labour or capital. Nothing needed to be produced. But thereafter individuals needed to appropriate portions of the land 'in order that they might, without being disturbed in their
labour or disappointed of the fruits of their industry apply themselves to render those lands fertile and hence derive their sustenance'.

In this reductive myth sedentariness and private property combine to create presence, and the presumed ‘nomadic’ Aboriginal can only be understood as incapable of economic function. This however is a problematic binary to set upon a non-Aboriginal colonial structure where ownership and production is as dependent upon the ability to ‘discover’ and ‘claim’ through a constant moving outwards as it is on a ‘standing stillness’. But white nomadism, particularly through the ‘work’ of the shepherds and infinite possibilities of the ‘natural’ sheep, is also productive in its ability to name as ‘property’ its habitations. It was the shepherd and sheep mapping out the meaning of the land as suitable or unsuitable to grazing that invented the land’s ‘productive’ possibilities.

The economic inscription of production provided a cultural sensibility which could contain the seeming irreconcilable experiences of settlement and invasion. Production in these symbolic terms is continuous: colonialism therefore never begins and can only stop at a momentary point before a further transformation. One transformation is Keating’s letter.

I have attempted to expose some central tensions between the universalising dualities of settlement and nomadism, the dreamscape of the productive sheep and the simultaneously contained and expanding worlds of the shepherd. The shepherd did not stand still but the shepherd did not roam. The shepherd moved out and around with his flock of productive possibilities. He moved between temporary encampments that were defined by transitional fences that could literally fold in upon themselves. And the limits of the leased lands beyond the boundaries which the shepherd moved within were often unmarked and were certainly disputed imaginary lines between water courses and hills. Since the sheep set limits that disallowed swampy or too stony land or trees with bark that might discolor the wool, the shepherd’s arena was also mapped by animal as well as human inscriptions. In this task the shepherd was understood as liminal: in a state of both becoming and unbecoming, half savage or half saved. Insisting on his labour as ‘settlement’, as an essentially legal action that underscored the right of the squatters to the land, set up a site of temporal contradiction which was constantly being dismantled by the insistent presence and actions of Aboriginal people. ‘Settlement’ was therefore a state of ‘unsettling’, of movement between typologies, of shifting meanings of presence and the ambivalent power of sheep and shepherd. As Meaghan Morris suggests:

‘to be traversed and attract traversals was obviously a means to and not an end of the process of “settling” place’ (1993:264).
Muster Up

Mr Irby mustered up all the men he could get... Muster, meaning to round up or gather together is one of the earliest technologies of colonial bureaucracy. While it was used in its most general sense to name a census of the entire non-Aboriginal population, its daily usage was in the checking of convict numbers. This led in turn to the ‘muster bell’ which was used to summon the convicts together. Keating is recounting an event from the 1840s when the men Mr Irby would have ‘mustered up’ were mostly bonded or ex-bonded labour. This was probably also done by ringing a bell which in ‘pastoral’ Australia is also often recorded as being a warning system. That is, the bell was also rung to signal the sight or arrival of Aboriginal people and it became a call to arms. The shift in the meaning of the bell and the muster between urban and rural areas is, I think, significant. In the urban arena (ie. within the limits of settlement), the muster was a part of a routinised system that was creating accountable bodies. The muster was also no doubt the site around which resistant strategies were organised. For example escaping convicts no doubt maximised their success at escape by organising it between musters to give them the greatest period of time before their absence was noted. At such musters, work and rations were detailed and the convicts released until the next muster. These convicted bodies had become a part of a colonial governmentality.

But what happens to these bodies ‘beyond the limits’ of location, that is beyond the formally settled regions? They are given over to particular squatters (not yet land ‘owners’) into an older order dictated by individuals, the demands of production (in this case sheep and wool production) and the unpredictable actions of Aboriginal people. This scenario is more feudal than governmental. The muster bell is no longer about having their bodies ordered but is a command that they must respond to. Their bodies are to quickly assume the risk-taking possibilities of armed action. Not in any trained or ordered fashion but at the whim and command of the squatter, their master. Their punishments were public floggings or banishment to the outer out stations. Are these bodies serfs or governed subjects?

When Keating writes that Irby ‘mustered up all the men he could get’, the power of Irby’s position has remained. The particular ‘Mr’ that Keating uses for all those above him and the first name ‘Tom’ that he uses for an old worker on the station indicate textually the residual ‘mustership’ of the now large land owner. To ‘muster’ in 1925 must have already been firmly imbued with its use as a term to describe the gathering of livestock. It was the cattle and sheep which would be mustered now, for it is only livestock not people that can be so easily commanded. The description of ‘all the men he could get together on the station’ could mean that there were Aboriginal workers already on the station who may have been included in this ‘muster’. Irby’s diary and Keating’s
final comment about the 'part-fixed tribe' suggests their presence. This would allow one
to re-read Keating’s dichotomy between ‘blacks’ and ‘men’ as not necessarily being
dependent upon colour but as a distinction between ‘wild’ and station based peoples. The
easy assumption by Keating that they could follow the tracks of a mob of chased sheep
even amongst roughly timbered country may mean that Aboriginal trackers were
employed and erased from the text or it may be a re-reading of the experience of relatively
cleared country onto that time.

What is distinctly absent from ‘the men’ then is any description of the ‘women’.
Aboriginal women are undistinguished from ‘the blacks’ and there is no note made of
children either. The Aboriginal who is said to have killed the shepherd is described as a
‘black fellow’, the presumption being that it was a man but there the gender specificity
stops. There are no Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal women in Keating’s account. Even in
other parts of the letter Keating identifies that Mrs (my emphasis) Carr, Irby’s daughter
can be tracked through her husband’s work. It is a small hint that the children belonged to
the wife and mother in Keating’s world but that all public trails of women were to be
followed through men. He assumes though that Mrs Carr (Mrs Irby’s eldest) will have
the more personal history of her father in the form of photos at least. No doubt a part of
this separation was the assumption that no station ‘women’ would be ‘mustered up’ and
he might also assume that there were no non-Aboriginal women there at the time—
another historical disappearance. Keating doesn’t warn Thomas not to report what he has
said so either Mrs Carr already knows the Bluff Rock history or there is an implicit
understanding that Thomas wouldn’t. To know such detail would help situate how this
story was sent and received and how and why it emerged in 1925. Of course ‘more
detail’ is just an old researcher’s fantasy; as if the text isn’t enough. Of course I know the
author is dead.

‘All the men’ presents us with an undetermined scale to this event. I could wheel out
the total figures from the archives of those employed at the station in the 1840s; I could
refer to Irby’s diary; but what I am trying to emphasise is Keating’s intent. How many
men did he imagine were necessary to get up Bluff Rock and ‘throw’? How many did he
hear was necessary then? The text suggests that all available men went—‘all he could get
together’—and so there was nothing strategic about this venture. No-one was left to mind
the homestead or supplies (or station women?) which assumes no danger from other
groups and assumes (as is borne out by the narrative) that ‘the men’ could quickly find
and take action against ‘the blacks’. Perhaps the speed of the actions echoes the resources
and landscape of the 20s when the familiar five miles to Pye’s creek could be covered
quickly enough to discover ‘the blacks’ killing the sheep.
Fat and Jolly

_Killing them (the sheep), opening them & taking the caul fat out of them._ The caul fat is the sheets of fat that surround the intestine of all animals and again it is difficult to say whether or not this emphasis on what they were doing comes from the '20s or the 1840s. Caul fat has little connective tissue and can be rendered down very efficiently into lard. Dairies and home milkers were quite well established in New England by the 1920s so the reasonably common use of butter might well have made the removal of the caul fat as something to be commented upon. Keating's use of the word suggests an ongoing familiarity with what caul fat is and far from proposing an inhumanity or foreignness on behalf of the Aboriginal people presumes some common usages of the sheep. Caul fat has a low melting point and so its technical availability to grease the head is a 'sensible' employment of an identified resource. It also points to one sort of translation these Aboriginal people may have made of introduced animals. By mapping onto the sheep the known resources of familiar animals they discovered new sources of a commodity they required. It can be imagined that the need to discover new supplies of cold deflecting, useable fat would have increased as the larger 'native' species were reduced via the demands for secure grazing land. Sheep made kangaroos? But to be seen 'greacing ther heds' with it is to point to 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1984). On the head, caul fat is a symbol of disorder and jarring 'otherness' while rendered down on damper it spreads into the prosaic. That the Aboriginal people were also able to roll the caul fat up to take it away means that these sheep were quite fat and in good condition. I'm sure a grazier reader would be suitably affronted at the loss of such fine sheep but it is uncertain whether Keating is making that point.

'[T]hey were having quite a jolly time'. 'Jolly' is followed by 'middle class' in brackets in Ware’s _Passing English of the Victorian Era_ (c1900:160) and this is quite suggestive. Did 'jolly' quite early on carry that cloying middle-class reduction of pleasure to the contained and restrained 'jolly'? And yet in this context doesn't the 'jolly' jolt? To describe the disembowelment of sheep as jolly reintroduces an idea of abandon but this pleasure is about to be discovered and brought down to earth; transposed to actions and repercussions. 'Jolly time' is suggestive of a temporal transgression, occurring outside of conventions that make time time. In 'jolly time' your pleasure is displacing the organised minutes as the indicator of what is happening. It is exactly such types of time which have the power to be interrupted by the sudden menacing presence of 'the men'. For 'jolly time' must always be snatched momentarily away from rationally organised time, from time where there are no appetites to be fulfilled. Textually 'the men' come in to re-instate rational time; their task is to disrupt 'jolly time' and so they do. There is a trace of morbid nostalgia here, something like the final feast of the condemned man which whispers in that weird Romantic way, 'they might have gone on as they were'—only ever said after it was impossible.
Why else was it necessary that they be enjoying themselves? Had ‘the tide of history’ by 1925 made Aboriginal people safe enough to be ‘curiosities’? Has Keating temporarily forgotten they were ‘wild and wickat’ or is this simply further proof? ‘Quite a jolly time’ belies the sense or seriousness of the event. It could become ‘blacks’ enjoying themselves at the ‘men’s’ expense which is a very unsettling description, as if Keating never heard that ‘men’ were afraid of ‘blacks’. But the way in which history has been presented and represented has taken away the power of Aboriginal people to inspire awe. In 1925 it is their ‘jolly’ proclivity to ‘greace heds’ which is described.

Across Country to the Bluff

...[A]s soon as they seen the mob of men they [the Aboriginal people] cleared. The first definition of ‘mob’ in Hughes’s Australian Words and their Origins is: (a) A (potentially hostile) party of Aborigines and (b) An Aboriginal community. Its recorded use for a group of animals began simultaneously. ‘Mob’ is itself a shortened form of móible vulgus the moveable (ie., excitable) common people (Delbridge, 1992:1140). In the opening section of Keating’s letter that we are concerned with, he describes the numbers of ‘blacks’ on the station in Irby’s times as ‘big mobs of them’. This follows his description of them as ‘wild and wickat’. ‘Mob’ carries with it some sense of charged atmosphere, the ‘excitable’, the potentially dangerous? At the point of being seen ‘the men’ become the ‘mob’ and the Aboriginal people begin to take action to get away from their threat. This is a momentary reversal where the fear of the Aboriginal people makes them innocent and ‘the men’ become ‘wild and wickat’. Those Aboriginal people who survived then ‘mad[e] across country to the Bluff rock & the party [not the mob] of men after them’. ‘Party’ carries with it the ambiguous meanings of festivities and troop deployment.

The shortest distance between Bluff Rock and Pye’s creek is fifteen kilometres and no doubt the distance to be covered was greater given the probability that a running route might not be the most direct. It is very rough country. Coming from any point along Pye’s Creek to Bluff Rock means traversing country marked on topographical maps as cliffs and with very close contour lines regularly indicating 1000 and 800 metres. It is heavily timbered now and there is no real reason to doubt that it wasn’t then. Since there is no mention of horses are we to assume that ‘the men’ had already run the fifteen kilometres from the station to Pye’s creek as well as some extra kilometres tracking the sheep before Pye’s creek, making the days total, at a minimum, thirty kilometres? A marathon (not usually run in this terrain) is forty two kilometres. And then after the final four kilometres up the steep back of Bluff Rock, ‘the men’ threw ‘the blacks off’. It is an extraordinary claim.
AN EXTRAORDINARY CLAIM?

In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations to a normalizing judgement (Bhabha, 1994:67)

What does Keating know? From the time when ‘Mr Irby took the station over’ in the 1840s to the moment in the 1920s when Keating writes, there was in place a continuous Government project of controlling Aboriginal people. While this project had many, many different forms that varied from state to state and institution to institution, it was broadly speaking a project centred about the continuous dispersal of Aboriginal people. After the terrorism of land taking and initial ‘settlement’ there was a system of reserves based on the idea that these would be temporary staging posts to the eventual complete dying away of all Aboriginal people but when numbers were seen to be increasing rather than decreasing a more rigorous process of dispersal came in to being with the Aborigines Protection Act of 1909. This Act put into place the programs of removal of children, running down of reserve conditions and the perpetual availability of Aboriginal lives to the actions and gaze of many Government agencies but particularly the police (Read, 1996:76-8; Goodall, 1996). These general policies had particular local effects and form part of Keating’s ‘regime of truth’. His story of a single massacre might also be read as an allegory of the processes of removal and dispersal which were operating throughout NSW from the 1880s when he went to manage Bolivia to the 1920s when he writes.

The times are very approximate but ‘An aboriginal reserve was secured for the Bolivian Blacks in later years on the Upper Mole River. The last of them were Old Jacky and Sally’ (Tenterfield Hist Records Vol 1). Imagining such finality was a direct invention of the reserve system. Allowed onto a reserve because of their ‘full blood’ or sometimes appearance or because they were known to particular authorities; named as ‘pure’ or the ‘last’ by such a system, their eventual deaths led to such apocalyptic headlines as ‘The Last of His Tribe’ (Tenterfield Hist Notes). Was it the deaths of Jacky and Sally that Keating remembers? Jacky coming back with rations having to swim a flooded river and dying on the bank and Sally taken to Tabulum ‘to live with the blacks there’—were they the last markers of a system of Aboriginal classification that was directly linked to work and relationships with the large properties? (Tenterfield Hist Notes). The ‘Bolivia Blacks’, like the ‘Deepwater Blacks’, renamed and made final markers of settlement—were these the ‘last man killed’?

And might not the energy of Keating’s description be motorised by the governmental power of splitting families up, erasing language and moving beyond geographical recovery the possibility of re-establishing cultural coherence? What happens when we read Keating’s letter, written in 1925, with Margaret Tucker’s account of being ‘removed’ from her family in the 1920s.
Listen:

TUCKER: There were forty or fifty of our people standing silently grieving for us. They knew something treacherous was going on, something to break our way of life. They could not see ahead to the white man’s world. We simply accepted the whites as a superior race. Around that particular part of Australia, I feel we were fortunate in having a kindly lot of white station owners...

*Mr Irby mustered up all the men he could get together and supplied them with arms and ammunition.*

TUCKER: She went out to her house at the side of the school taking as long as she dared to prepare something to eat. Her husband, his face going purple, was looking at his watch every few minutes. At last she came in with a tray with glasses of milk and the kind of food we only got at Christmas time. We said we couldn’t eat it—we were not hungry—but she coaxed us to drink the milk and eat something. Mr Hill couldn’t stand it any longer and said a lot of time was being wasted, and that the police and the driver wanted to leave...

*The blacks had them rounded up killing them opening them and taking the caul fat. They were having quite a jolly time.*

TUCKER: Our mother like an angel came through the schoolroom door. She still had her apron on, and must have run the whole one and a half miles.

*As soon as they seen the mob of men they cleared. Some of the men had a running shot at them. They made across country. The men got up to the top of the rock & threw the blacks off...A lot of the blacks goh and a lot more crippled.*

TUCKER: Then we were taken to the police station, where the policeman no doubt had to report. Mother followed him, thinking she could beg once more for us, only to rush out when she heard the car start up. My last memory of her for many years was her waving pathetically, as we waved back and called out goodbye to her, but we were too far away for her to hear us...

My purpose in reading these terrible narratives together is to reveal the ‘nonsense’ produced by Tucker and via Tucker the re-reading of the Bluff Rock massacre by Keating. These texts display ‘the alienation between the transformational myth of culture as a language of universality and social generalisation, and its tropic function as a repeated ‘translation’ of incommensurable levels of living and meaning’ (Bhabha, 1994:125). There is no ‘nonsense’ in Tucker’s account but she makes ‘nonsense’ of the everyday. Glasses of milk, school teachers, a mother’s apron, a car driving off. All of these ordinary, ‘universal’ signs become unstable, wobble away from their non-
Aboriginal, colonially produced meanings when connected to the incommensurate destruction of Aboriginal living. I suppose it would be clearer to say that it is Tucker’s ‘sense’ (her re-writing, her re-inscription, her effective? ironic? counterpoint?) that produces the ‘nonsense’ of acts of ‘normal’ life where a glass of milk now used to be something to drink, not an elegiac swallow down.

Perhaps it was the monstrous, terrific powers of the state’s machinery and its effects that Tucker describes which have produced the ‘nonsense’ of Keating’s letter. Was it those practices of continuous removals and separations that produced the omnipotent imaginings in non-Aboriginal Australians of total Aboriginal destruction or did it ‘really’ happen exactly as Keating writes it?

Would the last thirty years of Keating’s experience have exposed him to the system of reservations and removal of Aboriginal children (which began in one version in the late 1880s)? If Aboriginal people ‘disappeared’ around you and if sometimes you caught glimpses of some of the machinery of ‘removal’ or were actively involved in it, how easy to imagine that the ‘blacks’ were ‘thrown’ off, how ‘sensible’ to understand original colonial encounters in terms of the 1920s governmental machinery of concatenating colonialism. Ordinary ‘men’, like the ordinary policeman in Tucker’s account, when given the power to be one small part of a policy of ‘solving’ the ‘Aboriginal problem’ do have the ‘super’ powers of Keating’s ‘men’. They do have the power with paper and reports and cars to pluck identified people up and throw them down in ‘Homes’ and hostels and other institutions—of course some are ‘crippled’ in the process. A final trip in a Holden? Well ‘none of that tribe was ever seen on the station after that drive’.

The history of the word ‘drive’ within Australia is a particularly poignant one. In early colonial attempts at suppression and ‘final solutions’ ‘drives’ were envisaged as the ultimate tactic of complete discovery and destruction. The best known example is the ‘black line’ across Tasmania where volunteers and the military formed a human chain across the island and proceeded to walk across expecting to frighten out and capture and/or shoot any Aboriginal people they encountered. It was spectacularly unsuccessful. In a less organised fashion individual squatters and workers and official Native Police would organise ‘drives’ where they could find particular groups of Aboriginal people whom they pursued on their horses to their deaths by shooting or being forced over cliffs or some equivalent. But these were sporadic, never completely successful and of course escalated an ongoing war of counter attacks. But the organised driving away, that is the removal of Aboriginal children which took on its most systematic form in the twentieth century, precisely because it was a part of a government which had the powers to be systematic, could slice out the connective tissues of Aboriginal families. It was the car which usually made these grabs so possible. As a tool of the policy, it was the speed of the car which enacted the power of the state to remove utterly beyond the means of a country public transport system and so the ability of Aboriginal families, to re-establish
contact. It presumed the powerlessness of Aboriginal people to follow in any equivalent. Cars like the final milk are therefore not entirely ‘ordinary’ objects. They were part of a machinery of ‘removal’, another sort of massacre.

MY MOTHER TO MY GRANDMOTHER: Shall we go for a drive Mum? The McGregor are building a lovely place up in Heron Avenue.
(This was said after Sunday lunch at Granny’s. Snailpacing along we passed other cars doing the same route round the new houses in the right end of town)

What the Daughter said.
Fifteen years before receiving Keating’s reply, Thomas had written to Irby’s daughter (Mrs Traill not Mrs Carr (her sister) whom Keating suggests) seeking her knowledge of the event. This is the woman who published her father’s and uncle’s ‘Memoirs’ in 1908. Parts of her two replies to Thomas read as follows:

Wirepe
Turramurra
Sept 22nd 1910

Dear Mr Thomas
... The only punitive expeditions I know of were those mentioned in the ‘Memoirs’, but we have often joked with my Father about the Bluff Legend, it amused him very much—surely some bones would be there to this day if anyone cared to search... he was only a lad of twenty when he came out here, his brother was younger; I am afraid my two sons of similar ages have not as much grit and enterprise...

Dear Mr Thomas
... Referring again to the Bluff Rock episode, the Blacks were either Clarence or Severn River tribes & would naturally retreat east or west after committing murder: they would certainly not go near the main road which always led close below the Bluff, & of this I am certain that none but punitive expeditions were made by the settlers of my fathers day: the half-caste was right when he said my father fired in the air, he was not a man to shirk what he deemed a duty but he was ever ready to give another chance when justified in doing so...

I am yrs truly
(Thomas Papers)

Initially these letters do not deny the truthfulness of Keating’s account. Keating is clear to point out that the Aboriginal people were pursued because they had killed a shepherd and stolen sheep. It was to ‘punish’ them that they were followed; it was ‘a punitive
expedition’. But here we have a struggle with meanings. To punish an entire group with death seems monstrous and ridiculous. Justice must now be done through particular, autonomous and disciplined individuals. The group must be carefully examined to reveal the leader, the followers, the coerced, the remorseful and the doubtful and each punished according to the valuation of their particular guilt. Making the claim that ‘only’ punitive expeditions were carried out no longer convinces us. The legitimating discourse has changed and the failure to recognise individuality will not be tolerated. The powerful structures that permitted, even encouraged, the ‘punitive expedition’ have been resisted and displaced; now we are all ‘free’ to ‘freely’ be individuals and will be judged as such.

But Keating’s letter resists the legitimation of Traill’s ‘punitive expedition’ in another sort of way. ‘Punitive expedition’ can belong to the matter of law—factual punishment—or it can be translated via Keating’s account into the mayhem of chasing and throwing and shooting. Keating’s letter transposes ‘punishment’ into the key of the corporeal where action has bodily effects: crippled, shot and thrown. Those adjectives jar. ‘Punishment’ is no longer meant to belong to this physical environment as Foucault has traced for us. At the same time though, we concede that all ‘punishments’ have bodily effects, that prisons can induce depression, insanity, violence or love and so through the spectre of the chase and massacre we understand we are reading the ‘real’ to Traill’s euphemistic ‘punitive expedition’. And yet which is the most ‘real’ of its time? Which time? One of the answers is that they are both real and both true to their times and writer. In this way the productive force of ‘massacre’ is established as a shifting hybrid, including punishment, pain, chase, injustice and myth.

**Local Time?**

Keating’s account produces an order of time that can only be described as mythologically local. The only time detail Keating is exact about is the years he was at Bolivia. All other references to time are quite general; ‘after a time’, ‘some time before’, ‘at the time the line was built’ etc. Keating doesn’t clearly say that everything he described happened in a day but his running narrative leads us to assume that it did. This is another effect I believe of the ‘nonsense’ of what he says and is a part of the mythological underpinnings of the racist imagination. In 1925 Keating’s letter, supposedly recounting an incident from the 1840s, emerges as ‘proof’ of the horrors of the 1840s and the conditions of its emergence allow it to be seen as ‘historical’, since by 1925 ‘none of that tribe was ever seen’ not only on the station but increasingly across the nation mostly due to a system of institutionalisation and reservation but perhaps also because Aboriginal people could not be recognised by non-Aboriginal people as Aboriginal. They were now domestic labour, stock workers, fellow Christians and if not assimilated were no longer a material threat since their difference had been temporarily accounted for.

- 67 -
It is very difficult to track the moving strategies of the non-Aboriginal racist imagination. How can I say that I don’t think Keating saw you when you were always there? Could psychoanalytic theory explain it? Keating’s complete or near complete destruction of ‘that tribe’ may serve as a cultural screen memory for the daily ‘crippling’ of Aboriginal people via hiring practices, newspaper depictions etc. The mythologically written ‘massacre’ perhaps hides the greater and more immediate trauma of his own involvement in the destruction of Aboriginal culture. The fantasy of the omnipotent destroyer might also be a fetishistic disavowal of the ‘return’ of the (repressed) ‘Aboriginal’. This could occur in at least two ways. The first is that only ‘the Aboriginal’ has the power to truly imagine that all non-Aboriginal people would disappear, that all of ‘us’ would just ‘go home’. This renders the non-Aboriginal impotent and set on a course of continually telling of Aboriginal destruction in a useless effort at prevention since each act of agency clarifies the fact that our efforts are always only ever worse than a time before ‘we’ existed here. ‘Our’ coming was not necessary, is not wanted, can never be shared. The figures evoked in the expression ‘a lot more crippled’ sets up the possibility of an Aboriginal return since they did not die and they are able to return corporeally inscribed by non-Aboriginal intent. Formed by non-Aboriginal evil these mutated selves are a potential vehicle of revenge on an archetypal scale. They become the possibility of the utter destruction of non-Aboriginals.

That these sorts of myths may have partly informed Keating’s writing in 1925 may or may not be ‘true’, may or may not be ‘historical’. The imaginings of psychoanalysis are one possibility given psychoanalysis’ discursive circulation but as such do not constitute any greater truth than that of my various excursions into etymology and or the historical analysis of the period. Each one of these silences, awakens or shadows other readings.

On Hearing

*I will now send you what I heard...* Keating is in his way a revolutionary. He is in the moments of writing this letter radically relocating what was previously an orally shared history.

I will now send you what I heard. What did I hear at home? I heard about the little red hen, whom we also knew as the banana lady. It was bad to be the little red hen. It was something to do with babies. Too many? No husband? The wrong husband? Now I’m sorry, I’m a little red hen too. Then there was Rupert who lived near the high school. I heard he had murdered someone. He looked like he might. Later I met him as the quiet man in the sheltered workshop who carried the waste paper to the press. I heard about our next door neighbour. She walked across paddocks and hid down near a log and took tablets until she died. My mother said, they were never happy. The neighbour had once said; He can be cruel sometimes. She was highly strung I heard. She had a face like a pansy. Soft. There was only five miles of paddocks between us. I heard about the
librarian who came too close. He taught swimming to pretty girls whom he held under the tummy. Don’t go into his office someone told me. Maybe it was my sister, maybe not—we didn’t speak of such things at the time. I heard that Spiro the fish and chip shop man was a drug dealer, heroin. He had an old Mercedes but lived in a flat—nearly proof. I heard that Mr Munstock; he and his wife owned a little general store, was a spy in the war, he had had a radio. He was a Jewish refugee who came out after the war. You couldn’t send any of this.

If you were taught history you could tell anyone, history didn’t hurt. It was all too far away. We didn’t hear history we were taught history and what we heard excited us about Europe but particularly England. ‘Local’ history was all around us but we couldn’t see it. We couldn’t hear it. My friends and I were the Youth Group of the Local Historical Society. We dressed in period costume for open days and for the Agricultural Show. We spun wool for exhibitions and had a club house. We cleaned displays and experienced the pleasures of stepping behind the mesh doors of the display rooms but we didn’t hear a thing.

But Keating did hear, he can tell. After eighty years, something can be sent because somebody asked. He was not at the massacre but he was asked; because he was from the place, he was there.
MR IRBY'S ACCOUNTS
'BEYOND THE LIMITS' OF LOCATION

The 'limits of location' were those boundaries delimiting those parts of an Australian Colony within which land is available for alienation. eg. The 1836 Squatting Act...allowed squatting beyond the Limits, providing a license fee of 10 pounds per annum was made for each 'run'. (Hughes, 1989: 311, 314)

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—women, the colonized, minority groups, bearers of policed sexualities. (Bhabha, 1994:5)

This section uses two sources from Edward Irby, or more accurately, two different versions of the same source. The first is a small book titled: Memoirs of Edward and Leonard Irby 1841, which was published in 1908 in Sydney by William Brooks and Co some years after Irby’s death. A copy of this memoir is available at the NSW (Mitchell) State Library and inside the red and gold cover there is an inscription which reads: 'Presented to the Public Library, Mitchell Wing by Mrs Walter Traill, [his daughter] 25th November 1908'. This same daughter published an unknown number of these volumes at a cost of twenty pounds and so was asking of those who desired a copy some five shillings. By 1910 she had sold ten. In 1909 she had left a copy with Angus and Robertson but had not heard back from them (Thomas Papers). It is a small and sturdy book and I am allowed to photocopy it. In just 60 A4 pages I have 'captured' the whole thing. This red and gold objet d'art of family history and valuable colonial artefact is quickly and seamlessly rendered into the vulnerable, utilitarian 'primary' text. Within five minutes I have scribbled a note on its photocopied pages. The second 'source' is the original diary held by Irby’s granddaughter, which I transcribed with 'assistance'1 in 1996.

These two sources share some content but emerge under different conditions and are read in different ways. In the first section (Memoirs of Massacre) I am writing out a 'beyond the limits' self called Irby whom I track through a number of transformations within his changing language. On a border of contact which he linguistically organises,

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1 Assistance is an inadequate term for the emotional and material help provided by Susan Brock. It is interesting but also tedious work to spend days deciphering difficult handwriting and then as time begins to run out it was her inspiration to begin speaking the diary into a tape to be later transcribed which allowed us to finish the task on time. I simply could not have done it without her with the limited time and money resources to which I had access.
there emerges a range of ways in which different Aboriginal people are named differently and moments where Aboriginal people are collapsed into the generic ‘blacks’ or natives’. I attempt to both contextualise and analyse those usages.

In my next effort (Ambivalence and Massacre) I look at the limits of the language itself. How does ambivalence fuel a massacre? What does this record produce? But this record also emerged at a particular time so within the next section (Emergence) I read the Memoirs with Gunn’s We of the Never Never published in the same year to reveal another historical vocabulary. And since this close look at the particular contexts of language in turn pressures the very vocabulary I employ, I take you on a very short exposition of this pared down, sometimes ambiguous list of death. Different information, different contexts, do demand different ways of writing which should be able to be read with one another in a productive state of liminality. Perhaps in the end only you can read but I can’t write my own limits of location.

MEMOIRS OF MASSACRE

Bluff Rock was once a part of the land leased and then owned by Edward and Leonard Irby. The holding was called ‘Bolivia’. Edward Irby reports that he and others killed Aboriginal people but the shape and meanings of these deaths are very different from the account by Keating and the Tourist Leaflet. Edward Irby as diary and letter writer becomes the second source used by the Tourist Leaflet and he is therefore the author of two ‘primary’ sources as construed in my own project.

I wish to examine the book Memoirs of Edward and Leonard Irby 1841 to track some of the hows and whys the Irbys (and Edward in particular) become available as massacring subjects. This is a clumsy sentence and points to a certain fantasy of ethnographic history which is useful only in the endeavour not in any claims to single truths. That is: I am setting out to ‘discover/invent’ the cosmology of the Irbys’ world at Bolivia, the ‘sense’ of their lives while squirmingly (delightedly and disgustedly) aware of my own inventiveness. Simultaneously I hope to signal which parts of their experience and record of it allowed them to become the ‘perpetrators’ of the ‘Bluff Rock Massacre’. I am inspired by Dening’s goals of ethnographic history: ‘to re-present what actually happened in its specificity, to re-present the systems of meaning in their manifold and processual character (and) to authenticate these re-presentations of the other by displaying their relationship to the author of them’ (Dening, 1988:109-10). A partial success like Clifford’s ‘partial truths’ (Clifford, 1986: 2-26) is what I hope to have achieved.

I am assuming at this point that you agree with me that Irby’s shooting of trapped Aboriginal people is a massacre but that it does not ‘fit’ with Keating’s account to become the single event: ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. The question of ‘who dunnit?’—the hope
of a denouement—now needs to be dissipated if not abandoned to begin an engagement with the multiple ways in which Irby writes himself—the always?, never?, not quite? sometime? sacrificar.

The Irbys’ account begins with their sail to Australia, but I will be concentrating much more on their records from the moment of their arrival in Australia and will be focusing in particular upon their writings to do with land, Aboriginal people and the Irbies’s existence ‘beyond the boundaries’. In the first instance I am going to look at the ways in which ‘blackness’ and ‘Blacks’ are used throughout this collection of letters and diary entries to show the variety of ways in which Irby’s placements and namings change and to show simultaneously his own emerging identity as ‘squatter’? white? non-Aboriginal? The book puts all letters first and then the diary extracts but I have arranged them in a purely chronological fashion, the diary extracts only beginning in 1844.

When we look at the extracts from the memoir that refer to Aboriginal people we are looking at the words of Edward Irby. Leonard Irby contributes many fewer letters and usually in a lighter vein and his diary records, if he kept one, have not been saved. From here on ‘Irby’ therefore refers to Edward Irby unless otherwise stated. These examples were selected for publication and this should tell us more rather than less about their contextual importance. My effort at this time is to trace the emerging meanings of Aboriginality as they were written.

I have combined the records of his representation of Aboriginal people with my interpretations and further questions. One of my efforts was to show an emerging hybrid (chimera?!?) which could be called whiteness or Anglo Australianism (or?) and so remind you of the other parts of the Irby self which emerge with his process of racial figuration. The exchange between us was meant to prevent any easy reading of Irby as ‘developing’ or ‘advancing’ and it is clear there is both stasis and change in his array of material and linguistic inventions but the progressive character of the diary, day after day, year after year fixes a processional order that is very difficult to displace. And if it was precisely this sense of progressive change which enabled the ‘settling’ process than its presence deserves to be properly recorded but I hope it emerges as an uneasy background to the events recorded and critiqued. All page references are to The Memoirs of Edward and Leonard Irby (1908) unless otherwise stated.

Natives, Blacks, Blackboy and ‘Tommy’
Edward and Leonard Irby travelled first class to Australia. It was in a barque of 417 tons called the Flora Kerr. Their cabin was as large as the Captain’s and Mate’s and of their deck, theirs appears to be the only passenger cabin of that size. While other cabin passengers paid 70 pounds theirs cost 160 pounds. All of this was paid for by their ‘great benefactor Mr David Powell’ (p.15). What were they doing there? Of Leonard we know almost nothing except a granddaughter’s idea that he was considered fun but ‘unreliable’.

- 73 -
Shades of the famed ‘remittance man’ put under the care perhaps of the older and more responsible brother? He writes in one of his few kept letters that Edward has ‘undertaken to write all the sense, and given me the nonsense’ (p.55). *Australian Men of Mark* tells us that Edward had been training at the Military Academy in Woolwich when he was ‘struck down by a severe illness (Digby, 1889). His health was so much affected that he found it necessary to seek a change of climate’ (p.371) and came to Australia. This history suggests that Australia was a place, at least in the Irbys’ imagining of it, where the climate was good and where something less demanding than a military life could be carried out. This is not a vision of a place that is an ‘other world’ or full of frightening possibilities but situates Australia as a part of an English whole. An extended version perhaps of going to the mountains from the city or from Victoria to Queensland? But early in the voyage it is also the place where Edward promises he will ‘live in a steady and upright manner and not disgrace [Mr Powell’s] letters of introduction (p.21)’. This might suggest that it may be the very place one was tempted to do otherwise, it might point to a previous lapse or it might simply be the offering up of moral conduct as some sort of proof that Powell’s money has been well spent.

The Irbys begin full of praise for the food on board and their intention to learn some gleeas as all the passengers, ‘very respectable young men’, are fond of singing. They laugh at anything that goes wrong since it is so much better than ‘crying or looking sulky’ (p.5). Weeks later Edward has decided that there is only one man who he ‘should care to have any connection with in Sydney’ (p.12). After some rumblings the crew break into open mutiny and the Irbys are part of a group that capture the ringleaders and quieten the rest. As a belligerent crew member moves toward them, Edward records that it must be ‘kill or be killed’ but the sailor doesn’t move which is a relief to Edward for ‘I was fully determined to shoot him myself if he had moved another step’ (p.19). From then on they take turns for the watches which they undertake fully armed and since the prisoners are guarded in two of the steerage cabins, three more passengers come into their cabin. They run into Rio de Janeiro to have the crew charged and Edward notes how ‘enchanting’ after his cadetship at Woolwich, he found the sounds of cannon, muskets, and the drums and the sentries being challenged even though helaughs to find the soldiers using their cartouche boxes (which were meant to carry cartridges) for cigar cases (p.22-23). They set sail again and land safely in Sydney even with a Captain who is discovered to be a dedicated drunkard.

As a journey toward ‘a change of climate’, one upper-middle-class road to improvement, the outward journey must have been an ambiguous success. The spatial status of their double cabin was partially undone due to the mutiny, they had to practice the protection of their lives and property through recourse to arms and they saw in Rio de Janeiro a dirty town with a magnificent cathedral, unreal soldiers who smoked cigars from their ammunition boxes and a bizarre currency which meant one received a bill for
dinner of 2300 something! ‘Quite a shock’ (p. 21). Sydney Harbour appeared as far
better. While not as grand as Rio de Janeiro, Edward liked it better with its creeks, and
islands and ‘plenty of gentlemen’s seats peeping out’. It looked more ordered. Leonard
describes it jokingly as a place ‘infested with rats, babies, dogs and lunatics’ (p.40).

A Natural History of the Natives
But if this thesis is in part about how someone becomes a person who kills Aboriginal
people then it is useful to track the variety of ways in which that was an action enabled by
a particular culture and organised by Irby’s position within that culture.

Irby’s first reference to any idea of colour and culture occurs soon after his arrival.

Sydney April 18th 1842 (Edward to brother Tom)
(On the dedication of a bronze statue of Governor Burke) One old woman seemed much
disappointed when he was uncovered, for she exclaimed, with a look of dismay, “Oh, my
goodness, he’s a black.”

This first reference to Aboriginal people that Edward records is at the expense of an ‘old
woman’ who sees ‘a black’ as being anyone who was black. This may seem like
tautology but suggests that there was little division between for example Aboriginal town
dwellers, those further afield and possibly Africans. Even Governor Burke could become
‘a black’ by having his colour changed. But Irby is writing this as a humorous anecdote.
This horror at becoming ‘a black’ is proof of the silliness of this old woman. Irby knows
what the colour of cast bronze is. He knows what blackness is not. In a town where they
have been told to suspect everyone and where the ‘leading men’ can do nothing for them
Irby has declared that he will follow the advice to remain steady.

In Irby’s first encounter with Aboriginal people, one month later, he refers to them as
’natives’, which signals his own foreign status, neither born in Australia nor indigenous
to it. ‘Native Australian’ became a very early source of humour due to its ambiguous
meanings of ‘black’ and ‘born’ and may have precipitated the early concentration on
colour as the distinguishing feature: ‘black fellows’ versus ‘a (white) native of Australia’.
The unsteadiness of language.

Sydney May 11th 1842 (Edward to sister Fanny)
(While on Richard Windery’s farm Tomago, near Newcastle) Whilst walking in the evening we
met a party of natives, the king of Tomago among the number. His Majesty made us a most
polite bow, welcomed us to Tomago, and made his sons throw the spear and boomerang for our
amusement.
This image is one entirely of calm and ‘amusement’. No fear or qualms are recorded; it reads like a perfect fit between expectations and results. The ‘King of Tomago’ was no doubt appointed by Windeyer or some other powerful landowner and may have had a brass, half moon breastplate to ‘prove’ it. The status of such a position was often ambiguous. It usually marked some service to various non-Aboriginal groups and was an effort to map onto Aboriginal people the same order of hierarchies that some non-Aboriginal people lived by. It invented Aboriginal bodies that were understood as systematised, that is, negotiable and part of a non-Aboriginal state. This is not to suggest that the Aboriginal people who were a part of such namings agreed with the definitions but it is easy to observe how reassured Irby is by the encounter. He, as a 22-year-old of the right British stock, is amused by the spear and boomerang—it is ‘natural’ that he is welcomed by ‘His Majesty’, no matter how ironical the title is.

This encounter with ‘royalty’ occurs at the very moment that Irby is recording that their capital is their all. Their English education and trainings and their letters of introduction have proved nearly useless except for an offer from an uncle of one of their introductees. Archibald Windeyer has offered them the opportunity to learn how to run sheep in exchange for their buying of 600 head of sheep from Windeyer at the end of the year. He will pay them as nominal managers and Irby is delighted to be ‘taken in and to gain experience for nothing’. At this moment the welcoming ‘natives’ have nothing to do with the realisation that their capital is their all. They are no threat to it at least. Irby did not invent the ‘royalty’ of the Aboriginal people but it is a curious moment to become aware of it just when his own claims to class status have been, in his terms, replaced by the need for capital.

Three months later, the Irby brothers are on their way to New England and the Windeyer property of ‘Deepwater’.

Deepwater Station, New England Aug 3rd, 1842 (Edward to sister Fanny)

(On the journey from the Clarence River to New England) There were plenty of ducks, pelicans and black swans to be seen, and also natives, to whom we threw biscuits, which pleased them very much. It amused us to see them fishing when we anchored off the mouth of the river... They sat on a hill about a hundred yards from the river, watching. Directly they see a shoal on the shallow, about twenty run shouting down the hill as hard as they can, plunge into the water, form a circle, and all dip their nets in together, making as much noise as they can all the time. We saw them catch a great many. They then run up the hill again, make a fire, eat them, and then watch for more.

Here Irby appears to be enlarging upon his ‘naturalist’ appreciation of Aboriginal people. They remain ‘natives’ and fall all too familiarly at the end of a list of wildlife. Their
humanness is not even ironically inscribed through the self serving titles of ‘King’ and ‘Queen’. In this example, further from ‘settlement’ in the process of a journey where no commitment has to be made to any ongoing relationship, Irby can simply please the ‘natives’ with biscuits. In this moment it is he who is the source of amusement in his ‘quaint’ custom but the vision he imparts is of his bounty and ‘their’ ‘simple’ pleasure. It is his eye that then records his own ‘amusement’ (again) at Aboriginal (Bundjalung?) fishing skills. His pleasure in the ‘natives’ and their indifference to him is in contrast to his revulsion at the convict and exconvict workers who travel with them. How will he keep his distance from this group who make sin their delight?

**Deepwater Aug 6th 1842 (Edward to sister Carrie[Caroline])**

(On the road from Tenterfield to Deepwater) We did not see a single native; they seldom come near a road.

‘Natives’ that don’t come near the road suggests a wild shyness that fits with the ‘amusing’, ‘natural’ wonder that is the ‘Aborigine’ to Edward Irby at this time. There may also have been other stories circulating even within their small party but the Irbys’ determined separateness would probably have silenced them. In this journey Irby records how he and his brother talked mostly of ‘old times’, played their flagelots and it is possible that they arrived at ‘Deepwater’ with a stronger sense of their English selves than ever before. This is a cultural rebirth through nostalgia which has inventive powers that are in part dependent upon these public diaries (which were often sent home) and letters home. It is these writings that insist on their sameness with the rest of his family who are also outside of the ‘limits of location’ occupying as they now do an originary home. These letters become a vehicle of ‘locatedness’; they place Irby’s actions before a sensible audience and make available a community beyond the people physically available to him. Irby wishes he had gained more riding practice.

**Making Blacks/Making Cartridges**

Five months after their arrival in Australia, one month after arriving at ‘Deepwater’, Windeyer’s property ‘beyond the limits’, Irby records his first effort to kill Aboriginal people. This was never, in his reports at least, the action of an individual. It is a communal activity that gathered up the workers of the six huts that surround the head station, two with wives and children and it brings in the two shepherds and watchman from each of the four outstations, each about three miles from the head station.

**Deepwater September 10th 1842 (Edward to father)**

(When report of missing 205 sheep came in a party of eight is got together to go after the ‘natives’. This account takes up two and a half pages, hence the rolling extracts)
We had plenty to do the remainder of the evening making cartridges...

There were eight of us, five on horseback and the other three on foot. We took a couple of dampers and some tea and sugar...

About five in the afternoon we came to a creek, where the natives had encamped and had two or three sheep for supper...

[Lose track and spend afternoon regaining it]

Night came on, and we remained for the night about a quarter of a mile from the Blacks camp...

[Much more often fruitless tracking until find footprint by chance]

The natives had chosen a capital place to retreat to, where they had encamped; there were two terribly steep ridges, really impossible for anyone to go down without breaking his neck. ... The camp was about 60 feet above the gully, but slanted down to it, so they could soon get into it. ... There were about 100 of them. They of course took refuge in the deep gully, of which we had no idea till we got to the camp. We completely routed them, and remained in possession of the camp and all their traps. Such a scene I never wish to witness again. There were about 30 fires, and as many sheepskins, also the meat of about 16, cut up in small pieces, half roasted and covered with dirt, nets and baskets half filled with meat ....We found three wedges, a pint and quart pot, a blanket, and a pair of trousers, which we have great reason to suspect they took from a poor man whom they murdered near here about a fortnight ago...

There were 102 sheep left. ... We made a large fire and burned everything belonging to them; we also found spears, skins of opussums, &c &c...

We got home at 4 pm the next day well satisfied with our success.

This is described as an expedition in the bush. Expedition has always carried the meaning of warlike enterprise and Edward with his military vocabulary at his fingertips uses the term precisely. Since the head station is more or less in the middle of approximately 55 000 acres and has four outstations spread around it, all about three miles out from the main station, there are circles of increasing and decreasing ‘settlement’. The outer stations are close to the boundaries of the property marked comprehensively but also ambiguously with hills and creeks. In simple terms the property of Deepwater occupies the rich, river fed plain and ends in the foothills of the rough range country on three sides and on the other side by the already marked boundary creek of the next door acreage; ‘Wellington Vale’ creek.

The expedition works its way through the station’s hierarchies, temporalising each position. First arrives the watchman from the outstation (presumably on foot) with the ‘intelligence’ of the 205 missing sheep. Intelligence gives the figure of the watchman a military air and properly identifies his particular flexibility to move. Unlike the nominated shepherd who must stay with the sheep, the watchman must take the messages, make the meals and sleep with the sheep. In moments of emergency it is his marginalised body that moves through the bush to the ‘home’ centre. Linked with
convictism, not even a shepherd, the watchman is associated with the activities of the night rather than the day and it is perhaps only within the drama of possible attack that this figure becomes known by his master as carrying (no matter how momentarily)—‘intelligence’. There is an immediate response but it is not the Irbys nor young Windeyer (not yet of age—19? 20?) who start out but the overseer Collins who sets off with two or three men. Out of the centre of the head station security, past Three Mile Creek, past the out stations, past Seven Mile Creek and beyond out, into the bush.

It is too wet for Windeyer on that day and too wet the next but when no-one returns with any news and Friday ‘being a fine day’ (p.59) Windeyer finally sets out. It is as if there is an inverse relationship between reaction time and status. Only someone wholly in charge could wait so long to act and appear to respond only to the weather and not to human carried news. As a performance of autonomy, of being above events, Windeyer’s exit/entrance is beautifully timed. Windeyer’s going out is the dramatic finale for the Irbys who wait anxiously for his return until the next day when they follow him. Two of them, one of him; they follow rather than lead for they are after all there to learn. The Irbys meet Collins and some men returning. Collins has found a sheep between some rocks and so they are now all aware that Aboriginal people have taken the two hundred and five sheep.

That evening they make cartridges. Where did they make these cartridges? In some large open space or inside one of the small huts in some communal act of preparation? In individual huts? Did all of them make the cartridges? Given the security that would have been accorded to their supply of gunpowder, the careful controls that limited how much of it went into their ticket of leave men’s hands I think it most likely that this would have been one moment when the careful spaces between people of differing status would have been moderated. The dual roles of overseeing the use of the gunpowder and the need for all labour would have been met by the making of cartridges together. It is a complex moment within station life. To do the same task together in the same room provides for an unstable moment of suspension when subtle reversals may have occurred. A watchman may have shown Edward an easier way to roll the paper around the gunpowder or did Leonard amuse all with a joke as he bit down on the end of the paper cylinder and packed it into his leather pouch? Did such moments offer the social space for the usual order to be seen as sensible and rightful, as something that would re-emerge as the correct way in the morning or was that order doubted? Was there something particular about the smell and touch of gunpowder and paper that made of this event a sensory otherworld, far from the odours of sheep and gum? Or was it a moment of glimpsed equality? A moment that led to the idea of non-Aboriginal mateship as a means of out-negotiating the existent, whitish hierarchies? Would the atmosphere have been one of excitement or fear or grim familiarity—the
Irbys being the only virginal expeditioners? At dawn the next morning they rode and walked out to meet Windeyer and the other men.

Altogether there were eight men, five on horseback and three on foot. If Collins, the Irbys and Windeyer each had a horse—was the fifth given to someone whose status was already established or who was marked as having a particular skill in tracking or riding which suited such situations? Were there rivalries and tensions over such decisions or was this already an order well established and accepted to varying degrees by all? They follow a trail of sheepskins, fires and marked trees. When they hear the Aboriginal group below them Collins and Windeyer ride straight down the ridge. The Irbys recognise that they will be thrown off down such an incline and hand their horses over to be held by a man who was already in charge of holding a colt they had bought along. But the camp that had looked so attackable from above proves to be more strategically placed than their English military style of warfare expected. Below this camp is a deep, covered-over gully through which the entire group of one hundred are able to flee before Windeyer and Collins are down the ridge. And this next gully is too steep for horses and too dense for tracking or perhaps they are afraid. They go no further. They are over 22 miles from the head station and are between leases of land in a crack of un-named space.

Their shotguns, loaded with paper cartridges could only kill up to about fifty metres and the Aboriginal group had already disappeared much more than that. The technologies of horse and gun which elsewhere might map out spaces that allowed expansive murders were here useless against a competing sense of strategy based on a very different knowledge of the country. The expeditioners stay at this camp and bum all the Aboriginal belongings that remain. The alternatives to a fire would have been the successive snapping of spears and hacking apart of baskets but they put all into one big fire and Irbys doesn’t record if ‘souvenirs’ were taken. Did they make of the big camp of about one hundred people a redemptive, purifying moment? Their fire was a single ‘large’ (p.63) one; they did not use the 29 other small ones.

Their was a different use of fire. Unstrategic, destructive, neither covering tracks, nor attracting kangaroos by initiating new growth, this was an anti-fire. This one large fire was an attempt to disrupt the communal force of the thirty small fires. The signs of organisation among the group of about one hundred were all around them; the nets and baskets filled with cooked meat, preserved in a layer of ‘dirt’ (more probably ash) and the signs of cross-cultural adaptations: a pair of trousers, a blanket, a quart pot and three wedges (to split wood).

The expeditioners had only two small pieces of damper each (p.62) and yet they would not eat any of the food around them. And so the expeditioners, all except the man holding the horses above them, waited in front of the fire until all the Aboriginal ‘traps’ (p.61) were burnt. Is this the climax to an act always imagined as a narrative
with clear beginning, middle and end? The other moment after cartridge making when they are all together, acting in unison, doing more or less the same tasks? Was it this fire which ended the ‘colonial story’ and allowed it to be written and collected?

Was there revelry around the fire? Were things thrown in wildly? Did they rush for more fuel or was it all suppressed anger and cleaning up a bad job? Were they disappointed not to have shot at least one Aboriginal person dead? Could there have been mutterings about how it might have been done better? And was this one of those flame blazing moments of knowing whiteness, knowing they were all there to kill ‘blacks’? Things could be said and done together. Across class, across histories—wasn’t a particular community being born in moments like this?

Did the day-and-a-half ride back mark the return to a more ordered world, a stricter hierarchy or does the threat of Aboriginal people always unsettle this? As they climb out of the camp the man who has been looking after the horses has found the remaining 102 sheep. A tenth of Windeyer’s flock has been taken by the Aboriginal group. The Aboriginal group has been able to exploit a new source of protein and fat in an extraordinarily efficient style. Did they suspect that these sheep would not be in the same place, at the same time when they returned? Could they be depended upon as a new, exploitable food source or had they upset the systems of continuous food harvesting by their presence in places where kangaroos should have been? Or were the sheep more continuously there than any indigenous food source which suggested a permanency that was profoundly disturbing? If sheep were always available to eat, should one stay nearer them? Should overtures be made?

From this action onward the ‘natives’ become ‘the Blacks’ although not consistently so. It is only after the second night out and only in his description of the ‘Blacks camp’ that the word emerges. At this camp Irby is disturbed by the scene; ‘such a scene I never wish to witness again’ and one wonders what might be disturbing him. Is it the disorder, the loss of so many sheep, the ways in which flesh is strewn? Does his understanding of this affect how he will figure the murders he will commit? The moral rhythm of this record is that the pursuit of Aboriginal people was an adventure. Their spirits are high, the bushing goes well and after completely ‘routing’ them, they are ‘well satisfied with their success’. In such expeditions the authority of the three young managers of the right class invents itself over again. Aboriginal people become the symbol around which new constructions of ‘we’ and ‘our’ emerge. The ex-convict labour becomes a part of ‘our’ success and the station begins to become the ‘village’ that is to be protected from the outside attack of ‘the Blacks’. Since these pursuits take Irby into rough and often unknown country there are also natural hurdles to overcome and all of this is deadly serious. There is no ‘amusement’ at the ‘native’ ways, ‘the Blacks are a nasty, treacherous sort of fellows’ (1908:57).
I plot out the approximate movements of these men on a recent topographical map in an effort to discover land and in particular hills and cliffs that might have been the site of such events. When Irby reports that they were now twenty two miles from the head station I draw a large, 22 mile pointed circle around the head station. The tip of my pencil runs beyond my sister and brother-in-law’s property. They are within the field of possibility. This had not occurred to me. Smaller properties, roads and the cultural traditions of travelling toward the larger town had never connected them with Deepwater Station but there they are. And there also am I. Not only does my sister live there, invests there, but my brother-in-law’s parents bought the property from the parents of my first girlfriend. We are all there. It is not a shock. I feel thoroughly grounded as if in this discovery I have somehow finally overcome the speculative and the proven parts of this thesis and seen the past become present. It is natural that the once isolated sites of massacre will have become someone’s backyard, my backyard. The ironies of the fears of losing one’s ‘backyard’ to a Native Title claim are achingly rich. Isn’t something already lost to the idea of ‘Freehold Title’ when you live over unremembered graves?

What is free? What are you to hold? But this 22 mile radius of possibility also includes the whole of the current village of Deepwater, a large slab of the New England Highway, miles of prime grazing land, steep rocky hills that are still uncleared except for small inroads made by the discovery of minerals at other times in history, the Japanese owned feedlot, the city based QC owned stations, the struggling marginal cattle growers who try to get some return from those rocky ranges and so many other communities with nothing in common mapped onto what only looks like a shared geography. They are all within the field of possibility.

Deepwater Dec 6th, 1842 (Edward to father)

We have not been troubled with the Blacks again, but about a week ago they killed the shepherd of a settler between this and the Clarence, and took his flock, but they regained them all but 50 the following day. The settler had but lately commenced, and he had but few sheep so it is a very great loss to him in fact there is not a single station between this and the Clarence that has not a flock taken off it by the natives since we have been up here, and in two or three cases the shepherd has been killed. [Station currently surrounded by smoke] …generally supposed that these large fires are caused by the natives dropping their firesticks accidentally and not from any design on their part of trying to burn the settlers out of their station. They sometimes burn the old grass off, in order that they may have a chance of killing the kangaroos when they go to feed on the young grass that springs up, and also when they think they are likely to be pursued they fire it to prevent their track being seen.

… If he had that [1600 pounds] he might safely commence because if both Blacks and catarrh attacked his sheep he would still have something to fall back upon; but how would it be in our case?
At this time the ‘amusing natives’ have become more usually the relentless ‘Blacks’ who nevertheless still ‘accidentally’ drop their firesticks. Iry’s sympathy now extends toward other settlers affected, no matter what their history is, and begins to draw anxious parallels with his own situation. How would it be in his case? All of this is written in an atmosphere filled with smoke and his ‘steady’ response that of course ‘the Blacks’ are not intending to burn them out, but the atmosphere is literally and metaphorically dark. He has been advised that a commitment to sheep means that you should stay in the colony for life and he worries about the stopping of transportation. ‘Blacks’ and catarrh are the two greatest fears and greatest impediments to getting on and making profit. Catarrh required sudden falls in temperature and/or other atmospheric or epidemic causes and so the ‘native’ climate or passing sheep were to blame. Like the actions of Aboriginal people these factors could not be completely contained by the actions of the Irbys. They had to rely on their shepherds’ independent efforts to ensure that the sheep did not experience severe temperature drops and they and their other workers had to be constantly vigilant as to the passing of foreign sheep or the activities of Aboriginal people. All of these fears are now present and personal. Not only Windeyer’s but his own interests are explicitly at risk from ‘the Blacks’ and from nature. Is it at this point that the environment becomes as loathed, as accountable for all woes as the Aboriginal people themselves? The Irbys complain that they have to fish without shade and the overly hot sun spoils all beauty by making everything brown rather than green and the Irbys too would have been turning brown, that sun and wind beaten brown of arms and face. A working man’s tan! Even the ability to appreciate the beauty of the rough country of the station, the wild places, is curtailed and ordered by Aboriginal people and the vagaries of sheep: ‘And the trees are nothing more than caricatures excepting in the rough country. There they certainly grow finer and you may then also see many beautiful wild flowers but then again you seldom go into the rough country unless it is on some unpleasant expedition after lost sheep and at that time you think very little about wild flowers and scenery’ (p.67). The Irbys contemplate leaving and returning to England ‘for if a man embarks his capital in sheep, he must do so with the full expectation of remaining in this country for life. Now we could live very comfortably here for ten or twelve years, supposing we should be able to return to England after that period; but knowing we should have to remain here all our lives would make even the first ten years miserable’(1908:70).

**Missing Records**

Within the missing 16 months of these records, Iry does not leave but takes up a station ‘Bolivia’, next door to Windeyer’s ‘Deepwater’. What happened in these sixteen months? Were there other letters that were edited out? Did the ‘real’ Bluff Rock massacre happen in this time and make the Irbys’ naturalisation as white Australians complete? What events transformed a moment of literal darkness and anxieties about success to a decision
to buy an adjoining property and to begin grazing in their own names? What became of the ‘firm conviction that we should never be reconciled to the idea of staying here for life’ (1908:70)? For in taking up ‘Bolivia’ they have begun their ‘life sentence’ in Australia. How does that knowledge with its ironic parallel with convictism influence the ways in which he writes Aboriginality?

War, Compromise, Particularity?

**Thursday August 15th 1844** (Diary of Edward Irby at ‘Bolivia’ the station they have acquired next door to Windeyers ‘Deepwater’)

Tracked the Blacks from Deepwater nearly to the Gap. When I got home, could see the smoke from their fires on the Dividing Range.

**Monday 19th August 1844**

...He [Windeyer] told us he had seen our bullocks tearing along the road, one of them having two spears sticking in his side

**Tuesday 20th August 1844**

Feel confident our bullocks were speared by Windeyer's Blacks.

As owners and completely responsible for their own stock and station, the Irbys have more formally joined a community of squatters. There is a constant intersharing, sharing and sharing again, of supplies and labour and the ‘outside’ is now not so clearly defined. It is now just as likely to bring in someone with much needed flour or decent tobacco. These exchanges are not always entirely equal and there is some griping. But these movements back and forth between stations (including at least four others besides Windeyers’) seems to have also included some more careful identification of Aboriginal people. For the first time a group of Aboriginal people are named as being associated with a fellow settler. ‘Windeyer’s Blacks’ suggests that some rapport has been established. Irby is still carefully tracking ‘Blacks’ but these presumably are not ‘Windeyer’s’. The fact that Irby can still suspect ‘Windeyer’s Blacks’ of spearing his bullocks suggests a very loose arrangement with the group. This Aboriginal group while identified with Windeyer are certainly not constantly at his beck or call or restrained to his property limits. The circulation of resources that the squatters are practising appears as a sort of communicative nomadism where limited resources are shifted about from run to run, perhaps an inverted version of the Aboriginal practice of moving from one resource area to another in an established cycle of care within a designated area. The clear hard divisions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal appear to be getting less fanatical.
Wednesday 21st August 1844

Whilst hard at work, Mark ran to me to point out smoke from a Blacks fire which was rising from the range at the back of our bullocks' swamp ... Before we had proceeded many yards further, heard some Blacks close to us. ... [They are seen and the Aboriginal group flee except for two little boys] ... but I ran after and caught one. He immediately cried out that he belonged to white fellow; so I let him go and the other one joined him... we heard the men coming along. We coo-ed to them, but they wouldn’t come to the camp. ... [one] began trying to persuade the boys to leave us; but as we had given them some bread, they were a long time before they would....

It was very bad country, and, still thinking them Windeyer’s Blacks, I didn’t like to fire upon them... As the way we got up was very rugged and surrounded with Blacks, we thought it better not to return there, but keep the most open ground. The Blacks ran along on one side of us, but taking care to keep out of gun-shot.

This is the first verbal encounter with Aboriginal people recorded and it is also the first record of resistant, verbal strategies. To say you belong to a ‘white fellow’ is a way of buying you time, of getting away. It also collapses class and convict/non-convict into ‘white fellow’ momentarily. How quickly did shepherds become ‘white fellows’ in forcing? negotiating? bribing? exchanging? to have Aboriginal people ‘belong’ to them compared to the squatters and settlers? This extract establishes that the practice of ‘protecting’ (from whom!) and so presumably pacifying some Aboriginal people is known to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. And as Irby records, the possibility of their ‘belonging’ to Windeyer does stop him firing at them even if their distance from him shows their familiarity with the effective distance of gunfire. But again it is not entirely clear that non-Aboriginal figures are solely figures of dread since the small boys are able to be coaxed with bread suggesting that there is no formidable cultural apparatus that would frighten the young away from even the thought of a non-Aboriginal person. There is a hint here that some sort of exchange between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups is beginning to establish itself.

Thursday 22nd August 1844

He [Windeyer] told me he was certain they were not his Blacks but believed they were from the Severn [river], and he, Kelso, and Gardiner [neighbouring squatters] promised to come over the following day and help me drive them off. ... [Bates] had seen the Blacks fires all the afternoon on the Gap Range

Friday 23rd August 1844

[The party detailed above sets off] Windeyer’s blackboy saw a track there but it was too dark to run it.
Sat 24th August 1844

... The blackboy got on their tracks, but he hadn't gone many yards when we saw another smoke rising .... We went on this way for about a mile, when the blackboy said he couldn't keep the track ... We felt sure the blackboy could keep the track if he chose, but that they turned up a very steep range to our right, which he had no fancy to toil up. ...it was evident the Blacks were going right away, and impossible for us to track them, we determined to return home.

Details begin to emerge of individual Aboriginal people employed on the station. The 'Blackboy' becomes a very important part of their expeditions; it is he who allows them to follow other Aboriginal people into country where they cannot see any tracks. Now the 'Blacks', at least in this instance are those Aboriginal people not known to them. There is no suspicion in Irby's mind that the 'blackboy' might not be lazy but cleverly foiling the pursuit party. These accounts suggest that some sort of territorial readjustment is occurring; there are points beyond which the squatters are happy to let the unknown Aboriginal people go. The 'blackboy's' diminutive title suggest his lack of threat. He is a 'black' but he is also a 'boy', regardless of age. 'Boy' places him in a well established nomenclature of colonialism/slavery where 'boy' was a native servant and/or slave. While not 'amusing' as Irby's original 'natives' were, the 'blackboy' is ascribed proclivities like laziness and his position serves to invent once more the beginnings of a new version of the old idea that Irby is 'in control'—at least of his own household.

Sat 12th October 1844

...The sheep appeared all right, so I did not think he (Robinson) had been attacked by Blacks

Sunday 13th October 1844

... Felt sadly afraid he had been killed by the Blacks, and still could hardly believe such could be the case without their taking the sheep.

Monday 14th October 1844

...He (Windeyer) said he felt certain the Blacks had the sheep in that spot only for their having returned home safe.

Tuesday 15th October 1844

Windeyer rode over after lunch. He had been looking over the ranges in hopes of finding some clue to the direction the Blacks had taken, but could find none.

Wednesday 16th October 1844

...we came upon a place where the Blacks had camped on Sunday and Monday night.

...Weaver sang out that he saw a Black. ... We soon got up to him. Windeyer found he could understand him, so asked where the camp was. He pointed to the south east. Windeyer then told him he had killed a white man. He said no, but those at the camp had done it. ... We rode about till nearly dark but couldn't find the camp ... (so we) camped about a mile from where we had come upon the Black

- 86 -
Thursday 17th October 1844

...We went at once to look about the hill where we saw the black last night. On reaching the spot we found the natives had been there, and must have heard us coming, as in their hurry they had left a fire-stick and two spears. ...

...Windeyer soon caught sight of a Black and pointed him out to me...a glimpse of the rascal bolting down the rocks. ... Knowing the Blacks were in the rocks underneath us, I fired off for the two men to join us. ... could see the Blacks in their hiding place. Having now the means and will to punish them for the barbarous murder they had committed, we took advantage of the opportunity and gave it to them pretty severely

Sydney, January 31st, 1845 (Edward to father)

(This is Edward’s account of a particular ‘punitive expedition’ which Halliday and others put together with Keating’s account to produce ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’)

For a moment I felt certain the Blacks had been there, but when I thought of the sheep coming home safe I doubted again...

Windeyer and I consulted for a few minutes, and determined we would pursue the murderers ...

He (Windeyer) had been on the range close to where the murder had been committed, in hopes he should be able to track the Blacks, for we could form no idea in which direction they had gone, but without success. We started early on Wednesday morning, prepared for a week’s trip, but with very little expectation of our finding them.

...could see nothing of the Blacks, although it was evident they had but just been there.

...The Blacks had heard us coming, and hidden themselves among the rocks. ...

If they had taken to their heels they might all have got off safe. Instead of doing so however, they got their fighting men together to attack us, so we punished them severely and proved our superiority to them... He (Windeyer) said I had no alternative but to act as I had done.

As one more encounter with Aboriginal people, as one more expedition which is more murderously successful than others—the separating out of this particular occasion as one ‘proof’ of the ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’—exposes it as part of a continuing ‘settlement’. To read this particular massacre as part of a continuum of warfare is to be able to appreciate its moment in time. People rather than sheep are now being killed on ‘Bolivia’ and Windeyer can make himself understood to some Aboriginal people. To attempt to track and kill Aboriginal people is neither a new nor extraordinary event in quite the same way as it was two years before. Four people rather than the eight of the first recorded expedition set out and there is no detail of the preparations or communal activity.

Robinson was killed without the sheep being taken. There exists in Irby’s experience a reasonably established pattern of Aboriginal behaviour but the death of Robinson does not fit his expectations. This points towards a number of scenarios. The most common would be to believe that Robinson had been abusing particular Aboriginal people,
probably Aboriginal woman/en which meant his actions needed to be accounted for according to the Aboriginal system of law and custom. Robinson is stripped and the variety of blows and numbers of spear wounds may point to some ritually sanctioned action since only some of the Aboriginal group would have been allowed to carry out the killing (Bassett, 1989; French, 1993). Further records begin to emerge that some interaction between the hutkeepers, shepherds and Aboriginal people was occurring and with the ‘owners’ as well since Windeyer can speak their language or the Aboriginal man could speak English. There is a possibility then that some of the Aboriginal people being pursued may have been known, or even well known, to the workers on ‘Bolivia’ if not on ‘Deepwater’ and perhaps the use of ‘Deepwater’ only personnel was a response to that suspected familiarity. So this was not a meeting of complete unknowns. While individuals may not have known each other, the movements and actions, the patterns were beginning to be appreciated and Robinson’s death was probably a marker of another change in the orders of possible interactions. Shepherds had been killed before but not on his property. And Irby’s response is different. For the first time he must account for the killing of Aboriginal people. At other times he may have intended to kill —way back on the boat out he said he would have shot the mutineers—but now he has killed and not a specific criminal but an entire group of people. The Blacks.

Robinson was Irby’s employee and, ex-convict or not, his death requires that he take action that he can then account for to the appropriate authorities. Aboriginal people killing non-Aboriginal people is now a ‘fact’ to report to a government authority while his fellow ‘settler’ assures him he had no alternative but to pursue and kill the Aboriginal people. The finality of Windeyer’s judgement, that Irby had had ‘no alternative’ immediately suggests that he did. But now Irby knows he can kill Aboriginal people, report the details (possibly only the death of the shepherd is required) and he remains ‘with no alternative’. He writes ‘immediately’ to the Land Commissioner and you wonder with what emotion that writing was done. Excited? Determined? Steadily? Worriedly?

There is a similar gathering up of peoples as in the Irbys’ first expedition with Windeyer. Edward first hears that a shepherd Robinson but not the sheep, are missing, from another watchman Fox. He then sends Mark who appears to occupy the position of overseer out to his outstations to have the two other shepherds or watchmen help search for the missing man. In doing so they bring the strangely unmove sheep in to the head station. The sheep come in as do the other men and a letter goes out to Windeyer. When the body is found and the joint decision to pursue ‘the murderers’ is made Windeyer returns to his home to prepare and Edward and Fox bury the body. That there is no record of Edward’s preparation alerts us to the point that no-one from Bolivia except Edward himself goes. Leonard is away in Sydney but what of the others? Since Bolivia is a smaller holding, with fewer workers than Deepwater, is it simply unable to supply the man power or has Windeyer already been established as the ‘best’ organiser and
perpetrator of such expeditions? Or are the Bolivia workers in some way doubtful? The fact that Irby goes with Windeyer and two of his servants marks this sort of massacre as a very different cultural event from the more sustained raids across the land exemplified in official guise by Nunn’s campaign and in unofficial guise by the Myall Creek Massacre (Milliss, 1992). And the fact that Irby et al shot rather than hacked open with swords and burnt on a triangulated fire might support Townsend’s argument that non-Aboriginal people killed Aboriginal people using the rituals that they were familiar with (Townsend, 1985:24). Irby had the military understandings of strategy, surprise and victory and if his murders look more ‘rational’ to us now, then that should only expose the class ridden origins of a civilised death, the insanely neat missile landing on a trapped town, our televisions exposing ‘them’ as trapped beneath us.

Monday 17th February 1845 (Diary)
…shepherd of Windeyer…on his way to the head station to report the murder of a watchman by the Blacks. (The party organised to pursue the Aboriginal group gathers)
…five of them (the ‘party’), besides the blackboy. … Heard that the Blacks had been seen on the ranges close to Bolivia.

Tuesday 18th February 1845
…For two or three days before the murder he (the dead watchman) had allowed a few of the Blacks to come into the hut, and had given them food. …the Blacks had struck him on the back of the head and knocked him into the fire, they then pulled him outside the hut and finished him off. … (The returning shepherd) came upon six Blacks, who were squatting down apparently with the intention of seeing what the shepherds would do on finding their mate dead. … he fired a couple of shots at them and wounded two, when they instantly made off.

Thursday 20th February 1845
Came upon the Blacks suddenly about 11am. They had got into a dense mountain scrub, so that we couldn’t half punish them. …We determined to make another attempt…. Weaver and I commenced firing, to make the Blacks believe we were all down below. …(This ruse did not succeed and both parts of the group came together again to camp the night) It rained all the night, and we could hear the Blacks shouting quite plainly

Friday 21st February 1845
…lay by the Blacks fire that night.

The further actions and the further deaths seems to point to an escalation of conflict. It is always suddenly or by chance that the Aboriginal groups are found even with the assistance of the ‘blackboy’ and the ‘landowners’ and their servants’ efforts to destroy Aboriginal people are never completely effective. The weather and the country keep turning against the ‘settlers’. At this time Irby begins to record that strategies and ruses are at least being tried by his party. They don’t work but there is a realisation that simple
pursuit rarely rewards them; they are being out-manoeuved and end up using Aboriginal fires and paths to return by. They have to learn Aboriginal techniques to pursue Aboriginal people. But simultaneously, at this time of closer and constant exchange with fellow squatters, the ‘punishment’, murder and pursuit of Aboriginal people is becoming a cultural motif of this tiny society. Such actions are usually shared and the audience for acceptable behaviour expands to this intimate, active and available set who reinforce the value of such behaviour while all the while discussing these ‘expeditions’ in terms which allow for their easy communication to a family audience back ‘home’ in the diaries and letters which become the narrativised lists of knowable experiences. To talk of such things presumably becomes a part of the conversation of ‘gentlemen’. And there is always in the response to what Irby calls violence the refusal of Aboriginal particularity. Why would the six Aboriginal people wait by the man they had killed? Had that watchman unlike the shepherd broken particular rules and now were they waiting to clarify the position with the shepherd? Was it their careful delineations between people which simultaneously made them vulnerable to the crude taxonomies of massacre and enabled their highly successful, manifold resistance across a variety of landscapes and peoples?

Monday 24th February 1845
...He (son of manager of Deepwater) brought a letter from his father requesting Len and self to meet him next day and look about the ranges, in case there should be any Blacks about.

Tuesday 25th February 1845
...were on the ranges all the afternoon without seeing any signs of Blacks.

Sunday 27th April 1845
... Heard that Windeyer’s cattle had been rushed by the Blacks.

Tuesday 29th April 1845
... felt sure they must be our cattle, and that the Blacks had rushed them.

Tuesday 3rd June 1845
Fox came in just after breakfast to tell us the Blacks were on the five-mile ranges

Wednesday 4th June 1845
...came upon the camp, but the Blacks had seen us and bolted. Got an old gin, who had hidden; had a little chat with her, and then sent her after her tribe. She told us two tribes had been meeting; one of them had gone toward Windeyer’s.

Thursday 5th June 1845
Started for the purpose of following the Blacks, who had gone towards Windeyer’s; could see no tracks; the old gin told us a lie.

Monday 9th June 1845
... the Blacks we were after last week passed across the five-mile station on Friday, setting the grass on fire as they went.
At this time Irby must more or less trust his ex-convict workers and doubtful pasts of his servants so now it is not the (non-Aboriginal) ‘convicts’ whom you cannot trust but ‘old gins’. Again we see Irby’s confusion about whom you can and cannot trust in the Aboriginal world. Because he has sought and received information from the woman from atop his horse he expects that her responses will be sound in his terms.

Thursday 31st July 1845
... he (Burgoyne) had heard the Blacks, and had seen old Bill, who had no gun with him.

Friday 22nd August 1845
...Collins sent word that the Blacks were about, and intending to kill a white fellow.

Tuesday 26th August 1845
Tommy and a lot of other Blacks came over from Deepwater

Enter ‘Tommy’. Tommy is an Aboriginal worker; perhaps he is the ‘chief’ Aboriginal worker; perhaps he is ‘Irby’s’ first Aboriginal worker. What does it mean to be called ‘Tommy’? Irby’s other brother is Tom so perhaps that was the initiating factor. It is the diminutive of Thomas so that the symbolic order is kept or perhaps this was simply his birth name, indicative of a larger group of ‘town’ or ‘station’ Aboriginal people who name their children according to colonial convention. ‘Tommy’ was also a name given to other Aboriginal people in earlier places and at earlier times so it may have had the ubiquity and denigration of later names like ‘Sambo’ and ‘Jacky Jacky’. Tommy is special; he is marked differently from the others, but precisely why? The name nicely records the variety of intimacies that existed.

Friday 19th September 1845
Rode over to Windeyer’s with George Page; met the Blacks coming here; sent them back on account of my bullocks.

Tuesday 7th October 1845
...We got four Blacks who were camped here and five of us went with them to look over the ground.... The Blacks said they smelt stringy-bark burning on the distant ranges, which made me almost afraid the wild Blacks had murdered him ...

A new Aboriginal identity emerges: the ‘wild black’. ‘Black’ has to now be qualified with ‘wild’ for it to communicate any sense of threat, since ‘Blacks’ are now more often recorded as doing useful work rather than posing a threat. This record makes clear that the ‘Blacks’ doing this work are ‘tame’ or ‘domestic’ and that outside of their order exists a continuing group of the ‘wild’ sort who remain independent from Irby. Such a seemingly simple dichotomy was probably not the case given the times that various useful bits of the colonists’ equipment is found in ‘wild’ camps but it succeeds in
marking resistant bodies who are not available for Irby’s use. ‘Wild’ actually serves to
textually domesticate ‘Black’ since ‘wild’ has become a descriptor usually used to mark
simultaneous difference and similarity, a permanent liminality. Examples of this include
wild raspberry, wild currants, wild figs etc and were a way of marking recognisable
similarities with a known entity eg ‘Black’ and unknown qualities e.g. ‘wild’.

Monday 27th April 1846
Dougherty came in last night to tell us that the Blacks had chased old Bill for his life….
When I got home it struck me that the Blacks, perhaps hadn’t got them (the missing sheep) at all,
so I thought I would go by myself first and see for certain if the Blacks had taken them. … I now
began to think the Blacks really had got old Bill, and driven his sheep off. I followed the tracks on
to the five-mile, and felt so sure the Blacks must have got them… (After finding sheep on an open
ridge) … I am inclined to think that Bill lost his flock, and made up the tale about the Blacks to
exonerate himself from Blame if any should be hopelessly lost.

Now ‘the Blacks’ have become an excuse that even the old shepherd can use to explain
his failings. This action reminds me of the pursued Aboriginal group claiming ownership
by ‘whitefellow’. ‘Black’ and ‘white’ are now used as strategic explications for private
needs and claims. But as doubtful as Bill is as an informer, Irby shifts and sways with
competing evidence. He can never afford to immediately dismiss a charge against
(unknown) Aboriginal people since they still threaten him but each report does not
necessarily lead to armed pursuit and ‘punishment’. A kitchen is being built.

Tuesday 12th May 1846
The Blacks came from Windeyer’s. One of them said he had seen six men, armed, on the station.
Suppose them to be Wilson (bushranger) and his gang.

‘Shared’ ‘station blacks’ now act as messengers of danger to the squatters and if lines can
still be drawn these ‘blacks’ are now firmly of the station not against it; in rather than out.
At this moment the threat is once more from the wrong kind of non-Aboriginal; the Irbies
typologies are crumbling/expanding.

Sunday 17th May 1846
Came upon a Blacks grave. Saw the smoke of their fire, but no grass.

Wednesday 12th August 1846
(170 sheep lost) … Sent all the Blacks out, and went myself but got no tidings of them.
And now it is the (unpaid?) Aboriginal workers who are first sent on any recovery treks. Their integration into station life begins to be more spoken of and their tasks defined. There is no mention of payment.

**Friday 14th August 1846**
Rode out with Tommy, came upon the spot where they (the sheep) had been rushed; found fourteen dead. …

**Tuesday 25th August 1846**
Sent Black Tommy to tell old Bill to meet me on Robinson’s flat. …supposed Tommy had been too late to give him my message …

‘Tommy’ continues to occupy a textual space outside of wild or station ‘blacks’. He suggests another detail of the complex array of relations between Irby and Aboriginal people—the defined and/or intimate. Whatever the basis of ‘Tommy’s’ position he is trusted and individually named.

**Wednesday 26th August 1846**
(Following discovery of Innis’s sheep on his run) I immediately ordered him off, and then rode home to get out Bates. I sent him (Bates) with two Blackfellows to carry some tools.

In this final entry the Aboriginal workers assist, albeit obliquely, in the removal of a non-Aboriginal from Irby’s run. The new perimeters of struggle are being conditionally set where squatters will set themselves against the selectors and land reforms and as their efforts to import ‘coolie’ labour fail, will ‘employ’ more and more Aboriginal labour. Aboriginal people keep exceeding the limits of the categories they are given and in part this happens through their productive labour. Irby meanwhile takes up positions made available to him through the increasing presence of governmental bodies such as the law. He becomes a local magistrate. Is this the beginning of governing production in a particularly Australian way?

**And In Particular**
Edward Irby was not a modern monster. He was unable, within the daily complexity of station life, to operate in the generally figured metacategories and state initiated processes that might make him an Eichmann (Arendt, 1994). He didn’t kill all Aboriginal people; he may not have even imagined that category, but he was frightened of and did attempt to kill, sometimes successfully, ‘Blacks’ and later ‘wild Blacks’. He worked with, trusted and no doubt exploited ‘Black Tommy’. He also ‘employed’, managed and/or was involved with a range of other Aboriginal people who enter and exit about these extracts, never entirely individuated through names or constant occupations but always there.
Although there are changes in how he addresses Aboriginal people and pictures himself, these changes co-exist with a certain continuity. He begins as an Englishman with an unsteady seat who stays well away from those with a convict past and ends imbricated with convictism, ‘Blacks’, rural society and ‘Australia’. And did he really begin simply as an Englishman or was he already ambiguously made by debt? declining family status? illness or…? And perhaps ‘ends’ isn’t quite fair, he doesn’t die but he does stop writing. His family have no other records of diaries and letters except for these showing Edwardius Irbius: First ‘Settler’ Man.

These chronological ‘clips’ are attempting to populate colonialism’s limits and boundaries to give them some sort of lived (or rather written) momentum. What does it mean to say that Irby was a particular sort of colonial who killed a particular sort of Aboriginal person? Is this the horror of a ‘cultural studies’? postmodern? even ethnographic? reading where the particular enables a collapse into the schlock horror of relativism? Does this read like an apology, a ‘rational’ explanation for his actions? Does it make him look better or worse? Who are you identifying with? Who are you appalled by? Me or him or perhaps ‘Tommy’? I am genuinely puzzled.

In one way I see Irby’s failure to use the metacategory of ‘ Aboriginal’ as preventing a wholesale slaughter—he insists not all Aboriginal people are the ‘same’. But his careful differentiation might be an originary form of the intense classification of the ‘Aborigine’ (to one sixteenth ‘full blood’ for example) which in turn led to internments, separations, assimilation, cultural destruction and death. There is of course also the possibility that it was precisely Irby’s differentiation that was most exploited by the local Aboriginal groups. Was it the work of ‘Tommy’ and the ‘blackboy’ and ‘Windeyer’s blacks’ to signal when a raid was safe? Was it they who became the interpreters of colonialism and invented strategies for safe passage like ‘belong white fella’?

Where Irby saw difference did Aboriginal groups organise within the larger categories of extended clanship and an emerging (or existent?) sense of ‘Kooriality’? I am employing ‘Kooriality’ here to suggest some pre-existing sense of community that was not based on racialisation as ‘Aborigine’ was but upon the experience of managing resources in a region now shared by new strangers who had to be managed in particular ways. I am questioning whether new alliances had to be made across pre-existing boundaries to allow for the movements of Aboriginal people associated with the stations? What sort of work might Tommy have had to do to sustain his various roles within the Aboriginal nations and the emerging non-Aboriginal clans? And if Aboriginal people were organising within a larger entity like ‘Kooriality’ does it mean the differentiations of Irby read like a strategy for divide and rule?

Perhaps it sounds like the work of the chronically insecure, desperately seeking sameness of an emerging familiarity? He trusts and works with ‘Black Tommy’ and kills ‘wild blacks’. Both of these figurations reduce the complexity of Aboriginal culture to the
‘good’ and ‘bad’ ‘blacks’. One becomes available for work in an ambiguous capacity that rarely included wages and the other was able to be killed—both are ‘Aboriginal’. This attempt to ‘fix’ the ‘other’ through these usages produces powerful stereotypes fuelled by ambivalence. How does ambivalence invent massacre?

**AMBIVALENCE AND MASSACRE**

Having already looked at the ways Irby emerges as non-Aboriginal and changes his namings of Aboriginal people in a chronological fashion I now want to look in a more minute way at how this happens in the two particular accounts Irby writes of the massacre he carries out. What did those words of Irby do? This story is therefore also about murder and language but here we are concerned with the temporal inscription of stereotype and the omnifarious power of ambivalence. As Bhabha has written:

> For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces the effect of probabilistic truth and predicability which for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed (Bhabha, 1994: 66).

The introduction of the notion of ambivalence in conjunction with a massacre may appear to be disgusting. The murder of Aboriginal people insists upon an immediate grappling with the effectivity of colonial discourse. How did it work? How did it make murder possible? The usual response to these questions is to insist on the power of the fixed negative stereotype. An example of this would be to point to the ‘scientific’ reports and journal entries where Aboriginal people are listed as fauna, as animals—a mode of description we can identify in Irby’s early naturalistic descriptions. This then leads to an explanation of atrocities as being caused by colonisers’ perception of Aboriginal people as simply animals, to be shot and poisoned when it was necessary. A way of ‘doing history’ is thereby invented where we look for the excessive colonial linkings of Aboriginal and animal and, having found them, relax. Our explanation is proven. It was an ‘irrational’ moment in colonisation and is now dismissed. This sort of explanation fails to engage with the particular ways, the ambivalent ways, in which the colonisers constructed and reconstructed ‘the Aboriginal’ and themselves. How can we explain ‘Tommy’ as well as ‘Blacks’ and ‘Natives’? The strategy of engagement I am going to use here is to begin by looking very closely at two, small, textual fragments which contributed to ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’ to try to track a process of subjectification that made the massacre possible. My judgements are contestable, the extracts themselves ambiguous, but how else can I begin to imagine what these murders might have meant?
How were they enabled by these particular colonial discourses? These particular ‘processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse’ (Bhabha, 1994:67)?

**The Letter Account**

The first account (and the one deployed by the Tourist Leaflet and always used in brief sketches of the event that appear in other local histories) is from a letter to Irby’s father; the second is from entries in his diary. From the letter:

The blacks had heard us coming and hidden themselves amongst the rocks. One, in his hurry, dropped poor Robinson’s [the dead shepherd] coat so we knew we were on the right tribe. If they had taken to their heels they might all have got off safe. Instead of doing so however they got their fighting men together to attack us, so we punished them severely and proved our superiority to them. We got back the same day. I sat down directly I was off my horse and wrote the particulars to the Commissioner and Windeyer started immediately with it. He [the Commissioner] lives more than one hundred miles from Bolivia. He [Windeyer] said I had no alternative but to act as I had done. Leonard [Irby’s brother] returned about ten days after this sad affair occurred. I was of course put to very great inconvenience for want of a man and lost a number of lambs as a consequence, but on the whole we had a pretty good increase—nearly ninety percent (Irby, 1908:80).

Irby writes quite simply that they had proof this ‘tribe’ had been responsible for the shepherd’s death but that even then they could have got away if they hadn’t ‘got their fighting men together to attack us’. This imagery depends on the idea that there was an existing hierarchy of warriors and non-warriors. It suggests that the threat posed by such a group made the response of Irby and Windeyer (the neighbouring squatter) necessary. Whatever the other images that had gone before, at the moment of death this group of Aboriginal people were understood as attacking them and so they were attacked back. The savagery of these ‘fighting men’ has already been reported in an earlier part of the letter when the body of the shepherd is described as having ‘five spear wounds, four deep cuts from tomahawks on the temples, and the back of his head beaten in with a waddy; he had then been completely stripped and thrown in the river’ (Irby, 1908: 79).

Detail like this provides the anxiously repeated vocabulary that invents the Aboriginal people as a savage totality. The list of injuries not only carefully note the three different weapons used but also the absolute nakedness of the victim and his eventual disposal into the river. The shepherd’s death becomes a story of crude weaponry and strange ritual which produces the shepherd by comparison as a simple but nevertheless familiar and known subject. Irby and Windeyer are enabled by the creation of this opposition between familiar man versus ‘barbarous’ death to consult for a few minutes to determine that [they] ‘would pursue the murderers’. A crime had been committed. The catalogue of
‘primitive’ acts is thus syntactically answered and accreted by the active response of the squatters who, having named this act as murder, set about creating a punishment. And yet after days of following the ‘murderers’ there is a sudden invention by Irby that the group might still have ‘got off safe’ except that they attacked Irby’s party. So there is another shift in his representation of these criminals. They are no longer savage murderers but children who simply need to be scared off to be made good. The effect is to have Irby instituted as the father of these children who if only they would have run off as they could do and were expected to do, would have been ‘safe’. But then there is the final imagining; the Aboriginals become ‘fighting men’ to whom it is necessary to prove the ‘white mens’ superiority. These different shifts in Irby’s narrative sketch out the deadly process of making an active subject who could kill and the savage/child, ambivalently inferior who was able to be killed. Through these words and figurings Irby became supra-enabled to kill (some) Aboriginal people.

All about (and within) these shifts is the complexity of the ordinary as presented to the parental audience—this was, remember, a letter addressed to his father. The tale of murder moves quickly onto the details of lambs born and from there until the end of the letter Irby details what letters have or have not been received and ends with a reminder to Fanny (his sister) to address the letters to the correct place. But this is still a letter, a narrative creation with a very specific audience. The ‘ordinary’ is selected and edited. It might easily be a part of the showmanship of the antipodean colonist to juxtapose attacks by ‘Blacks’ with stories of lambs born and letters received for the benefit of a non-colonial audience or it might simply appear that way now. This is one of the puzzles. How does this ordinariness become this massacre or this massacre become that ordinariness? Irby’s second account of the massacre is taken from his diary.

The Diary Account

Thursday 17th... Knowing the Blacks were in the rocks underneath I fired off for the two men to join us. Before they came up we went on to the farthest projecting rocks and looking underneath us could see the Blacks in their hiding places. Having now the means and will to punish them for the barbarous murder they had committed, we took advantage of the opportunity and gave it to them pretty severely. Immediately after accomplishing the object of our trip we returned homewards, nor did we stop for breakfast till we had got within a short distance of the Sugarloaf (a hill). We then spelled for about three hours. We reached home at about four pm. Windeyer determined upon returning the same evening and as he was thinking of going down to Sydney in a few days, I sat down at once to write to the Commissioner informing him of the murder (of the shepherd) and our expedition. Fri. 29th. Commenced shearing (Irby, 1908: 89-90).
The diary is an interesting form of narrative. It is assumed in the late twentieth century that the diary is a private medium, that its lack of audience privileges the information within as being more real, more true to the individual’s thoughts. But in the eighteen forties, diaries, particularly of colonists, were often edited and published, as parts of this one were. There is also a slightly different tradition of the farm diary where the central effort lies in the tracking of stock and weather conditions and the more personal element is missing. Irby’s diary extracts are mixtures of all of these. His account of the massacre is followed by the short details of shearing: ‘Saturday, 30th: Had a thunderstorm last night; we were obliged to wait some time before we could get on with shearing. Tuesday, Dec 3rd: Too cold to wash sheep’ etc (Irby, 1908: 89-90). His account of the tracking of the Aboriginal party and the shooting of them is, however, written in a much more detailed style. This event clearly constituted something other than diurnal detail. What is harder to predict is whether or not that something was colonial adventure or something suitable for possible publication or...

In discussing Irby’s letter to his father, I attempted to track the range of ways in which Irby positioned himself and the Aboriginal people he finally killed. In the diary account however, there are continuous references to the barbarity of the Aboriginal people which are combined with ‘opportunity’ to explain why Irby committed the murders. There is no mention that the Aboriginal group got their fighting men together; there is no pause where they might have got off ‘safe’—here there is simply ‘opportunity’ to give ‘it’ to them pretty severely. This idea of ‘opportunity’ is built up in the previous diary entries where Irby, with the help of a ‘blackboy’ had been un successfully tracking another Aboriginal group which continually evaded him even though each night he would see their camp fires spring up in the near distance (1908: 85-86). In this instance he was attempting to discover which group of Aboriginals had been responsible for scaring off bullocks. An ‘opportunity’ then when Aboriginals were actually trapped in the rocks beneath them was rare and to be quickly taken ‘advantage’ of. But Irby is not simply responding to a rare, chance opportunity, for he is also ‘punishing’ the Aboriginal group and he has ‘the means and will’ to do so. The means were guns, an established position that enabled him to act in this manner and some sort of group philosophy that allowed him to do so in the company of others. The ‘will’ was an invention of the squatter who must overcome all obstacles to claim and establish stations in what was understood to be hostile country that was literally beyond the then legal boundaries of ownership. The ‘will’ of a legalising ‘outlaw’?

Is this murdering subject the same subject who asks so pleadingly in a letter of the same year to his sister for new music for the flute (Irby, 1908: 76)? Here are the shadowy antecedents of Arendt’s banal evil (1994{1963}). While Irby is clearly the perpetrator and his actions are not those of bureaucratic order, he places the murders as part of an ‘ordinary’ life. Irby’s existence as son, flute player, and squatter with will, is
performed both continuously and simultaneously. The murderer is a murderer, is a murderer, is a ... The mixture of murder and music is now all too readily understood as existing harmoniously within a body understood through a public/private divide but my effort is to disrupt that completion. The ambiguities of the position of squatter have to be wrested away from premature closure while recognising that Irby himself is endlessly trying to contain his own meaning. I suggest that Irby is attempting to control the meaning of the murders as action through his stories by leaving the killings as the semi-final moment in both his narratives. His killing is described in the letter and the diary where other detail is changed. But his final action is writing to the Commissioner. But what happens with this next letter? What does it invent? What does it make possible?

**Writing to the Commissioner**

The letter is quickly sent to the Commissioner, in this case the Crown Lands Commissioner (Macdonald, 1845: CY102). Irby’s letter does not exist. MacDonald the Commissioner for Lands duly reports to Governor Gipps the murder of a shepherd on Irby’s property. There is no mention of the massacre and we can only guess whether that omission was the result of Irby or Macdonald’s action. The action of reporting only the shepherd’s death, and not those of the Aboriginal people, denies the massacre entry to official public history. The letter that Irby writes to the Commissioner is therefore most importantly an act of placement. It places Irby’s action and his letter within a bureaucratic regime of meaning which sanctions and makes sense of the subjective position of ‘settler’ defending his property and ‘punishing’ the (black) ‘fighting men’. This writing, like the bloodshed, is a devastating act of ‘showing their superiority’. As Gibbons (1994: 31) writes:

> the possession of a writing system allows for, even encourages, kinds of cognition, notably the spatial organisation of information so that it can be recorded in a material way, then classified, recorded and distributed and reconstituted.

The act of official reporting therefore becomes a powerful discourse which invents the identities of wronged pastoralist and most effectively the ‘land owner’ while creating and producing a system of legality based on written evidences and principles. As part of a capitalist economy these bureaucratic exchanges function as money. They invent and circulate and so give currency to particular colonial identities which are repeated and become embedded within a larger governmental discourse. Their purchasing power is immense. The importance that Irby grants the written report is clear: ‘I sat down at once to write’; ‘Windeyer started immediately with it’ for this, like the murder of Aboriginals, is a constitutive act of pastoralist identity. Writing makes him legal or at least accounts for the actions in a legal manner. The shepherd’s death is all and reporting it continues the pressure for more police, for more official protection ‘beyond the limits’.
Following the writing to the Commissioner, Irby bemoans the inconvenience he has suffered but he is also able to point to his increase in lamb production and records that shearing began the next day. These economic increases mean that the Aboriginal deaths are also effaced from the material economy; they failed to prevent production.

The diary account might also be read in relationship to the land economy. Irby wrote: ‘having now the means and will to punish them… we gave it to them pretty severely’. These deaths are opportunities in the same way that the land taking was an opportunity that required some means and certainly will. Irby is not at this moment a landowner. Like all ‘squatters’ he paid a small licence fee and agitated for the land to be put up for sale. His tenure depended upon it being surveyed and a licence being paid for each run but this was rarely adhered to at this time since surveying meant fees and one could simply pasture sheep all the while. If the law was strictly interpreted he was illegal but his temporary licence and status as a free gentleman gave him ‘real’ legality. ‘His’ land lay beyond the boundaries of settlement and, as such he was limited in how much stock and land he could immediately claim but these restrictions were generally ignored. And these ‘properties’ quickly out-produced in terms of wool and beef the officially ‘settled’ regions. Murdering Aboriginals—or more accurately ‘disappearing’ them since the murders were never officially reported—was a means by which this ambiguous land could be claimed as pacified and the will to do so established in the process. Aboriginals, as fellow British subjects, were already trespassing. Production of selves, of subjectivities, was inseparable from the production of ‘owned land’, of wool and of wheat.

Words like ‘will’ and ‘means’ are annoyingly obscure. They contrast vividly with Irby’s descriptions of the Aboriginals as ‘barbarous’ and even ‘Black’ in this context. Irby is able through the linguistic ‘fixing’—or articulation in Bhabha’s sense—of some Aboriginal people to represent them in a number of ways which all countenance his destruction of them (Bhabha, 1994:67). I understand the power of ambivalence to be the constant performance of belief that I see enacted in Irby’s writing. As he swings between often contradictory ‘stereotypical’ descriptions of the Aboriginal people he reveals a need to keep on manufacturing versions of the stereotype for it to keep its productive power as a basis from which to take murderous action. I see in these movements also a constant struggle with the desire to fix oneself, to become ‘unquestioned owner’ within a colonial project that could only ever be a constant vacillation between the known and unknown. Irby too has to become good cop, bad cop; a trained soldier responding to ‘fighting men’ and an upper class Englishman becoming settler in part by shooting trapped men, women and children—giving ‘it to them, pretty severely’.

Murder is perhaps the most powerful expression of ambivalence. It instantly transforms one set of meanings into another and is a powerful site of new meanings. It needs to be constantly performed and moves from site to site in an escalating effort to
control its meanings. Hence perhaps the rise of waves of violence as such stereotypical understandings of Aboriginal people and of ‘pioneers’ shift through the ‘settlement’ of Australia. It is from sites such as Bluff Rock that the new stereotypes of barbarous squatter and resistant Aboriginal arise. And ambivalence too—of course.

EMERGENCE

As stated before, the Memoirs of Edward and Algernon Irby were published in 1908. In the same year an ad was run in the Tenterfield Star, Irby’s local paper, which said:

Aboriginal Labour: Anyone wishing to engage full blooded or half caste aboriginal youths or girls for farm work or domestic service may do so on application to Sergeant Rogers, from whom all information may be obtained. The employee must clothe the aboriginal and pay them so much per week as prescribed by the Act (Wednesday, August 31, 1908).

In New England at least, some Aboriginal people were now a state organised labour force or at least represented as such. Further stories of that year in this paper (which did not mention the publication of Irby’s book) included accounts of the skill of Aboriginal stockmen, particularly in the north: ‘though they find any more settled occupation irksome’ (Tenterfield Courier, Friday, August 12, 1908). The local census was divided into Europeans, Asians and Chinese. Within the larger national arena the first title fight between a white and a black boxer was held and was won easily by the black boxer. White [sic] records that a Methodist minister prayed in response: ‘God grant that the defeat on Saturday may not be a sullen and solemn prophecy that Australia is to be outclassed and finally vanquished by these dark skinned people’ (1981:81). The ‘White Australia’ policy was in place and it expressed the evolutionary anchored belief in the power of whiteness as full of transformative possibilities, as able to lift up and carry onwards the national hopes.

In this year We of the Never Never is published as is Dorothy Mackellar’s My Country. Irby, having died in 1900, was already recorded in Australian Men of Mark (1889:371-4) as a squatter who accumulates a fortune and takes his place among ‘those men whose works will give a new nation to the world’. The Memoirs of Edward and Algernon Irby becomes therefore the record of a man who assisted in the bringing into being of the new Australian, the ‘Coming Man’ as depicted by White (1981:63-85). If the new man of 1908 is action-based, decent, virile and rides third-class then Irby represented a very different idea: that of the educated upper class man who provided the magistracy class in the ‘outback’ and established the values of the Government and their own particular class ethos. How was Irby’s book greeted and why was it published
When it was? Does it emerge as a valiant valedictory? Is it published at this time because his experiences of mutiny, land development, hostile Aboriginal people and mysterious deaths are now understood as grand adventures carried out by someone who had through private effort done good? Are his contradictory tales of how he shot Aboriginal people understood in 1908 as the necessary parental gloss while the pragmatic, hardworking ‘real’ man simply shoots when he is able? Does this only enhance his connection to the emerging ideal of the down to earth action man? How much of his diaries and/or letters were available to be read from 1840s to 1908 by friends and family? Does Irby’s ‘superiority’ in one action of an ongoing ‘guerilla warfare’ find any echoes in the representations of 1908? Is it most of all published because he is a successful (non-Aboriginal) ‘white man’? One way of challenging these questions further is to read Irby against Gunn, the Memoir against ‘We of the Never Never’ and see what very different versions of Aboriginality and ‘whiteness’ emerge.

White versus Knight? Reading Gunn and Irby

The feminine narration of Gunn insists that we engage to some extent with Irby’s memoir as a masculinised text. What are the differences? Gunn has accounts of organising Aboriginal domestic labour, records her problem with lack of dresses and begins the garden around the house. The classic ‘feminine’ touches are there. Irby records carving bedsteads, gardening, making small tables and organising and assisting on the larger projects of shearing shed, hut and Gunya production. Although there are gendered differences in these lists I would suggest that the place and the conditions under which they were carried out produced both Gunn and Irby more obviously as ‘settlers’ rather than distinctly feminine and masculine subjects.

Gunn almost always speaks as ‘we’, a queer amalgam of herself and husband. Her distinct femininity joins with the husband’s distinct masculinity to make a productive nationalist blur of a gender that worries about the right dress and what is ‘good form’. Campy overtones spill out of their performance of running an ‘outback’ station. Irby and Leonard are always riding to or from or being joined by Windeyer in an intimate, exclusive brotherhood. It is their non-Aboriginality and their land ‘owning’ status that produces what they do and how they do it. Their masculinity cannot be separated out from their colonising bodies. Both Gunn’s and Irby’s activities are centred about riding here, riding there, mustering, branding and selling. What is a man? what is a woman?— aren’t they both most of all non-Aboriginal? Becoming ‘Australians’? Isn’t it the accumulation and continuation of these sorts of actions, these sorts of exploitations, that invent the supposedly seamless history of the ‘white man’.

But Gunn’s text actually shows how doubtful Irby’s status as ‘white’ was. He worried about letting the shepherds in the kitchen in extreme downpours, he records no social relations with the shepherds at any time and sees no connection with them until
they emerge as named, pliable workers. Those who pass by are not uniformly to be welcomed as possible carriers of news but are considered on the whole as rather rough. This is not a man who would ride third class and such an idea reminds us of Irby’s distinctly class-based (perhaps ‘feminised’) categorisations. He is not white, he is English of a certain upper class. The stockmen whom Gunn records as ‘educating’ her would not be granted any familiarity in Irby’s words except as very occasionally providing amusing examples of Irish stupidity. Irby’s brotherhood was not with fellow whites but with fellow gentlemen. These different conditions and historical situation give rise to different representations of ‘hunting’ Aboriginal people.

The Never Never of Racist Representation

…after inquiring for the “education of the missus,” he added, with further winks and mystery, that it only needed a nigger hunt to round off her education properly...

The Maluka [Gunn’s husband] being more than willing to give his fair percentage (of old bullocks at corroboree time and winking at occasional cattle killing on the boundaries), a judicious hint from him was generally taken quietly and for the time discreetly obeyed, and it was a foregone conclusion that our ‘nigger hunt’ would only involve the captured with general discomfiture. ([Reprint] 1961: 140-141)

The underlying ‘joke’ of Gunn’s account of this attempt to surprise local Aboriginal people on land near the river, which was forbidden to them by non-Aboriginal land owners, is that all the surrounding Aboriginal people already knew of their party’s movement since one of the station workers, ‘Sambo’, had sent a smoke signal on the first day out. Time and time again in Gunn’s account, difficulties with Aboriginal labour are resolved by a judiciously friendly approach and never ever showing ‘them’ that you are frightened of anything. This is written against a backdrop of the Northern Territory where ‘red tape had been forgotten, but having a surplus supply of common sense on hand, it decided to use that in its place’ (Gunn, 1961:153). But what made their sense ‘common’? Exactly who shared their assumptions?

Irby reports no conversation, no anecdotes, based around any Aboriginal person except when he or Windeyer are in pursuit of a presumed guilty party or when he records the occasional order or presence of ‘Tommy’ whom we learn only later is Aboriginal. What the two accounts share across sixty years is the glossing over of the exact material conditions of Aboriginal workers. In 1844 these ‘conditions’ consisted of rations, occasionally money and often perhaps nothing since it is unrecorded and by 1908 it is difficult to discover that any great improvement had been made on this situation in the Northern Territory. Irby, however, had some dwindling access to assigned labour as
well, so there was no compunction to lobby for particular laws to have access to Aboriginal labour as in Western Australia or to begin a style of management that would necessarily retain Aboriginal labour. His silence on the subject, however, makes it difficult to be too certain that Aboriginal workers did not make up a larger number of the workforce than it may appear. To show or even suggest that it was (unpaid) Aboriginal labour that underscored both the squattocracy and the rise of nationalist ‘white’ myths is what can’t, (Never-Never) be written down. This is also something that is silenced by ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. The use of Iryb’s account in that context sustains a dichotomy between ‘settler’ and ‘blacks’ that is not born out by Iryb’s variety of relations. A part of this dichotomy is a presumption that ‘settlers’ worked and Aboriginal people did not.

A SHORT VOCABULARY LIST

There is already occurring in these three sections, ‘Memoirs of Massacre’, ‘Ambivalence and Massacre’ and ‘Emergence’ some slippage in terms and I would like to look at this for a moment. What does it mean or has it meant to say that someone killed, murdered or massacred? It is important to be aware of the number of ways in which such words were employed.

Massacre:  (OF-Old French before 1400) Comes from *macecler* to butcher.

1. the unnecessary, indiscriminate killing of a number of human beings as in barbarous warfare or persecution, or for revenge or plunder.
2. a general slaughter of human beings
3. to kill indiscriminately or in a massacre

And in particular, in Australia, the ‘settlers’ went:

‘blackbird shooting’,
formed a ‘black line’,
encouraged and organised ‘expeditions’
formed a ‘bush party’ and
took ‘decisive measures’.

None of these definitions gives the sense of a slaughter against unarmed opposition, the sense of entrapment ‘beneath the rocks’ and the unstoppable ‘punishment’. Never a ‘massacre’ to Iryb; always a massacre now. Massacre is the political re-naming of an event that was made possible both by Aboriginal people’s refusal to forget and the subsequent productions that came out of those memories (Reynolds, 1991; Elder, 1988
etc). This has also enabled further re-readings, or fleshing out of sometimes named places eg Slaughter Creek, Blackfellows Ridge, Niggers Leap etc by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals. But ‘massacre’s’ incorporation into history is also a way in which such things become foreign and solidified. This sort of massacre was against a particular people, at a particular moment in colonial history. The waves of racist massacres where vigilante groups swept along rivers and roads through the country seeking out all Aboriginal people were happening concurrently with these much more localised, relatively contained acts. Are they all massacres? Or is it worthwhile to attempt some differentiation? Not to rescue any of them but to insist on the complicated nature of these regions ‘beyond the limits’ where only some things could occur. These deaths happened here and happened there but they did not happen everywhere. So massacre remains a difficult term, useful for its naming and power of connection but potentially dangerous in its collapse of events into a single idea of what happened. It is also complicated by my use of it as a construct of a particular event circulated by a tourist leaflet and its most literal usage as the slaughter of human beings. There remain massacres and massacres. But it is useful to keep questioning when precisely these events were able to be called a ‘massacre’.

**Murder:**

1. The unlawful killing of a human being by an act done with the intention to kill or to inflict grievous bodily harm, or with reckless indifference to human life

2. Colloq. an uncommonly laborious or difficult task

Unlawful? Kercher writes: ‘The legal position of Aborigines was determined slowly and hesitantly through both physical and verbal conflicts’. New South Wales was assumed to have been organised into existence on the basis of *terra nullius*, that is settlement of an empty land. Therefore Aboriginal people became legal subjects from the moment that occupation began and should have had access to the protection of the law. But this was problematic since Aboriginal people were unable to give evidence in court since they could not swear on the bible and it was assumed they would be, according to Atkins, ‘wholly ignorant’ of the court procedures. Richard Atkins, second Judge Advocate of NSW, then went on to suggest that the only practical course was ‘to pursue and punish them when they deserved it’ (Kercher, 1995:6). The fact that Irby and Windeyer were pursuing and killing Aboriginal people six years after the Myall Creek Massacre in the same general area points perhaps to the ongoing belief that to kill in vengeance of a white man (Robinson) was allowed, if not exactly legal. That the Myall Creek Massacre resulted in the (unpopular) hanging of some of the perpetrators was a direct result perhaps of it not being a ‘punitive expedition’. Those massacred at Myall Creek were ‘station blacks’ attacked by non-Aboriginals from a different area, who in possible
imitation of Major Nunn’s campaigns, were riding and shooting indiscriminately across country (Milliss 1994:274-322). Although in legal terms ‘there could be no corporal or capital punishment without trial except in self defence or in the heat of battle in a period of martial law’ (Kercher, 6:1995), the settler culture seemed to allow that killing Aboriginal people on one’s own ‘property’ in response to a death meted out by Aboriginal people was to all intents ‘legal’. The Myall Creek Massacre was one of a series of random raids by ex-convict workers, who swept across other people’s properties where Aboriginal people were slaughtered out of hand regardless of whether or not they were workers on particular stations, children or unknown. One of the resulting carnages was reported by a manager who noticed the absence of the ‘station blacks’. With the assistance of a non-participating non-Aboriginal witness they were able to make a case that meant that some of those massacrers were hanged as murderers. No such circumstance made it possible for Irby, Windeyer, Connor and Weaver to be criminalised. Irby in fact became an early magistrate, someone who decided what was ‘legal’. Someone who continued to decide punishments.

**Killing:**

1. to deprive (any living creature or thing) of life in any manner, cause the death of, slay
2. to destroy, to do away with, extinguish: *kill hope*

At home, that is on our farm, my mother would sometimes check with my father whether or not he had put the ‘killers’ in. These were a selection of sheep (not lambs—far too valuable!) from which my father would select one to kill for our fortnightly meat consumption. Of course it was my father who was the killer and the sheep the about-to-be-killed but this linguistic irony? confusion? cover-up? is connected in my mind to Irby and the un-named Aboriginal people as killers. Was the shepherd, Robinson, ‘killed’ by Aboriginal people or was he ritually punished? Was it the Law that killed Robinson but fearful, greedy anarchy that killed that Law’s officers? Was Robinson’s death in effect an act of incorporation into Aboriginal culture? This is after all what Irby claims for himself—that these killings were a ‘punishment’ to murderers, that he was sanctioned to act and so the group was posthumously ‘civilised’. But the scale of his killings is so much less precise, so much further away from what we might identify as the rituals and practices of colonial law. In his lack of discrimination he becomes a killer of women and children as well as what he may have perceived as the ‘guilty’ men.
And what of more ordinary words?
Go over the gap
Shove off
Go take a jump
Take a leap
Do all these mean?
Go kill yourself
Before I kill you?

View from Edward Irby's balcony in Scott Street of Gaol and Police Barracks.
THE DISAPPEARING WINDEYER
WINDEYER

Who was the ‘Windeyer’ mentioned again and again in Irby’s letters and diaries? In terms of this project Windeyer was also a killer of Aboriginal people, he participated and initiated many ‘drives’ and ‘expeditions’ including the incident that is set up as ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. It is Windeyer who is sent for as soon as it is suspected that Robinson is dead, Windeyer with Irby who ‘determined on pursuing the murderers’ and Windeyer who assures Irby after the event that he (Irby) had ‘no choice’. Yet the tourist leaflet ignores him and his public coupling with the event is almost completely shrouded. Who was he? What was he?

One of my early interests in Windeyer came with the discovery that in the very year that Thomas Windeyer of Deepwater was mounting expeditions and organising the deaths of Aboriginal people his cousin Richard Windeyer was expanding his legal practice, joining the Aboriginal Protection Society and writing ‘On the Rights of the Aborigines’. At first these read like two opposites: the educated and urbane Richard and the murdering, perhaps less educated Thomas. But their fathers took up ‘Deepwater’ together, at least in name, and in many ways, as I attempted to show in the section on shepherds, Richard’s originary myths of a particularly Australian situation that specifically denied Aboriginal people a right to land provided the legal-sounding arguments which, when joined with the tactics of massacre and warfare, set up a ‘government’ of genocide. He had also been a part of the defence team for the Myall Creek Massacres. But Richard Windeyer belongs to another story because it is the far more obscure Thomas Windeyer whom I am trying to ‘discover’. Why and how did he disappear from the ‘Bluff Rock Massacre’?

The Man and His Men

Windeyer, Connor and Weaver; these are the names left out of ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’ and so they should be. If the scale and spectacle of The Single Massacre is to be sustained then the idea of a mass of men hurtling after a single group of Aboriginal people has to be perpetuated. Admitting that Irby’s account states there were only four in the ‘expedition’ provides a different picture. ‘Our party consisted of Windeyer, his two servants [Weaver and Connor] and myself’ and ‘I fired off for the two men to join us’ (1908:88-89).

Thomas Windeyer was twenty four years old at this time. He died five years later, on another Windeyer property in north east Queensland on the Dawson River when he accidentally shot himself in the thigh while mounting his horse. His father carefully reports in his diary that although Thomas was shot on the 6th August 1849, he lingered until the 28th of September 1850 ‘when it pleased the Almighty to take him to himself. He was buried at the back of Mr Stephens Hut and the Grave fenced in’. This means that
Thomas ‘lingered’ for over a year. If, as Jallard (1997) and Aries (1974) suggest, the Victorians from the wealthy classes desired a slow death, in the company of family and servants throughout which the almost departed could reflect on their life and prepare for the deeply religious exit then Thomas got at least one thing right. I wonder who nursed and comforted him? An unnamed Aboriginal servant? unnamed woman servant? unnamed wife of Mr Stephens? or Mr Stephens himself? And in the end the elements of his death seem to hold within themselves the quiddity of colonialism: staying overnight, the horse, the gun and the final fence.

Thomas Windeyer’s position at Deepwater Station seems difficult to define. He was not the manager or overseer. This position was occupied by Collins whom Thomas Windeyer’s father, Archibald, advises not to take his family to New England. This is some indication that Collins was considered to have a family of some sensibilities and is in contrast to the living arrangements of the labourers as evidenced in the reports of rations for their families (Windeyer, A 25th July 1839). Collins, however, was not a clear or entirely literate writer and in comparison to Thomas’s well scripted Station Diary entries, could nearly be considered illiterate. One of Thomas’s main functions was probably therefore to provide an account, clearly written, of what happened at the station to his father.

‘But they just couldn’t hide the genocide’ (Archie Roach)
The station diary attributed in the catalogue to Archibald Windeyer but which must have been written by Thomas, who was actually there at the time, begins in 1845 one year after the particular massacre that formed the source for the story of ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. But this was nevertheless still a time of bloody reprisals and skirmishes. What happened to previous diaries? What do we learn of Thomas Windeyer from his entries? In the three years covered by the diary there is no mention of Aboriginal people except to write as part of a list: ‘”so “ so “ blacks employed’ (25 February, 1846). This is the Windeyer whom Irby reports could understand and make himself understood in the language of the group they were pursuing, Windeyer of ‘Windeyer’s blacks’ and Windeyer who responds so quickly to Irby’s request for help. But in this diary there is only page after page of money, work and weather:

Engaged Connor and White to Shear,
Collins an order for one pound ten to pay Herring for horse, John McPherson 12- per week to take
Stephen Fury’s flock Samuel MacMillan washer 10- per week in the meantime,
Frank Smith Died. Took possession of his horse saddle and bridle to pay the Doctors bill and other debts to the station.
Buried Frank. 1 chest of tea returned from Bloxsomes with 89lb owing 13lb (Windeyer, 15 Oct, 1846)
Is there is no need to mention the horror since it is all about him? Or is he more like Eichmann with his job to be done with all its banally evil detail? No need for Windeyer to mention the raids and retaliations he organised since they were such a part of daily life? Or is it a matter of form—this is a *Station* Diary, and so there is no place for organisational detail, even day-to-day activity that didn’t have a particular cost, monetary or labour, attached? He does record the building of a bell: ‘6th July—At the side of the woolshed put up the bell post and bell’ (Windeyer, July, 1845). This bell is recorded by others as being particularly used to warn of Aboriginal attack: ‘at Deepwater station the hasty clanging of a bell denoted that the watchman had spotted aborigines in the vicinity and generally the sound of gunfire during the day was taken to signify an aboriginal attack’ (Walker, 1966:28). But there is no purpose given here for the bell, simply (!) bald detail after bald detail. Did the larger operation that was Deepwater (compared to Irby’s Bolivia) with its extra workers and families not demand the same attention to every possibility of Aboriginal presence? Did Thomas Windeyer have every reason to be less fearful of ruin brought on by Aboriginal people? Was he being careful or strategic?

There was an ‘official’ massacre on Deepwater some months after Irby’s when Commissioner Fry (from the coastal region, not New England) and three troopers tracked a group of Aboriginal people he held responsible for the murder of a shepherd and dispersal of a sheep flock, up from the Clarence River to Deepwater where in a ‘deep brushy ravine’ they shot ‘five children, four women and seven men’ (Walker, 30:1966). This was reported by Fry to the Colonial Secretary on the 15th April 1845 (Col Sec Corr.45/3041) and Thomas’s diary begins in October 1845, some six months after this event. So there is never a particular massacre or ‘expedition’ recorded by others which allows me to show spectacular oppositions between Irby’s or the Colonial Secretary’s records and Windeyer’s. These other reports, do however, suggest very clearly a time in which there was a very active Aboriginal presence and resistance and yet day after day, for three years, only a single entry. This is a point of high frustration. Silence is always a part of any project but this sort of silence, amongst so much minor detail, is galling. And although there is this particular erasure of Aboriginal people it is not as if Thomas himself disappears. Many of the entries have a deliberate gentle humour that supplies something of a mood or atmosphere of the day.

20th May ’46—raining all day, very miserable, took to our pipes
13th Jan ’46—Mrs Weaver increased her family at precisely 15 and one half minutes to one
19th Oct ’45—Offered them (Connor and White) 9/4 perscor [to shear] said they would consider about it
‘ie’ will not take it

So it isn’t fair to say that this is bald detail but, perhaps like Irby’s erasure of the wives and other women associated with his workforce, Aboriginal people disappear from
Windeyer’s account except for the single moment when they are employed and even that appears to be close to unspeakable.

25th Feb 1846 "so" so blacks employed

I’ve given this a separate line—I want you to appreciate its importance to my project. Let me try it a little bigger:

25th Feb 1846 "so" so blacks employed

and bolder

25th Feb 1846 "so" so blacks employed;

for this is the ‘original’, primary sauced consummation of Irby’s ‘punishment’ and having the ‘means and will’. In this half-arsed entry the ‘Bluff Rock Massacre’ is born as non-Aboriginal people discover what can’t be written. This is the doppelgänger of the letter that Irby claimed he wrote to the Commissioner. Irby’s words could still walk on their way to the sense of his time. He could write to the Commissioner, he could be assured that he ‘had no choice’ and his grossly wounded words become History. But matter does not disappear and the strips torn out of his words, the ethical, feeling, sacrifices made to give them ‘sense’, pile up until more words can’t be written through the miasmas of emerging ‘whiteness’. And so we have elisions and the unsayable and what Windeyer writes:

25th Feb 1846 "so" so blacks employed.

This entry follows a list of the full names of non-Aboriginal workers and the exact rates at which they will be paid. The ditto marks are therefore referring to an impossibility. They are not repeating the conditions of the previous entry and yet the implied repetition bizarrely presumes this. It is a bad imitation of repetition since the conditions are not the same. To use Baudrillard’s phases of the image, does this ‘mask and pervert a basic reality’ or ‘mask the absence of a basic reality’ (1983:10)? The unspecified number of ‘blacks’, the absence of detail about their wages and set tasks makes this a very different entry and yet the effort is there to make the entry fit. It is a much more originary stagger in the Australian language than the landscape of endless repetition and overdetermination within which Baudrillard is working and its repercussions are still being felt. If you are killing people, if you are taking their labour but not paying them and if you are doing this on a reasonably large scale not only to
isolated individuals—what are you doing? Perhaps you are a slave holder and can enter their names in your stock books? But what if these same people refuse to stay under your control, arrive to be 'employed' at certain times and then move back or away? What if their wholly autonomous lives have incorporated just the bits they want of you and no more? Are you in an unspeakable, unwriterly relationship to them? You are not in an equal relationship; this word has no meaning in this terrain where, unlike them, you are refusing to move back, or away or simply on, and how could equality account for your fears, your bell erection and the murders you commit? You attempt to taxonomise Aboriginal people, you recognise that your treatment of this particular group has some similarities at certain moments with 'employment' but you can't quite complete the movement, you can't name them, you can't list their tasks and you can't itemise their payments. Words fail because your system fails—you are not actually employing them, you are approximating a categorisation, you are squeezing the racism into the rational.

Why does Windeyer take this moment to include Aboriginal people? What is it about the repetition, the toting up that prevents him from exclusion? Does the listing, the itemisation carry its own insistence on completion, its own totalistic ethic that admits this tiny point? It is useful I think to contemplate lists.

Lists were the lifeblood of the squatter-devised community. The entire Station's sustenance depended upon the correct detailing of what was needed until the next dray brought supplies. The Stations constantly borrowed from one another as Irby also records and they were in a constant relationship of paid and owing with one and other. It is the record of these small exchanges that incorporates these stations into a new community 'beyond the boundaries'. Upon primitive lists comes non-Aboriginal society. But can you list everything?

Windeyer seems to have personified 'the station' in a particular sort of way. Remember when Frank dies, it is not Windeyer who is owed but 'The Station'. This is indicative of Windeyer's particular situation as son of the 'owner' rather than the 'owner'. He is running an account and that account is the station. But this doesn't really help explain his minute admission of Aboriginal labour since even if they were merely being paid mutton or flour or bad tea, these payments would still have been important enough to record, for this was a usual currency and had real repercussions for supply lists. Could these Aboriginal workers have been forced? Paid nothing in kind but granted some non-material good like freedom to travel or...? Might this Aboriginal group have assisted because they were asked? Could they have assumed some sort of reciprocity? protection? It is easy to see why Windeyer disappears from the 'Bluff Rock Massacre'—according to his words he was never there or anywhere like it.
Deepwater Station
This was the home of Thomas Windeyer. When he was there, he and the Irbys initially lived in a small hut of two rooms. But now it is a station homestead with its empty worker’s cottages that gesture back to a time when it was the cynosure of a local aristocracy. The children of Deepwater station still go to private schools and its mistress is the daughter of a line that stretches back to the Windeyers but they have to move in an ever decreasing circle of people for this to mean something good. Deepwater, the village, some five kilometres from the station, has a population of 300 and is closer to Glen Innes than to Tenterfield. Its postcode was found by the last census to have the lowest incomes in NSW. There are two pubs and a primary school and when the wealthier boys come back from their boarding schools to go back on the farm they screw around with the local girls. Perhaps they promise everything; perhaps they promise nothing. They usually remember to marry well. The children of the village leave home for university, or a job ‘in town’ (Glen Innes) or Oxford Street. Smallness doesn’t bring diversity together but simply exaggerates the divisions.

Weaver and Connor
And what of Weaver and Connor, Windeyer’s ‘servants’ (Irby Oct 1844)? Their opportunity to be written into ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’ is limited. Weaver couldn’t write. His mark is recorded in lieu of a signature in the diary of Archibald Windeyer (Thomas’s father) beneath the conditions of employment:

David Weaver is to pay half his passage money as per agreement, 10 pounds of which I charged him now, the remaining half he is to pay next year
1 years wages Dec 1838 20 pounds
Gratuity I give him voluntary & a promise for good conduct 5 pounds
I advanced him for clothes, boots, washing and friends passage (Windeyer, 1838)

So Weaver had been on Deepwater Station since the very beginning of it. He was not bonded labour, he may have been known to the Windeyers in England and he was invested in by Archibald Windeyer. Weaver also had a wife and a family. We don’t know their names but we have Thomas Windeyer’s entry from 1846, 13th January: ‘Mrs Weaver increased her family at precisely fifteen and one half minutes to one, ten o’clock pm’. How could a birth be both at ten and at one or did he enter it at ten o’clock?. And Connor? Connor was ‘engaged’: ‘Engaged Connor and White to shear’ (Windeyer, 1838) and ‘Engaged two other men’ [one of which is Connor] (Irby, 1908:36). Another squatting neighbour, Robertson records in one of his lists:
Connor 21/2 days 11 shillings and 3 pence
Black boy 2 days 9 shillings 0 pence
(1842-5:17)

Next to next door therefore appears to be paying at least one ‘Black boy’ what looks like equal wages while denying him a particular name that would mark another sort of inclusion. Connor is not listed as bonded labour but neither is he mentioned as having any particular arrangement with the Windeyers so he was probably a free immigrant or ticket-of-leave man who worked about the area during shearing and was otherwise more or less attached to Deepwater. I’m not certain if there was a presumed intimacy in Irby’s description of Connor and Weaver as ‘Windeyer’s men’. Irby refers to Weaver as Windeyer’s servant but to Connor as ‘his man’ (Oct 15th 1844). Does this suggest they were particularly chosen by Windeyer for this task? Moments before the massacre Weaver and Connor were left with instructions to tie the horses and to ‘follow in case they heard us fire, we promising to return in case they fired’ (Irby, 1844:Oct). When Irby knows that the Aboriginal people are trapped beneath the rocks on which he is standing, he ‘fired off’ for the two men to join him. Weaver and Connor come. The not too many meanings of gunfire. One shot in the air means come, sustained shots means slaughter. If I told you to stand in the middle of the road would you do it? If I shot in the air who would come? At one shot Weaver and Connor come up. They haven’t seen the single Aboriginal man run down; they are not among the ‘natives’ dogs; they have to start shooting as soon as they arrive at the spot, firing their shots into a group of people trapped below them. Windeyer’s men.

WINDEYER AND THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING WHITENESS

The idea of whiteness, though at times shadowy and at times explicitly addressed has been a constant subtext of all the writings so far. I have been very careful to employ the expression ‘white’ only on certain occasions and in certain contexts which I believe are relevant. In most of the texts and contexts that I am looking at the division is much more clearly Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rather than black and white. Naturally these temporary folds can’t prevent the incessant spillage of naming. Within the boundaries of the term Aboriginal do I include ‘wild blacks’ and ‘Tommy’ and what of the ‘black trackers’ and Native Police who assisted in the capture of and shot other Aboriginal people? Are they a new sort of Aboriginal person or non-Aboriginal or…? Should there be a colonial nomenclature dependent upon who was shot and who wasn’t? In this way bushrangers, some Aboriginal people and escaped convicts might form a group to be contrasted with Native Police, other armed forces, pastoralists, farmers, farm labourers
(which always included Aboriginal people) etc. If we expanded this to include hangings we could include solicitors, judges, legal systems etc. ‘Black’ might be useful as a means of acknowledging early relationships that were formed between African convicts and Kanaks, Massacarans and Aboriginal people, but what of Johnston the ‘black’ or mulatto African convict who was hanged for his role in the Myall Creek Massacre? Wasn’t he much more a settler or labourer than ‘black’? I am making this judgement on the basis that he killed and was hanged on that basis.

Does killing with others invent a particularly virulent identity? Is that how one became a settler or labourer ‘outside the limits’? Or does murder join those subjects with the meta category of terrible ‘killer’ as the Myall Creek murderers inclusion in the ‘The Chronicle of Crime, or the New Newgate Calendar being A Series of Memoirs and Anecdotes of Notorious Characters’ would suggest? And don’t the oppositions of ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’, ‘black’ and ‘white’ continue the erasure of the immense diversity of languages and cultures that existed and continue to exist within those strange, wandering headings?

But looking at the context of the 1840s and yet writing on the postfeminist, postcolonial wordscape, I want to present whiteness as a partial solution to the problem of Windeyer. Windeyer’s diary textually disappears Aboriginal people but he also reduces himself to the advancer of monies, the recorder of debts and the smoker of pipes. This reminds me of the work of Frankenberg (1993) and the familiar experiment wherein when a group is asked to write down the ways it which it would identify itself, we invariably list the things that mark our distinctness: lesbian (if we dare), black, woman, working class and fail to identify the middle classness, Anglo Saxonness and whiteness that are so powerful they have made themselves ubiquitous so that we cannot see the privilege these things grant us because they are naturalised. And of course the nature of this privilege is itself invisible. There are no funds called ‘white’ funds (and yet most money goes to whites), no Minister for White affairs (and yet most Ministers are white). My privilege is my anonymous whiteness.

Can you be white only when you disappear? Perhaps in 1845 you wrote if you occupied a particular class position; taking time off white to write. If you didn’t say anything about anyone then you were really white? Did being ‘white’ rather than ‘non-Aboriginal’ mean that you sacrificed the curiosity of engagement and saw no point in describing what was happening about you because you were so implicated in that system? So is white is nothing and yet its everything. It’s a blank canvas, meantedime and covered with the possibilities of becoming: lesbian, poor, disabled, Prime Minister, James Bond, Doris Day etc. Whiteness is unlike other categories because of its very mobility. Here it couples with middleclassness and abled; there with lesbian and professional. But its mobility is not only as one part of some concatenation but in the way it passes as process. It can be a legal system, a way of working, a dress code, a bank or a
library. There is nothing to which it necessarily refers (to use Halperin’s thought on queer), for context is all.

We have to read Windeyer through the systems he invents, as he seems to read and write himself. A smoker of pipes, a recorder of monies, a character put in recordable control. What might this suggest about whiteness?

**They Do It With Mirrors**

When thinking about the ways in which whiteness works three particular images come to mind. The first is a Leunig cartoon that I saw years ago which has a figure contemplating the first glass clad skyscraper, than another and another skyscraper is mirror tiled until every building is a mere reflection of other mirrors with only shadowy lines between them. The second is the memorial to the Vietnam war in Washington which has its lists of names on a black polished surface which mirrors back the faces of those looking at them. The third image is that of mirrored fish scales. The more light that is thrown on their scales, which act as tiny mirrors, the less they are able to be seen. My suggestion is that whiteness works in all of these ways.

The first point is the conceit that ‘white’ is not a colour but is best understood as light. This is to extend Dyer’s (1997) work in relation to film to the larger colonial project. The invasion/settlement of Australia, the coming of ‘whites’, was not represented as one colour meeting another in which there would inevitably be some mingling of the colours (which of course did happen) but rather the coming of a metaphorical light which was variously called massacre, invasion, civilisation and sometimes religion. Unlike mere colours, light was itself responsible for colour. It invented, distorted and reflected what was seen.

‘Settlement’, government, economy and education were the mirrored tiles with which light reflected back upon itself. There were so many tiles that it was impossible to find the original source of light since it had long since been multiply reflected and refracted. Light not only reflected the good but the bad in its multiple images and when an injustice was seen further light would be thrown upon the subject until it too reflected the right colour or aspect or goodness. An example of such an effect might be the Westminster informed legal system. But while good and bad, justice and injustice could be seen on the tiles, the more light that was shone, the more the tiles themselves disappeared and what was light and what was tile became confused. Within whiteness people are institutions and systems, the language is strange. The task with Windeyer’s diary is to attempt to wrest ‘whiteness’ away from its normalising effects. But what is white and what is patriarchal, what is white and what imperialism?

Have I reached my own end point where I simply can’t see what he does because I do it, or have it, too? Am I writing white? This is the ahistorical threat of whiteness, its all encompassing power to get me, to give me something I may not even want. I can’t see
the white except when it is contrasted with its own shadows but there is often too much light for shadows to occur. I can’t quite believe I am white.
Chorus moans: GET REAL!

EVERYONE IS BLACK AT A DISTANCE

Does this happen to everyone? Is there some point when the writer loses control of the thesis? At this point, in trying to write about Windeyer through whiteness when whiteness is something that right now, right here, needs to be constructed, deconstructed, run over, pulled about, and finally revealed: I fail. My idea of collapsing the artificial distinction between past and present has come home to roost. Irby was so identifiable. Our mutual textuality permitted our relationship but Windeyer simply is in a way that I ‘simply’ am. It is a crisis of excruciating self-consciousness, of grisly overidentification. I sit and write in a world removed from others. I drink quietly on my verandah. I can list what I do. I can show you my bank account. On a miserable day I suck in Schwarzenegger for comfort. Windeyer has left me a way of life. The ordering and the recording, the white patterning are all here in my head. But my white patterns record how land was taken, my white patterns show how my own overblown love of the land I grew up on is now doubtful and ugly and undecided. When I write down how much I am paying, it is never enough. When I think of the nation station it will always be in debt, always owing. This is the list of lists. But now I’m thinking of myself as a boat over listing on the water, nearly drowning. And now that image of the tragic boat, alone on a vast sea (make it dark as well), looks so stupid, ludicrous, so egotistical—Get ON with it! But I can’t without imagining and everything I think seems wrong. I am a secret agent, I am a sixth man about to blow up whiteness. I am a good mole, I’ll travel far, I’ll carry bombs—I am not afraid. But this action shit sounds like another list of what I’ll do and where I’ll go. Beginning, Middle and End. Action lists. Narration lists. I can’t act outside of them. I will sit in my room and hold my finger on the key forever, something soothing, something that won’t offend something like this

I’ve just opened my eyes and I see the zeds starting on the new line.
I wanted them to start right after ‘this’ but the computer reads them as a single word and insists that as a single word it just won’t go. These crappy, crappy, zeds—they are so straight, so utterly straight, so incredibly neat. They even look as if they make sense.
They bring me unexpected joy. The lines look neat, they contain letters but THEY HAVE NO MEANING! This is a triumph. This is a legal system that can’t make ‘sense’ of
forced removals and massacres, which insists it is all right to continue to justify the
taking of land if one connection was broken; it can't believe in renewed connections or
old connections. These are the zeds of a government who can't say they're sorry, of a …
But what do I mean has no 'meaning'. Everything has meaning. This is one of my
credos. This is the fascination of Bluff Rock massacre, it means so many things. But that
is the problem with the zeds. They are over attached to their zedness, they insist on
themselves until they become nonsense. And this is what 'white' law does, over attaches
to the single meaning of itself until it stops doing what it once imperfectly did which was
to stand for the possibility of justice. But what about Windeyer? What about his sense?
His zeds are his entries, which utterly insist on their own ordinariness to the point of
madness. It is not only Aboriginal resistance and Aboriginal 'writing back' which makes
them mad but the many ways in which people wanted to be white. It is Irby that makes
Windeyer look most strange.

**Everyone is black at a distance (Mark II)**

I am sitting in a restaurant in Chinatown (Sydney) with my white partner, my brown
nephews and their white mother. The Australian Chinese (?) *maître de* comes over and
asks if things are fine and then says, touching one of my nephews head’s, "Lovely hair,
Where did you get them?" I have no actual memory of what we said in response but the
uncensored version would have been—'I 'got' them from my sister and brother-in-law,
they are a part of you turkey etc. We probably said their father was Zimbabwean. But
I was furious. Aunt Rage? Race Rage? How could anyone so simply draw a line where
there was none? And on the basis of hair or colour? There was no intention to offend that
I could honestly see. The man may have intended a less loaded 'where are they from'
rather than the capitalist, buying, acquisitiveness implicated in his use of 'get'? And what
did it mean to be experiencing this in a 'Chinese' restaurant, against whom the fears of
miscegenation and cheap labour were given full reign by an ungrateful nation? The work
of Chow (1991) and Ang (1995) warns us to never be complacent about who and what
might constitute 'Chineseness' and at the moment of this event, in a stark choice between
'white' and 'black'—what was I? What was he? If there was a colour to my Auntydom—
was it black?

This conditional 'blackness' is very different from Windeyer's 'blacks'. In his case it
is not the colour but the plural which unquestionably indicates that he is referring to
Indigenous Australians and not other labourers with black skin. His father had in fact
employed at least one convict with black skin (Windeyer A, 1838-91) who may have
worked at 'Deepwater', but he was not a 'black'. 'Blacks' therefore always meant more
than skin. In Windeyer's case the name meant labour, threat, people he could shoot,
people to be possibly paid. It would be tempting to suggest that in the categorisation of
Aboriginal people as 'blacks' we have the originary gesture towards all others as 'whites'
(even if they were black). In this way there could be an argument that Aboriginal people through people like Windeyer invented ‘white’ Australians. But as Irby’s differentiations show us there was never anything stable or undifferentiated about the category of non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal people. And yet Windeyer disappears Aboriginal people from his text and yet kills and ambiguously employs Aboriginal people. Under these conditions, precisely in his lack of differentiation, in the failure to admit any particularity, isn’t ‘white Australian’ born?

It is ridiculous
(Everyone is black at a distance) (Mark III)

When Richard, my black Zimbabwean brother-in-law arrived in Australia he did not leave their Erskinville squat for a week. David Gundy, a completely innocent, but most importantly for the purposes of the police, Aboriginal man, had been shot dead in his home. The police knew, you see, what an Aboriginal man looked like. Richard thought that what had happened in his original home in South Africa was happening again—here. When my sister told me, I laughed, we laughed. Of course there were occasional injustices, gross injustices, but the system was OK, the edifice was stable. We were stable.

And then one day at afternoon tea, Richard began to talk about the KKK Sauna which he had passed in Anzac Parade. How could they have something like that? I bet you won’t find many black people in there etc. I was certain this was nonsense. I vaguely knew it to be a gay sauna and therefore not only OK but good. A gay venue surviving outside the ghetto; the name referred to something else for sure.

My girlfriend at the time was the daughter and grand daughter of white liberal South Africans. At a time when we were all trying to Free Nelson Mandela, she would occasionally do her impersonation of an Afrikaans accent. We laughed and laughed—it was so ridiculous. Richard said ‘They are cruel people’. He didn’t get the jokery. They were not ridiculous to him.

A few years later it was my turn to be with Richard in a system of shifts that had gone on all day. He was in a coma, part of the diaspora of HIV, and I was waiting with him. I was holding his hand and watching him breathe when his breath got a little more even and he died. There was nothing as noisy as an angel appearing, there was a complete touchable silence. Our hands felt utterly united, completely alive. The whole room was pure stillness. How had this happened? How did it come about that this man, miles from where he had grown up, should find me at his death? And why should I have had the gift of that atmosphere, that extraordinary room? It was ridiculous.
Death By Implication

Windeyer’s records are the very mark of a man at work. The expected nineteenth century sentiment for death is absent, no feeling, no emotional cost, no curiosity, simply death and tea. The fair dinkum, laconic, bushman?

24th Frank Smith Died, took possession of his horse saddle and bridle to pay the Doctor’s bill and other debts due to the station
25th Buried Frank 1 chest of tea returned from Bloxsomes w(ith) 89 pound, owing 13 pound.

Frank Smith’s death isn’t given a full stop. The fact of dying is absolutely conjoined with a series of actions. Selling his possessions and paying his debts are as textually significant in this entry as the final expiration. Windeyer has learnt to record a human life in terms of debts and dues and commingles the experience with other debts and dues. Assigned labour was paid in rations. Exact amounts of flour, mutton, moist sugar, tea, soap and tobacco were given according to the number of children or the presence of a wife and in exchange, a predictable amount of labouring energy was required. Why couldn’t Windeyer write: ‘Blacks killed, 45 cartridges expended’? Or given that Irby suggests that he was mostly unsuccessful in his pursuit of ‘wild’ Aboriginal people, why couldn’t he write ‘Rode after blacks’ or anything that showed the presence, friendly or otherwise of Aboriginal people. But we have only ‘”’ blacks employed’. One answer is that Windeyer was not responsible for Aboriginal people. He was not their Master and their lives could not be accounted for within his system of ledgers. He had no set rates of exchange for the labour their bodies produced, he had no recourse to the magistrates when they disobeyed him. He couldn’t demand they be flogged or fined or… But perhaps his ledger style offers one sort of translation he might have understood.

‘Land taken from Aboriginal people to make ‘Deepwater’ 54, 400 acres
Destruction of food resources 1 shilling per acre
Refusal to obey laws of country, treason, perjury, trespass etc 1 pound per day of offence.
Water " " per acre
Pasture " " per acre Culture " " per acre
Murder " " per body?
Employment of Aboriginal people " " per day.

But what an enormous entry this would have to be. Windeyer owned as far as the eye could see but he had power over as much as the hand could write. Frank Smith died, debts and all. But no Aboriginal people did, not by Windeyer’s hand; thick ink on thick paper.
The Rock on the Edge of My Skin

As a monument to Windeyer—to what wasn’t recorded, what wasn’t, can’t be, seen—Bluff Rock seems very appropriate. There is a warning in its silence as there is in Windeyer’s diary. If I understand my position to be wholly stable, able to be listed and recorded and shown, then I will fail to articulate a sense of ‘whiteness’ that shows how I have been shaped by the colonial experience and implicated in the destruction of some Aboriginal people but how I have also been given the possibilities of mutuality and connection. Windeyer even more than Irby is ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’. He is the single storied silence of the place. He has invented a monolithic whiteness, whereas I acknowledge its instability and contextuality. We both belong to Bluff Rock. But in my belonging I am trying to live, as Minnie Bruce Pratt suggests, ‘on the edge of my skin’ (Pratt, 1984:18).

I have arrived at a familiar point in postcolonial, postfeminist, thought. That is, at the invented, historically contingent meaning of an identity like ‘white’. One sort of final positionality is summed up in the sentence, ‘Women (as a unified category) don’t exist but it is (sometimes) useful (strategically) to believe they do’. Pratt (like Foucault) is committed to a project of the self that is always expanding, always attempting the limit experience that makes new identities, new discourses possible. I have made Pratt and Foucault suddenly sound like overblown colonials except that they would also claim that there is no straight, progressive path to such an endeavour—rather, a constant bursting across or negotiation or simply acknowledgment of a self that is in constant relationship with discourse, and an embodied, Groszian discourse at that.

Only with Bluff Rock do I feel the desire to question the connection between the possibilities of becoming and being. That is, when looking at whiteness it appears to work in reverse. The very mobility of how ‘we’ can be, lesbian, woman, man, middle class, seems itself to effectively hide the endurability of white. Is the very possibility of becoming so saturated with whiteness that the theoretical framework simply perpetuates the systemic privilege of whiteness? Is it that ‘white’ doesn’t exist but it is strategically useful to believe it ‘does’? Or does it sound more believable to say ‘white exists but it is strategically useful to believe it doesn’t’? And somehow the limited space of a limited movement of atonement doesn’t entirely work either. To say I am sometimes racist, to point to parts of this thesis and write, ‘I acknowledge the racist assumptions here’, to say ‘but I am not always this way, I am also anti racist’, ‘I have worked in this thesis against the subtle powers of race’, ‘White is only one of my positions’... yet yet yet. It no longer seems enough to say we are subjects constantly becoming for although that displaces the essentialising power of particular identities it does not appear to displace or expose the light of white. To do that a much more radical fracturing is called for, which in Australia must begin with the undoing of ‘settlement’ and so history as we now know it and do it. The dis-interpellation of race?
While writing Windeyer it continues to be important to go on showing at what particular moments something called whiteness is able to appear through the fractured light and at what moments I might stop or at least temper the writing of my own reflections. But the writer of such events has also to acknowledge their own fractured and flawed self that lets them write such a history. Only when I question like Probyn (1993:81) the epistemological basis of what constitutes knowledge (being here!) and the ontological securities of ‘self’ is the writing position possible that can actually fracture rather than become. As a writer attempting that utopic position I must admit that while writing this whiteness I might be the last to know that I don’t know.

**Evil?**

Misnamed and misplaced Bluff Rock still memorialises the fact that four white men, two on the orders perhaps of one, shot dead an unknown number of Aboriginal people who were trapped in rocks below them. This doesn’t deny the ability of those same Aboriginal people to resist such attacks on open ground; it doesn’t suggest that the white men were not afraid or thought them an easy enemy. But those white men shot trapped people dead. This is evil. It is not a displaced evil but the personal experience of recognising a history which invented me as unable to be regained as good. As Buber suggests: ‘Good and evil then, cannot be a pair of opposites like right and left or above and beneath. ‘Good’ is the movement in the direction of home, ‘evil’ is the aimless whirl of human potentialities without which nothing can be achieved and by which, if they take no direction but remain trapped in themselves, everything goes awry’ (Friedman, 1955:103) and Buber describes Hitler as a man ‘in whom the tension between what one is and what one should be is dissolved—the man without conscience’. It is unfair to pick and pluck at Buber like this. I am not a Buber expert, am unfamiliar with his historical context and intellectual past and I am suddenly walking into a totally foreign ‘field’ but I think he can in part explain what the Bluff Rock does. His description of Hitler reminds me of the historical conditions in which Irby, even within his own classed and christianised self, became within colonialism an agent constantly caught between what he was and what he could be. I understand that Buber intends the fullest possibility to be a path with God but I am choosing here to look at the life Irby himself lived.

Irby was, like Windeyer, a man of a distinct class position that was lived out through his distance from other classes and the existence of a stable income. In Australia these conditions had to be renegotiated and he was given the possibility of becoming richer than he had ever been before. The partial resolution of these possibilities through the use of convict and ticket of leave labour, through the taking of land, through the slaughter of Aboriginal people meant they became their own possibility but became evil. It wasn’t something they did, it was something they were and as such it is much more difficult to separate out from myself, from the bits of my life that are similar. To make whiteness
strange is therefore also a struggle against the replication of this evil. It has to be seen so that I can at the very least do evil rather than be evil. I like Buber’s description of evil as being this trapped whirling of possibility because it brings so sharply home to me the way in which postmodernity and its many relations gets described as a cauldron of relativism and spa bath of the ethically dead. And yet it is postmodernity, and the crisis of the subject, which exactly gets me to this point of acknowledging that we are or can be evil, and that these infinite possibilities are trapped within themselves. The ‘good’ directions out of this whirling are not a retreat into resolution or ‘will’ or the dualisms of humanism and their manifestations in modernity but rather work which is directed, which is always in relation to others and which remains open to being called in other directions. I am not claiming to have written a ‘good’ work but I am trying to textually explore what one might look like. But the noisy silence of Windeyer, his originary whiteness, his reminder of evil, is to grant ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’ its infinite discursiveness. It is always something more than can be said and always something more than that which can be written.
TOO MANY BLUFF ROCK MASSACRES?
THE HONORARY SECRETARY

Within the sections on Irby and Windeyer acute attention has been paid to the particular massacre carried out on Bolivia by Irby, Windeyer, Connor and Weaver. This was work that had to be done since the very real ways in which Aboriginal people were killed, employed and spoken about cannot be extracted from the ways in which particular non-Aboriginal subjectivities came into being or the ways in which particular systems of 'government' emerged to circulate this non-Aboriginal power. This is the micro politics of 'The Bluff Rock Massacre'. But 'the Bluff Rock Massacre' as we have already seen in the Tourist Leaflet and in Keating's letter and now in this section, has an existence well away from the particularities of the 1840s.

This section is organised around a magnificently heterogeneous source. It arose from a simple idea; to record the stories of old 'pioneers'. In this way the histories, the stories of some 'ordinary' Tenterfieldians came to be recorded. Norman Crawford was the Honorary Secretary of the Tenterfield Historical Society in the 1940s and as such began a process of collecting and typing up interviews and crude oral histories of the older inhabitants of the town. Sometimes these were recorded by himself, sometimes by a member of the interviewee's family and occasionally a correction appears in the margins or at the bottom of the page. Interspersed with sections devoted to individuals are general sections on the local industries such as the Flour Mill or large properties such as Tenterfield Station and there is also a 1940s tourism brochure. All these different subjects constitute Volume 1 of the 'Tenterfield District Historic Society Records' (TDHSR). The pages are not numbered or titled. I have also included an extract from Norton’s 'Reminiscences' and two 'field' experiences. Within all these sources 'The Bluff Rock Massacre' is questioned, confirmed, doubted and rewritten. Its mythical, complex nature as a marker of being non-Aboriginal comes richly alive. Its role as a theatre of enunciation for every atrocity ever carried out on Aboriginal people becomes more obvious. The Bluff Rock Massacre allows many things to be said.

MAKING IT ALL OK

Essantee News was a small publication put out by Essantee Switchgear Ltd who featured the 'many lines of electrical equipment manufactured by the company' as well as 'the scenic beauties and industrial activities of the Municipalities and Shires throughout Australasia'. Published in the 1940s, the copy that featured Tenterfield was filed in the Historical Society Collection. The small section on the early days of Tenterfield includes the following:
Of the early history of the locality amusing stories may be related; encounters with the natives who did not wholly respect the white men as their superiors, of bushrangers and others. It is related that two distinguished pioneers, Edward and Leonard Irby, owners of Bolivia Station took it upon themselves to lead a posse to punish the blacks for the murder of a watchman at Snake Creek. Dame Nature took a hand in the proceedings, for just as they had cornered the tribe in heavy timber they were thwarted by a sudden and terrific hailstorm, in which "lumps of ice as large as hen's eggs" gave many of them sore heads, and they retired to cover discomforted. Dame Nature, with characteristic impartiality, dampened the ardour of "black" and "white" alike. (TDHSR)

This was a publication that was sent to all Supply Authorities, and those supply authorities were invited to send in particulars of 'industrial or scenic' interest which would be put into the next editions. This blend of the industrial and the scenic is representative of a particular current of tourism which may be less popular now but which I remember all too clearly. Whenever we went on a real holiday, (one lasting days and including some touring element) we inevitably visited dams. These we never found dull, although there was no interactive educational component, and the height of the visit was the walk along the top to look over the spillway or admire the gushing water. I suppose we were being simultaneously assimilated to the possibilities of modernity and the limitless endeavours of rational man while also appreciating the spectacle of it all. (Of course looking at something rather than being wholly implicated in its activity also gives rise to the images of what went before and I remember the doubts about the dam in the Snowies which had flooded a whole town and later wrote a letter with my 'Nature Class' to try and save the Viator Caves from being flooded.) The idea of the industrial as spectacle, as tourist destination was completely accepted and as spectacle it competed with such 'monuments' as 'The Bluff Rock Massacre'. Bluff Rock requires a much more explicit story than hydro-electric or irrigation schemes which were able to assume their spectacular majesty through their modern enormity. To link the industrial and the scenic as the twin possibilities of interest, of primitive tourism, is to see the explicit opposition between the progressive and the historical. The historical includes the natural landscape while the progressive includes the businesses, the industrial infrastructure, small factories and hardworking farms. Both of these can be presented to the tourist gaze but in different ways. The Tenterfield population is described as 'a progressive community' whose people 'are alive to the importance that their town has achieved in the commercial world'; it is 'an important trucking centre' and 'there is a large butter and freezer works' and 'its mineral resources have been worked with profit'.

This 'progressive', 'working', 'profitable' incredibly confident, forward march, allows the 'attempted' massacre by a (Hollywood western?) posse to become an 'amusing story' that forever belongs to a past that is absolutely past, literally ground into a dust by a progress that allows it no consequence except 'historical colour' in the 1940s.
I am writing this the day after the Prime Minister’s Address to the Nation. His plea to the nation about Native Title and specifically his ten point plan included the words... ‘I think we all agree on one thing, and that is the sooner we get this debate over and get the whole issue behind us the better for all of us’ and then later ‘I believe the time has come for us to fix this issue and to fix it now’ (Sydney Morning Herald, December 1, 1997 pp.1 & 6). This points to the durability of the combination of supra historical fixes and the assumption that in moving forward we leave nothing behind us—the past is forever gone and has no effect in the present. Particular events also become pluralised, the foiled massacre becomes one of many ‘amusing stories’ since all past stories have been collapsed into ‘the past’. How quaint, how odd, how perfectly amusing? Wasn’t it Kafka who said laughter was the absence of feeling and perhaps like Kafka’s laughter, history is necessarily a place of no feeling since it is not happening to us now? Even if we accept that what we are capable of feeling now is historically constituted and thus discursive it is difficult to overcome our alienation from history. We know history but refuse to feel history, refuse to be history, and refuse to become history. Let’s look at some of the shapes of this ‘amusing story’.

When Susan and I first visited Tenterfield as ‘researchers’, she was told by the local History House worker that The Massacre was interrupted by hail. Irby’s Memoirs include a letter to his mother in 1842 which reports on a fall of huge hail stones, some ‘about four inches in circumference’ (Irby, 1910:65) but more obviously connected is Irby’s account of the death of Bonney, a watchmen at Snake Creek in 1845. Snake Creek was on Deepwater Station, and Irby and his brother Leonard were part of a group of ten which also included Collins (Deepwater’s overseer who led the group), Weaver and Westley. They ‘came upon the Blacks suddenly about 11am. They had got into a dense mountain scrub, so that we couldn’t half punish them’. After a pot of tea and pitching a camp they decide to make another effort to kill the Aboriginal group and some go back and fire from below while others hide above in the hope that the Aboriginal group will run out and up and be trapped beneath the guns of those above. It begins to rain and ‘some awfully large hailstones fell. Collins had a great lump on his head raised by an immense hailstone... It was too steep where they had been to do much good’ (Irby, 1910:94) The only difference between Irby’s original diary account and The Memoirs account of this incident is that the original includes the detail that ‘It left off raining for a short time so that we managed to get our supper in peace’. So the account in the 1940s pamphlet is a reasonably accurate rendering of one ‘expedition’ except for its exclusion of the fact that the Aboriginal group had out manoeuvred the pursuing party. None of the accounts connects the incident to Bluff Rock.

The story of The Bluff Rock Massacre was certainly known in the 1940s but perhaps even at a moment when industry and progress could shape a failed ‘posse’ into an amusing scene, it could not do the same to the herding of people over a cliff.
There is something relentlessly optimistic about this position from which history can become a series of ‘amusing stories’. The tongue in cheek description of ‘natives who did not wholly respect the white men as their superiors’, the unassailable ‘distinguishement’ of the Irby’s, the erasure of the ‘posse’s’ regret that they ‘couldn’t half punish them’ (thereby revealing how badly they wanted to kill) builds itself up on a series of stereotypes and brusque story telling style that shows us again and again; that was the way it WAS. We are to read this as another sort of time when ‘pioneers’ could go scurrying off half cocked after ‘natives’ instead of working hard, industriously, investing themselves in the modern project—it is the most extraordinary conceit. And yet in a very subtle way this is the only version of the many attempted massacres where the particular transportability of the Irby’s and other squatters, in their endless small movements between ‘properties’ and persons, is acknowledged. Implicit in the power of those movements is their ability at any moment to focus it about an Aboriginal group and become a band of assassins.

But the attempted lightness of this story, published as it is in a public relations/advertising pamphlet is to insist on the ‘ardour’ of both parties. How much worse to imagine the calm taking of tea, the disappointment in being unable to really ‘punish’ them and the relentless commitment to go on with the shooting and poisoning: the industrious efforts at extermination which might echo all too strongly with the ‘profit making’, ‘progressive’ community of the 1940s. And so the past is again set up as a place of wild, emotion-driven action which is contrasted against sensible actions of rational work and possibly, given that this was written in the 1940s, the organised warfare of a military machine, where people and killing hardware are organised mechanically and publicly sanctioned.

THE SAVED CHILD

Coming on them on the side of a deep precipice, the avenging party attacked them and wiped them out, with the exception of one small piccaninny. The little chap ran to Bill Bates and clung to his legs and was spared. William Bates kept and reared him (the boy). He was always grateful and useful to him in after years. (Information supplied by Grandson Robert Bates TDHSR 1940)

The Aborigines withdrew to higher ground until they found themselves between a precipice and their pursuers. The entire group, women and children were driven over the edge—with the exception of one small boy, the only survivor. This boy, incidentally, was brought up very successfully by one of the white men involved. They developed a strong feeling of devotion to each other. (Campbell, 1971/4:6-7)
This was also a story that Susan and I were told in Tenterfield. We were even told that the child grew up and when dead was buried at the foot of the Bluff and that one might see the grave. We found nothing. William Bates’ son also says nothing about having a half brother. Campbell acknowledges no source for his statement which could well have been these extracts which he perhaps incorporated into his version of The Bluff Rock Massacre. There is no supporting objective evidence for this ‘saved child’, but nonetheless the story keeps on being told and written. Campbell’s confident assertion, in a thesis no less, even makes it official history. But if not true why would people invent or believe such a tale? What does this story do?

First it individualises morality. While a group was chasing and killing, when one child appealed to one of these killers, he ‘saved’ the child. This same man we assume could not and did not wish to stop killing all the others but he could ‘save’ one child. It reminds us that these men were not entirely monsters that they also had a fundamental humanity. That close up, when appealed to directly, one man’s choice was to save the child. But could we call this destruction ‘humanity’? Is it the sickest, most powerful manifestation of:

I hate all ___________ but Mrs X next door is OK
I don’t hate ___________ some of my best friends are ___________

or is it like this that the sensibility that led to the more systematic Stolen Generations began? When an Aboriginal child was told it was lucky to have been ‘saved’, stolen up from death, ‘rescued’ from ‘wild blacks’ to become ‘grateful’ and ‘useful’, ‘devoted’ and successfully ‘brought up’. But if one child could be saved why not all of the group? One can begin to see why the romantic imagination collapsed under colonialism. The innocent child saved but the rest killed—why? The sentiment attached to children frayed and played itself out along side the raw and unromantic slaughter.

Children were also involved in other massacres. About two hours from Bluff Rock is Myall Creek, where in 1838 (six years before Irby et al carried out their ‘punishment’) Kilmeister et al were slaughtering a group of women, men and children. Some of the perpetrators, all current or ex-convicts, were eventually hung amidst general outrage. They were not found guilty at their first trial for killing an Aboriginal known as ‘Daddy’ but in their second trial, they were finally found guilty on five counts of the ‘murder of an Aboriginal Black Child whose name was to the Attorney-General unknown’. This child had been identified by its rib bones, a jaw bone and some teeth. Chomley records Anderson saying:
‘There was a little child at the back of the hut when they were tying this party; and when the blacks and party were going away, this little child as I thought, was going to follow the party with its mother, but I took hold of it and put it into the hut and stopped it from going’ (1903:12)

However in his first sworn statement about the event Anderson says the following:

All the blacks at the station were taken away except Davy and his brother Billy, two Black gins a pickininy (a little boy) and two little boys who saved themselves when the horsemen were coming up by jumping into the creek. The Men left a black Gin with me saying she was a good looking Gin. They gave another to Davy. The little child came from behind the hut when they were taking the blacks away as I thought to follow them, I put him into the hut and shut the door— they did not come back after him. (Clerk of Peace Depositions:1838)

One of the reasons then that Anderson (and Davy) didn’t act to stop the larger slaughter was because they were given women to do with what they wished. It could also be said therefore that Kilmeister ‘saved’ two Aboriginal women but saved only to be raped? used? by others. There was another woman ‘saved’ from this massacre by another man. Taken with the others she had to watch the beheadings and the stabbings and the shootings and then was picked out by John Blake who kept her, saved her, for ‘future use’ (Milliss, 1988:296). Like putting pennies in the bank—this woman was saved as only the most brutal white economic metaphor can try to imply. The colonial rationality of economy. Did this lone woman, (perhaps the mother of some of the children killed in front of her) imagine that she was saved in any other sense? Was death by slaughter a worse happening in her psychology and cosmology than to see all her group beheaded, stabbed, burnt and to then be taken away from her country, used by Blake and perhaps others. Did she imagine she was saved? Might there also have been Aboriginal women taken from any of the number of massacres carried out around Tenterfield? And were children also used sexually and economically? What did Bates intend for his ‘saved’ child? Was the child saved because a dead child had hanged other massackerists at Myall Creek? Had the word come back from the city—not only don’t tell anyone about killing Aboriginal people but particularly don’t kill children?

This child had seen his closest relations and friends ‘wiped out’ but he ran toward the legs of one of these shooters and was ‘spared’. This little boy ran across and made his physical presence felt to the man holding a gun. The little boy clung to the man’s legs and the man couldn’t shoot. At that moment the man could have thrown the boy aside and shot him but at that moment didn’t. And so the story goes that this unnamed boy was always ‘grateful and usefull’—he had been saved up for later, careful, use—he didn’t send those who massacred to be hung.
In the early years of carrying to and from the coast the blacks would occasionally raid the teams. When Bates' teams were threatened, this boy would help to defend them and would persuade the wild blacks not to attack, so that his loads were never raided (Robert Bates, TDHSR 1940)

And so the saved becomes the saviour on a regular basis.

**My brothers saved kangaroos**

My brothers and the neighbour's boys went spotlighting. It wasn't called shooting although that was what it was. I knew it was shooting because, dressed in my Annie Oakley fantasy, I wanted to go too. My brother had already taught me to shoot a 22 when held in a stock and I would have loved to have been a part of it all. I may have even helped with the cleaning of the 303s because that was what was used to shoot 'roos. I didn't want them to actually kill anything, but I also wanted them to bring me a joey if they found one. And when they did bring one home I really thought my brothers had saved it. They had, of course, but by shooting its mother, the rest of the mob and then stopping I suppose to pull the joey from the corpse. Then I went about raising that kangaroo. When it could look after itself (the test of which was when it decided to jump the orchard fence rather than wait for its enamel mug of milk) it joined a local mob and then one day no doubt was in turn shot at, killed, by those same brothers. My father was never a part of these shooting groups, although he would have supplied the bullets and guns, and I remember years later (when the boys had left home, I think) that three roos had been frightened in the horse's paddock and one had got its leg twisted in the wire. It thrashed about caught. It was horrible to watch but we couldn't get close. Eventually it went quiet, fainted perhaps and my father could get close enough to disentangle it. It lay on the ground with its leg bone jutting out. I suppose others would have shot it but my father sent me for some plaster bandage which he kept in our 'vets' cupboard and we clumsily set the leg. The kangaroo was not fully grown, which was why it got caught in the fence, and so we put it in a lamb pen and fed it and it remained with us for a year or two. Until it, too, found another mob and went on its way to be shot at somewhere else—possibly by my brothers, home from university.

It was the idea of being saved that reminded me of my many pet kangaroos. I am not equating the lives of animals and humans but rather I am fascinated by the way that The Bluff Rock massacre works to inspire and question mythologies simultaneously. On the one hand, it offers us the figure of a child saved and with the other a cheap cross cultural servant. It sets up a massacre of exceptional violence, the driving of people over a cliff, forcing all of them over except one child who survives. Does the story of this child carry the longed for possibility of redemption? Is he the pathetic hope that all those Aboriginal people did not die? Is there in his upbringing the manufacture of a version of Aboriginality that the non-Aboriginal could cope with? The 'devotion' they/we? long for?
Does the saving of the child somehow suggest all others were guilty or even that they could have got away if they had been as children? Is there some collapsing of the human and the pet? Was this child a ‘tame one’ to be had as a (very hardworking) ‘pet’? Or is this child the Moses in the bullrushes, the single saved boy? Through him will come the undoing of the tyrants? The release of other sorts of prophecies? This child came to love his saviour which provides a strange sort of moral justification for the massacre in that the massacre produced ‘devotion’ and so love. ‘Hard’ love?

The story of the saved child fundamentally changes the rhythm of Irby’s report. He was shooting because he could, because he had the ‘means and will’. And then he rode fast away to report to the commissioner, being assured by Windeyer he had had ‘no choice’. The space between shooters and the shot, the fast turning away without burial or checking, implies a modern, distanced efficiency to this act. But to introduce the possibility of an indistinct line between killers and killed that could be crossed by a small boy suggests a corporeal engagement which Irby ignores. A small boy’s hands clung onto Bates’ no doubt warm and probably sweaty legs. Did Bates also have stains from arterial blood? The screams of the others in his ears? Perhaps for the first time we can stand below Bluff Rock and have a physical encounter in our minds to contrast with the omnipresent granite. But is this a good thing? Or does this function as another mirror of whiteness where the saving of one child proves that it was still possible to understand that they were operating in a moral universe? That they were punishing a group who had committed a specific crime but of course a child would be saved, at its own initiative or not. Who was saved? Not a baby since babies were trouble and could be simply knocked against rocks; not an adult since they were all capable of killing, and not a girl child, since she couldn’t be used as openly and obviously but a single boy child—who would be ‘grateful’ and ‘devoted’ to ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’.

THE TOP HAT

Was it only ever the top hat? The story is as follows: Edward Irby (or was it Leonard? Or Collins the Deepwater overseer?) while standing atop Bluff Rock was speared through his top hat by an unknown Aboriginal person, the assumption being that it was another man. No other figures come into this story as it is told to me by the Caravan Park owner, by a local historian, and as I read about it (differently situated) in the finely collected Crawford records of the Tenterfield Historical society. The truth of the ‘Bluff Rock Massacre’? The starkness of the scene intrigues me. Two lone men and a precipitous point. The lack of any connections to a larger sociality makes me wonder. Where is Irby’s horse? Where are the other Aboriginal members of this man’s group? Was he disturbed hunting alone? Was Irby disturbed on some private assignation? Had he
walked up to admire ‘his’ view? But I’m missing the point. This is the ‘other’ Bluff Rock Massacre. This is the local, pared down version, the ‘real’. It is another local joke on History where the epic slaughter becomes an awkward surprised encounter. One man perhaps startled from his view, another perhaps surprised at the fall of the hat and both aware of their sudden vulnerability, decide to peacefully disperse? And so they went back to their specific sites of security, back to their endangered homes?

But Crawford’s version is even finer in its oppositional detail. ‘Collins, overseer of Deepwater Station was once attacked by blacks at Bungulla at the gully below the hall and church... Before he could escape he received a spear through the crown of his hat’ (TDHSR). What are the elements of this tale? It is the story of a manager rather than a land ‘owner’, it shows a non-Aboriginal escaping his punishment not through any greater skill or technological or even moral superiority but because of the style of his dress and the quickness of his legs. Most importantly of all, this is a story of Aboriginal people attacking a non-Aboriginal man in a gully—the geographical and social antithesis of The Bluff Rock Massacre. Do all productive myths need the counter weight of the ordinary, perhaps the ‘real’? Is it better to understand this counter narrative as the repressed reality of frightened whites, near escapes and the threat of gullies as places of entrapment, or is it to be read as a further, ‘ordinary’ justification for the mythic proportions of ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’ as revenge?

**TRAGEDY**

Mr James Heffernan was born in Deepwater in 1857. He spent ‘the evening of his life’ in Tenterfield. On the neatly typed foolscap page there is a sub heading The Blacks, industriously underlined. Its’ two paragraphs state:

> Asked about the tradition of the blacks being driven off The Bluff by a party of white men, in the early days of settlement, in punishment for killing a shepherd and stealing sheep, he (Mr Heffernan) said he thought the story was right. It was said that the bones of the killed blacks were to be seen below the precipice and in the caves, but he had never seen any.

> In the early days of settlement on the Mole, the blacks were very troublesome and dangerous. So many shepherds were killed that it was difficult to get men to act as shepherds, as they were in constant danger of being speared. Someone gave the blacks a bag of poisoned flour, and many died through eating it. This incident was hushed up and kept as quiet as possible.

The questioner sets up that familiar Commissioner/Irbyised logical sequence: killing shepherd + stealing = death/murder/punishment. And the nuanced voice of the local—‘he thought the story was right’. And as long as we are able to resist reading the story as a
reductive equation—the story is right. It is necessary to open one’s ears to the moral embodiment of this memory—this story is right. Aboriginal people were driven off, Aboriginal people were killed in a variety of ways. But Heffernan makes you read those words with ‘troublesome’ and ‘dangerous’ (echoes perhaps of Keating’s ‘wild and wicked’?). You must understand that the ‘white men’ born of these encounters were scared. It is such a little thing, such an obvious thing and yet the whole meaning of these acts is lost without it. Squatters were driven off Aboriginal land by Aboriginal people. Squatters had already left parts of the Clarence and places further west (Milliss 1992; Walker, 1966; Campbell, 1969). Irby was worried about ruin. Heffernan reminds us of fear. How could The Massacre be written with the remembrance of non-Aboriginal\(^1\) fear? We circled them for days. We sent down messengers but we were rebuffed. One of us visited a shepherd but he was shot. We took some of their animals for food in exchange for the waterholes they had fouled but they still chased and shot us. Finally they closed themselves in wood and we burnt them through and knowing their presence was wrong, speared those who came out. To admit that there was ever a moment when Aboriginal people triumphed over the strangers coming onto their land becomes a pathetic piece of ephemera in the face of The Massacre and yet...this is the insidious effect of a History based upon winners and losers or, written in the cultural studies register, the resisters and the compliant. But the Ngaranbul and the Bundjalung are still here and so are some of those early non-Aboriginal families. So why The Massacre, why this textual orgy of annihilation? Is a canny non-Aboriginal audience simply too terrified of the legal and moral implications of saying Aboriginal people defended their land and won? But let’s think of the twilight Heffernan again.

Aboriginal people were not only ‘driven off’ a cliff in Heffernan’s account, they were also poisoned and in the local tradition, they were poisoned by ‘someone’. This is an inclusive title. Not a stranger, not a well known landowner individually named but the simultaneously known and unknown—‘someone’. Heffernan is not approving, but these things went on: ‘this incident was hushed up and kept as quiet as possible’. I wonder what it is about poisoning that allows it to be hushed up and kept quiet? Was there only the single non-Aboriginal murderer involved? Was it the very silent, remote nature of poison—something taken away from town centres with no non-Aboriginal witnesses to see the sudden, silent eruptions of death? No inconvenient skeletons in the caves or

\(^1\) I think I have said this enough but my care in the use of the terms ‘white’ and non-Aboriginal is always fraught. Some settlers, some workers, some squatters were not white as in English, some were not white as in skin colour and certainly some were not white as in spoke ‘the Kings’ English. Were they—in their immediate actions against Aboriginal people—non-Aboriginal? Not always. Sometimes their Aboriginal workers went with them, sometimes their Aboriginal partners and sometimes their Aboriginal? Mixed race? White? children went with them too. These ways of writing are so unstable that I have to simply ask you to read categorisations like ‘white’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’ as particular moments of division. This hopeless compromise is also reflective of the enormous cultural histories that have been destroyed.
below the precipice? Why does Heffernan tell us this after he is asked about the ‘tradition’ of The Bluff Rock Massacre? Is this an insight into how it was; is this a very old man’s half hidden confession? Is this the real work that the Massacre does? Does it massage the generations of ways in which non-Aboriginal people became ‘settled’ through the techniques of silence, through keeping as quiet as possible? And this silence, this *having* to keep quiet, acknowledges that things have changed. It had become impossible to assume everyone was against Aboriginal people, that you could rely on every non-Aboriginal to participate in poisonings and shootings and at the same time it could no longer be guaranteed that Aboriginal people would remain silent. Something had changed. Non-Aboriginals could not rely on one another and it was best to keep as quiet as possible because everyone knew someone, somewhere (quite close) did something.

Ironically, for all the promise The Massacre offers for a final solution to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal presence (that is triumph of the ‘whites’) in Norman Crawford’s hands, the Massacre never quietens down, is never ‘settled’ once and for all. The monolithic effectivity of the marauding settlers is teased out and upset by more and further atrocities. Henry Bates’ (son of the ‘Bates’ beer drinking wife) thinks it untrue that a tribe was ever driven off Bluff Rock, although he suggests it happens elsewhere in a different, better defined site with not one but three reasons for the massacre. But even this version of the massacre didn’t stop Aboriginal people. Poison was used, non-Aboriginal people were silenced—they become quietly guilty for they knew *something*. And so the ‘white’ is born out of the truth of knowing ‘someone’ did something to Aboriginal people and the constitutive need to keep as ‘quiet as possible’. This idea of flawed ‘whiteness’ makes the tale of The Massacre intelligible as a readable tragedy.

If we take three core elements—‘punishment’ (but wrongful punishment stuck in an immoral historical moment), chase (the action) and the hideous throwing over the cliff that is murder (the finale)—we have tragedy. This is not the tragedy of a stumble before triumph, since Irby et. al. did not hesitate and within their own terms they did triumph but they were fatally flawed by their own ‘whiteness’. As a mistaken nemesis, those who committed massacre become the fools of non-Aboriginality. They keep a play of silences alive that tells us something about the quiet of the countryside.

I have always understood tragedy to be a morality performance that assays the possible ways in which a community can both encounter and temporarily resolve what is humanly right or wrong in an atmosphere both emotional and political. Tragedy also offers a transportability that allows it to be performed for many audiences so that its temporary catharsis travels. In these sorts of ways I see the Tourist Leaflet Bluff Rock Massacre as tragedy. That it exists within the space of tourism is entirely appropriate, presenting as it does its stories to audience after audience. But a tragedy, starring a fool who must now perform along highways and in the face of television and historical re-
writes can’t always be heard and do we now know too much for the tragedy to be sustained?

When you attempt to show what really happened on Bolivia, around Tenterfield, near Glen Innes — ie what happened at ‘home’ — you discover the same connective tissue of such detail and seeming pettiness that mine and now your imbrication with these events becomes unbearable. What begins as tragedy spills into the audience, fills up our pockets, drags us down and dissolves the line between stage and floor. A wild historical melee breaks out. Irby and Windeyer shot so many Aboriginal people and then part of that land was taken up by selectors and then ‘Bow Wow’ was killed and Tommy started to work for Irby and some of the selectors married Aboriginal women and some of the early ‘tourists’ raped Aboriginal women and girls and of course some of the men had sex with each other on a ‘womanless’ frontier and then the post war migrants came and on the spot where old Fanny died the Greek Cafe was built and now across the road the Land Council rents and down the street there is the tourist office and the Aboriginal Cultural Tours — we can’t walk out. Tragedies end, but an endlessly read and reread, transformative history can’t. How could this ‘tragedy’ become testament? We can only hush up and keep as quiet as possible.

Silences could be the trembling of desire for the deeply unsaid but when does silence become a sustained forgetting? A forgetting so constant that even when you want to speak you find with a shock that there is nothing with which to say it? Are we kept or do we keep ‘as quiet as possible’?

**PRACTICAL DEMONIACS**

There is a popular tale in Tenterfield at the present time that many years ago a large tribe of blacks was driven over Bluff Rock by the white settlers in revenge for the murder of a shepherd. According to Mr Henry Bates this story is untrue. However many natives were driven over the precipice at Demon Creek for committing three murders — one two miles from Bolivia on the Deepwater river and another at Trelongon situated below Mahers property at what was in those days an old Commissioners camp. (TDHSR under ‘Holocaust of Blacks’)

They were tracked along the eastern side of the range towards Demon Creek. Coming on them on the side of a deep precipice, the avenging party attacked them and wiped them out... (TDHSR ‘Reprisals’)

The Demon Creek story inspires a very useful mixture of the practical and the mythical. The idea that a particular massacre (amidst all the ongoing, ‘ordinary’ massacres of small groups shot in paddocks, trapped in gullies and poisoned near riverbanks) of particular
ferocity and spectacular plunges did occur would seem to partially explain the continuing resonance of the story. And it is therefore sensible to suspect that it happened but not at Bluff Rock. Demon Creek makes a much more practical ‘fit’ between events. It has the open areas bordered by cliffs to the river upon which mounted men and guns could do the manoeuvring that would force Aboriginal people over a cliff. The strategic struggle could well have been over the race to get to the place on the cliff safe to climb down, a place impossible for the mounted non-Aboriginals to follow. If the Aboriginal people had made it to that point they might have gotten away but somehow their escape was cut off and so we have the same scene, in a different location. Guns, cliffs, horses; the murderers and the about to be murdered. To paraphrase Irby, all that was needed to kill Aboriginal people was the ‘will’, the ‘means’ and the ‘opportunity’.

But the name Demon Creek also connects this story with the only biblical story I could find about a cliff-side massacre. Given the power and ubiquity of the bible in so many of the eras in which the massacre story was told, retold and reinvented, I wondered if it might carry some particular biblical intent or undertone that might also explain the story’s pervasiveness. When I turned to the bible however the only story I found was that of the parable of the Gerasene demoniac.

This is a strange parable. The Gadarene was a raging, powerful maniac (although Matthew says there were two, Mark and Luke say only one) who was possessed by demons. When asked by the Lord for his name he replied:

‘My name is Legion for there are many of us. And he begged earnestly not to be sent out of the district. Now there was on the mountainside a great herd of pigs feeding and the unclean spirits begged him, “Send us to the pigs, let us go into them”. So he gave them leave. With that, the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd of about two thousand pigs charged down the cliff and into the lake, and there they were drowned.’ (5:15 Mark).

This parable when mapped onto the existing geography also has a problem with ‘fit’. The nearest lake to Gerasenes or Gaderenes was fifty miles from the mountains where the maniac was found and so the pigs would have had to run miles to drown in a lake not simply ‘down a cliff—but perhaps anything is possible in the realm of ‘possession’ (Keating, too, has the Bolivia workers running nearly forty miles up Bluff Rock). The swineherds ran back to the towns to tell the inhabitants what had happened and Jesus was begged to leave.

In his musing novel, Sebald questions the parable in an aside in Rings of Saturn. Was this:

‘the report of a credible witness? If so does that not mean that in healing the Garadene Our Lord committed a serious error of judgement? Or was this parable made up by the evangelist, I wondered
to explain the supposed uncleanliness of swine: which would imply that human reasoning, 
diseased as it is, needs to seize on some other kind that it can take to be inferior and thus deserving 
of annihilation?" (1998:67)

Did the logics of colonial reasoning also require the ‘inferior’ for annihilation? The 
colonial allegory provides one sort of translation. What is a ‘settler’ but a figure 
possessed of the cultural ‘madness’ of another civilisation? Trapped in the poetry and 
namings and movements of another land, aren’t his guns and sheep and stations the 
unfettered displays of one utterly untranslatable; possessed perhaps? His obvious, 
frightening strength grants him a place and yet he is tormented. How is the torture of 
translation finally cast out? Into the bodies of the indigenous. They must be ‘sacrificed’ 
so that the man can ‘go’/make home. For this is how the parable ends; after being cured 
the man begged to stay with Jesus but Jesus said ‘Go home to your people and tell them 
all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you’. And so the man, the colonial, returns or 
perhaps metaphorically ‘makes’ a home.

But I’m not certain that we can sustain this reading. This is the problem with a 
parable. It is a story and as such is open all along its narrative to a certain range of 
interpretations. As a simple tale of the ferocious need for an ‘inferior’, for an ‘other’, 
The Bluff Rock Massacre (and the perhaps real bodies at Demon Creek) slides into the 
position of cultural exemplar. On the level of meta myth and psychoanalytic 
resolutions—it satisfies, but as a ‘history’ and something to be lived with—it is far too 
complete. What does this story look like in its more grounded context? Who was 
possessed? Why?

In the New Testament story, the demons, having passed into the bodies of the pigs, 
rush over the cliff, falling to drown in the lake. But in the Tenterfield story it is the 
pursuers who are possessed, who ride on and on after the group and—unlike the biblical 
antsident? parallel? tangent?—are possessed by possession itself. What energies and 
spaces must be produced to maintain ‘ownership’ of stolen space? To possess them? The 
actions are haunted, suffused by original sins, and an uncanny putting together of 
previously placed spaces. Has some Mephistophelean arrangement been made? Are the 
sufferings and the tortments of those possessed by demons now a necessary resource? An 
engine? For I don’t want to tell this as the making of a symbolic otherplace, that has been 
done to Australia often enough. This is a ‘practical’ rearrangement. There was a need for 
judgement of truth and conduct to be made on the basis of who kept the land—the 
displacement of a particular sort of God happened along the way. And this pragmatism 
reigned. There are many suggestions about where God may have been displaced but 
could I add Tenterfield circa 1840 to the list?

All these Gods and Demons might make this story too ‘literary’—available for the 
invigoration of the dangerous lie of final dispossession. That is why we need to combine
the ideas of the ‘practical’ and the ‘possessed’ to describe the impassioned, embedded, cultural rituals of massacre. The ‘truth’ of this event must lie somewhere amongst the circulation of colonial capital and the sharp theatrical rituals of the wheeling horses, the tales told and the transformative shootings. This event has more than one staging, more than one audience—but exactly who is the audience and who are the players is not always clear. These are the performative inventions of subjects not theatre proper with its staged division between audience and players. Those Aboriginal people who do not escape, (and out here, not trapped under rocks, some no doubt did) those who were killed were in no position to appreciate these performances. The riding and the wheeling was for the benefit of the murderers, one to another. The stories they were inventing for each other on the ride back, perhaps with the help of extra rations of alcohol—these were the ‘speaking parts’ that let them live again as ‘ordinary’ men.

The story of Demon Creek—removed from the Bluff, and from Irby—may ground this story more thoroughly in the mode of the Myall Creek Massacre. The Demon Creek massacre may have been a group of station workers on a hunt not a land owner on a sepulchral ‘punitive expedition’. Some of the motivations behind such actions may have included the fact that Aboriginal workers were doing unpaid work and were therefore pushing down wages. An attack would simultaneously excite and maintain the violence of the land ‘beyond the limits’ and the non-Aboriginal worker could demand higher wages from distant employers. The freedom for those ticket-of-leave men to move beyond their assigned districts had come with their absentee landlords (and the importance of their labour in these districts) but it is unclear whether such conditions existed in New England. And such possible motivations cannot explain the levels and extent of the violence used.

But if a massacre didn’t happen at Bluff Rock, why say it did? Because it’s there? Because if it’s there, there has to be a ‘practical’ use? reason? for it? It will serve as the site of the past? It fits the bill. As a site of a single, extraordinary massacre the natural singularity of the Bluff is a suitable venue but as a symbol of the culturally regulated terrorism by working men, and killing expeditions of landowners, it doesn’t work at all. And even an isolated precipice on ‘Demons Creek’ is too particular for me. For once more, the gaze is displaced from those elegant old homes, those cute cottages and well kept gardens. Far from the rich grazing lands and non-Aboriginal back and front-yards to a rough precipice in ‘bad country’. How useful and how ‘practical’ to believe that is where it all happened. And if we do not think of the cottages and the paddocks and the neatly organised cattle we will never remember the cars and then the roads and the reservations and barristers and cities which made the systematic dispossession and dispersal of Aboriginal people possible. That is far away.

And perhaps there is a faint unbroken line back to an Aboriginal story that Bluff Rock was always a part of some ‘bad country’. Perhaps the earliest killers and settlers on
finding out that no Aboriginal people would go near the Bluff, filled in the rest with their own displaced stories—found a gap which could be practically filled? Everything could be explained. Or is it the old insistence that nature signify the originating myths of the non-Aboriginal? The non-Aboriginal foundationalist tale that non-Aboriginal people possess the land?

AND A WORD FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Extract from ‘Reminiscences During the Fifties’ by Hon. A.Norton M.L.C. Read before the Royal Society of Queensland 1902.

... The only notable places on the way was the Bluff Mountain and the Mole River. Of the Bluff there is a tale of black hunting and slaughter by the settlers. Some people say they believe it. In my own opinion if there is any foundation of truth in it, a grossly exaggerated story has been built from very little.

Exactly. But what is gross, what is little and what is ‘truth’?

LAND, GOD AND LONGING

Susan and I are walking down Penrith’s High street. It is the walk for reconciliation. We thought it to be the rally in support of Native Title. There are differences in politics and attitude between these conceptions. We cannot find a UWS Nepean or Hawkesbury banner to walk behind. I had assumed there would be one but universities have been replaced by Health Networks and Christian schools as the carriers of community conscience. It is hot and we find friends, individuals, who call on other networks to walk with. At the end of this bitumen-sticky, gentle walk we arrive at the rally proper where almost every speaker has a religious calling and we are thanked and preached to. Some of the balloons say justice, mercy, compassion. Mercy and compassion for who? Helium filled longings from non-Aboriginals to have mercy on ‘us’. This is Christian shorthand for something that I don’t quite understand.

There is a performance by a Christian primary school of a rainbow dance; all the colours are necessary (it says) to make the world work. I realise I’m lonely. I want the sisters to be there. I want that loose alliance, that feminism, leso, gay boy, lefty crowd to be here and they’re not. Is it too far west? Have those loose collections fallen into some final, fragmented dance party? And while I applaud the preachers and the speakers, I am thinking—at each mention of God—that this is no place to hold your girlfriend’s hand.
But these are strange times where ‘mainstreaming’ is still considered a safe strategy. So what if I feel a little odd, I don’t feel addressed by this crowd—a little alienation isn’t much to ask if the Ten Point Plan could be overturned, if land could be distributed, if the full possibilities of Mabo could be expanded and put in place. But you see the problem; so quickly I’m thinking like an old comrade—things will be better, just a few adjustments, just a few million dissidents, just let us institutionalise the queers, starve the Ukrainians—and things will be OK. But why not the rhetoric of the Church—it after all has the words, compassion, mercy, justice—to temporarily overarch all differences, all post-identity politics. It is a magnificently fragmented, transcendent universal that might just hold all this together. And suddenly I understand the appeal. Who else could form a ring, hand in hand around Bluff Rock and overcome the past in our hearts? Who has the right? Please God grant us non-Aboriginals compassionate, merciful, Kories. Forgive us our trespassing as we forgive those who trespass against us. Forgive us for the taking of your land as we will forgive those of you who refuse to forgive us?? But who would take on the burden of forgiving or being forgiven? What was it that God said to the Rabbi when he asked for his words amidst the holocaust? I am tired, tired unto death. Are we allowed partial, fluid Gods? Gods that give us the hope but not the promise of resolution? Gods that are contextual and strategic? Gods that will welcome lesbians and gays one day and forgive the past another? God never died, he just became one more strategy, one more political possibility.

When Aboriginal people were murdered was God waiting in the homestead? Shining his boots waiting to lead who to the gates of salvation? Aah, but this is a different God, a bright, shining, just God that never did any of that. This God could walk right through Bluff Rock and all mica crumbs of deep despair would drop away, clean as a whistle. Just as suddenly my love affair with Christ is over. Botched up, mixed up ‘history’/cultural studies with no offers of truth or redemption at least puzzles and engages—I’ll take Bluff Rock after all.

THE CULTURAL TOUR

Susan and I are on our last ‘field trip’. We have my two nieces and nephew and we are going on the recommended experience of the Tenterfield Tourist Office—we are on the Woolloo Woolloo Aboriginal Cultural Tour. We are picked up by small bus at the Tourist Information Centre and set off in the opposite direction to Bluff Rock. We pass the homestead of Tenterfield Station (where the Irby’s went to eat strawberries) which is pointed out to us and the story told of how McKenzie came as one of the first ‘whitefellas or gubbas’. Our guide points out the erosion brought on by the intense clearing and says well ‘we would have done it a bit different’. And then we are shown bush foods and
Thunderbolt's cave and we climb Woolloo Woolloo which I once knew as Bald Rock. We learn a little bit of the Bundjalung language and eat a good lunch and learn to throw a boomerang. The massacre is never mentioned directly but in passing as we are shown a rock formation connected to Bluff Rock. This guide is interested in the future and all the important sites are out this way anyway. It a wonderful experience. Colonialism is put into perspective as just one group of people who really didn't know much about the foods available, but who are acknowledged as coming here. Aboriginal people were killed but there is still a strong Aboriginal presence, and languages are being relearted and opportunities being invented. I know this delight is fragile. I know it's 'just' a tourist attraction, not an absolution. I also know that this enormous feeling of calm and place is entirely dependent on Aboriginal generosity and that is a fragile thing. These are 'cultural' tours not Historical ones, but the history it invents and the culture it creates to include me lets me live—and I never refuse a gift.
COUNTING DOWN HOME: 10, 9...
Taking it Personally, Making it Personal

So how do you write The Bluff Rock Massacre? How do you write Irby? Dear Reader let me marry him. He is my husband; I am his wife. Our unnatural fucking, through insuperable history, makes us both strange. We are the night parrot—that strange creature from Dorothy Porter’s ‘Scene from a Marriage ii’; the night parrot that wrecks vision ‘rebellion, havoc and birdshit in immaculate boring places’ and who ‘whispers seductive nightmares’ (Porter, 1984:16). We need the night parrot, Edward and I. Menagerie à trois. How can I write about this intimacy? How can I explain how his legs smell like horses and his hands like ink? How he writes down our life as if we never meet. He has built a new hut which he calls in his wry, fey way the ‘gartar gunya’. In this way, he can prepare his 25-year-old man/monster body and then walk across to me just as he remembers the sounds of his father’s steps moving along the corridor to his mother’s wing. This is fine, it leaves me time to be with the night parrot, coming as he does to keep us alive. Edward is ashamed that my feet have to touch the ground coming as I do straight from castle to carriage, which is how he imagines the hebel bricks and the ’82 Pulsar. But he hopes I’ll have time for my prayers and has begun a chapel for me to sit in. He’s bringing me into myself. He’s complaining about the land under threat, that he won’t be able to hang onto it all with the town and the Governor muttering louder and louder about splitting it up, letting ‘selectors’ come. He’s dreaming of more cheap labour and he likes the word ‘coolie’, fresh on the breath and fine for the country, for growth, for his enterprise. He can’t see my great great grandparents coming down the hill. He can’t see Bridget feeding mare’s milk to her baby. But he is making it all possible. I’m coming out.

They won’t know the sort of fear he has. Every fire in the hills is another sign to him, to mount up, to load his gun, to thunder off. But almost always to no effect. The Aboriginal people not attached to the runs as workers or trackers or in other unspecified occupations have got their own systems for attack and retreat, their own ways of getting what they want from what Edward seems to offer but it makes no sense to Edward and everything is an attack to him since he is not in charge of the meaning making. But for Bridget and John Eckersley Newbury, who will only find those Aboriginal people used to very hard work for very cheap rations, they will be the soothing balm to Newbury fecundity. It will be Fanny’s (the Newburys’ Aboriginal servant) and others ‘faithful’ black hands in the suds of petticoats and stockings that nourish the incipient respectability of the 12,13,14 Newbury children, outbreeding Teddy’s lot in perfect ten to one ratio. Every Mass followed by another action-packed propagating afternoon.

No one dares to point to our mongrel past since we have God on our side. Scientific breeding programs will be practised on Fanny’s people and we will look away, sorry for
the loss of cheap labour and oh how we loved her children, ‘their quiet dignity, all their own’ (Newbury, 1986:126). It is Edward making all this possible for me and yet he is awkward at my questions. He doesn’t like to think a woman could be here. When I sneak away to the shepherd’s wife to drink beer and suck her breasts and Edward finds her later, drunk, with bodice agape, he notes that he must speak to Bates about his wife stealing beer. This is only the third time he has had to mention an existent woman in three years. I’m not counting the women to whom letters are sent or from whom letters are received, they are altogether other beings. Breasts form no connection in Edward’s mind between I who step from my carriage and the doubtful wife of a convict. For the moment it is only I who see the possibilities. But Bate’s wife is no slave; it is often she who lunges first toward me. Her name is Marnuk, Scottish for a bird no-one has seen, and I see what she means but her touch is real enough. Bates is her third husband. ‘They don’t last’, she says and she always has to be looking out for others and something more. The tricks she practises upon my body she learnt from her mother’s lover who was in the ‘factory’ and was queen of the cats. She never asks me to stay and knows she will be leaving before me. ‘When you’re out you can’t stop moving’, she says. ‘I should know’, she says and laughs. Is she also the night parrot?

It is the night parrot that keeps oiling Irby and me so that we slip an’ slide into one another, so that we cannot forget that we fucked. His clotted ink stains are inside me and my silicon chipped nails leave torn shreds of membrane in his arse. You cannot deny this connection—history explodes every time we touch. Can my little Howard, my prime mistress imagine an armband like this? A sinuous coil that writhe into an avenging clitoris rising higher and higher rubbing harder and harder? But sometimes the night parrot comes to take me away into a void, past the cranky freedom of celebrated, academic Histories and history to a place where I can’t hear myself, where words fail, where one cannot imagine oneself and where the histories of the night parrot become impossible. Too many trips like this have made the night parrot extinct.

The Brain Farts

Here, like everywhere, there is space for your own readings and here like everywhere I am hoping you will build whole scores out of this pap gone rotten. But I have the penance to write. As incipient academic, I am called on first to prick my own balloon, to let out the energy of effect into the ether of intent, theory, reading. What do I mean? What am I trying to do? Let’s begin with the Night Parrot. Taken from Dorothy Porter (who wouldn’t thank me for the accolade—‘not another academic wanker’, I imagine her saying), the strength and the horror of the (almost) extinct Night Parrot suggested to me the raw, moving liminality of imagined histories. I wanted to do at least two things. The first is to insist on the intimacy of History (as progressive and officially documented) and history (as a fiction of the present) and the effects of both on live, real bodies, on the
subjects of 1999. In particular I need to show that Irby’s diary is ongoingly productive, that his words and actions are still assisting in the making up of inscribed bodies with emotional? real? rational? possibilities. The experience of reading him, going there, living there, growing up there means I experience his words through my body, my childhood, my intimate selves. When John Howard suggests that academics and others are subscribing to a black armband version of history, it is not the fatuousness of his ever more better politician’s-speak that so irritates me but the crime he commits on his own possibility. The flimsy armband is not an adequate metaphor for history of any sort. Removed from the heart, three quarters up the arms of action—this is no place for any symbol of history to lie. To insist on this inertia is to attempt to misplace history and reinforce History. It powerfully circulates an expedient knowledge that has to be engaged with over and over again since repetition is a convenient moving, standing stillness. H(h)istory is always speaking and no-one can stop us becoming but each insistence that Aboriginal history is not a current effective History results in an increasing limitation on who ‘we’ can be. Is there room to be queer? to be ‘woman’? to be? when over and over again your public possibility is endlessly rehearsed as only ever non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal?

Whether we are becoming in both the past or the present is something which has been overreached, but how do we write out this excess? Marrying Irby was one possibility. Of course Irby was not married at the time he wrote the diaries and ‘naturally’ he wasn’t married to me. This is not a Demidenko. There is not even the slightest consistency between writing and appearance. I am inventing, not telling ‘truth’. I think I am, like Margaret Tucker in the story of her ‘removal’, writing sense but our projects and fields of materiality are very different. As I have suggested before, I understand Tucker’s writing to be a fundamental challenge to the ‘sense’ of colonially invented language and structures. Hers is the sort of history that challenges the material effects of History that literally writes her story out of itself. It would be easy to suggest that if her history could become Australia’s History I may not have to write the way I do but there are a few things wrong with this thinking. The first is to recognise that the struggle to write out possibilities of becoming are not necessarily going to be applauded by any Australian History, no matter how heterogeneous, since this is an ‘essentially’ insecure project, related to but not solely born of a particular nationalism or commitment to place. The second is that the ongoing, re-thinking and reorganising of histories, institutions and governments that has already been necessary to hear Aboriginal voices will surely continue to invent histories unlike others—my inventive technology may not be adequate under those conditions.

The sense I am writing then is a struggle of nonsenses. Partly produced by the ‘sense’ of colonialism, the same ‘sense’ that disables and denies Tucker’s history; the arena of my struggle is marked out. Without Tucker’s experience, without her history (having
read and been affected by her history as well as hegemonic colonial history but being placed as a non-Aboriginal reader and subject), I can perform only within the theatre of colonialism’s nonsense. My sense also seeks to make nonsense but through excessive sense. The plethora of positioned histories which I have some access to opens up the routes of my possible encounters with Irby, but material reality insists that this is a marriage rather then love affair. I am not a ‘free’ spirit.

Secondly or simultaneously, I am struggling with the textual elision of women. I am there in Irby as much as Bate’s beer stealing wife—but how can I insist on that? There are clear reasons to do so. The first is part of a wider and more obviously historic project where ‘women’ are reinvented through the fragments and detritus of Historical formations that privileged the keeping of a variety of ‘men’s’ reports and thoughts and replicated the material conditions that meant many more ‘men’ (inventing themselves in the process) than ‘women’ would write and that their writings would be recorded. One resistant possibility that arose from that constellation of effects was the category ‘woman’. This is now as unstable as any other category but it still has I imagine writerly effects when I flesh out imaginary bodies for a simple sentence in Irby’s hand. What I mean is, I think that you as reader will figure this character differently than if it was gendered male. I don’t care what those figurations might be but I don’t want you to forget that it was at least these possibilities (and many many more) that Irby is unable at this moment to express.

His inability or his choice does not however affect my ability to invent all over him since he, as much as anyone, has made me queer. This is not the same recuperative project that I refer to with regard to ‘woman’ although I have no doubt that women were sleeping with, making love, sexually exploiting etc other women at the time and quite possibly at Bolivia. No, the action I am now calling queer is that (out of history but of this moment) invention, where the imaginary line between past and present and so future becomes imagined body on imagined body, a limit at which we produce our own locatedness. This state is both transportative and within the realm of the abject, operating as it does between past and present in a way that denies the stability of either.

A final point to make is that reading the intimacy and effectivity of Irby’s writing is an emotional experience. These wonderful words with their banal resonances from the mouths of Hollywood stars and New Age devotees form an intriguing cliche. Can we have experience without emotion? Can we have emotion without experience? I feel a moment of calm connection. I lounge insouciantly at the door of a sexed snuggery within which Steedman, McRobbie, Bhabha, Morris and finally Probyn have done the work that gives me the opportunity to develop my ‘enunciative strategies’ (Probyn, 1993:86) from the productive sites of emotion and experience and emotional experiences. I am taking Irby personally. But what has this done?
Closetting. Hidden histories and the Erotics of Silence

The closet is a contested, relational space. Once imagined as a final door that one was either in or out of, it now has to be acknowledged that ‘out’ means many things to many people and the discursive power of heterosexual expectation can constantly locate you ‘in’ or ‘out’ whether you are or not. The closet is a magicked space, a strategic cloud and a mad idea. The idea of a final emergence, a totally coherent knowable identity is something that haunts history as well as our ‘selves’. The closet (like this thesis) is a powder room of preparation, inventing a persona that can emerge historically knowable, a certain, queer, shade of white. Were the impossibilities of being lesbian connected to the impossibilities of acknowledging Aboriginal presence?

Perhaps I didn’t fuck Irby but I did make love; truly I made love as if I had never known what love was before. Perhaps I didn’t. One girlfriend’s father was best friends with the Grandson of Irby’s fellow squatter, Ogilvie. They had met at Cambridge, which tells you what New England used to be able to provide for its wealthy sons in terms of ‘education’—the return to England. These women’s mothers drove Mercedes and Rovers and once—like something out of Desert Hearts—we kissed goodbye in the Glen Innes airport and she streaked along the road in the Mercedes while my plane flew overhead. And that was the desire: to keep ourselves in perpetual motion. That was a becoming. We drank all day and discovered really why kissing was so good and our bodies felt like gods. Their parents thought my feet were on the ground.

I didn’t meet my old High School friends on the plane at the end of the university term (AUSTUDY paid an airfare if you were more than twenty four hours by bus or train from your home address). They were in jobs or in relationships that kept them in the cities—they had re-located. Neither did I meet people of colour nor distinguishable queers. But I loved this flying back to the country, the complicated connections from Melbourne to Glen Innes that always required a minimum of four hours in the airport bar and then the sudden re-adjustment to the small sized, rickety twelve-seater that marked the passage back home. Once my return coincided with my by then ex-lover’s parents’ twenty fifth wedding anniversary party. Everyone on that plane was going up for that party. That was the sort of set they were: cosmopolitans, which meant they knew the same sort of people whether or not they lived in Watson’s Bay or Moree. They had access to a circularity of sameness that I never did.

But Glen Innes and the countryside surrounding it was our shared place: the monied, the semi-monied and the poor, the black and the white. But we all used very different maps that only occasionally crossed over like at the bar of the local Agricultural Show. We knew the rivers to swim in, we knew where to go, we were goddesses of locomotion. She and I lost our lesbian virginity on blankets near a creek. It rained at the
end and the truck cabin was filled with the sweat of sexed bodies and wet wool. Some sort of primal settlement smell. We saw no ‘natives’.

No one’s parents asked where we had been until four or five in the morning; our positions were so well established—we were the girls. And yet we knew absolutely we could never go back. We had moved to another country forever where nothing was as we expected. Lips didn’t feel the same, fingers were extraordinary things and we were sucked out, heart first. Our desires were antipodean. Are these the pleasures of being ‘white’ and becoming postcolonial? This ‘entry into an arrangement, an assemblage of other fragments, other things, becoming bound up in some other production’ (Grosz: 1995:184). And wasn’t a part of those productions, the silences of homophobia and the scratched out racist routes that meant we never saw, never considered; these intensities following the well worn colonial paths of opening us up to the new, investing ourselves in spaces and places—always into country owned by no-one else. And because they were wealthy we always had drugs. Usually marijuana but later speed and so we could slow down and speed up, enervate and proliferate with each line and each puff. We spent two summers on the bizarre edges of the Bachelor and Spinster Ball circuit. We drove to Gunnedah, Black Mountain, Wagga Wagga—excited, high, everyone’s fantasy of getting out and off on it. We didn’t notice the absolute non-Aboriginality of those gatherings. Our out-of-itness was on long stretches of scrub and Bundy soaked halls where we collected stickers saying Got Ripped and Rooted at the Dundee B&S and put them next to our Feed the Man Meat sticker. And then I flew out again.

I see the parallels with Irby’s constant locomotion. The money and the time and the class and the whiteness and the drugs that were necessary to be. Were these bodies colonial or postcolonial? Were these pleasures queer or historically inscribed? Did knowing of The Bluff Rock Massacre change any of this?

It couldn’t have happened without Irby and dear Windeyer. The intense silences of the country began with the murders of Aboriginal people. They are the magnificent edifices of whiteness. This was not the silence of not saying or not doing, after all Irby did both but rather the power to disappear people, to ‘understand’ so completely that nothing was ever said. We ‘lesbians’ too had been disappeared even though we were still there. We were one hundred percent somebodies who couldn’t be seen. The technique of vanishment was perfect for them and for us, for in the interstices of its silence we discovered another sexed-self.

We could never really come home. And yet Irby did. He lived in another world, murdered other possibilities but stayed and prospered. Our exclusion from his sort of country wasn’t all bad. I found it quite warm on the outside. I was glad to get rid of Irby, wanted to step off Bluff Rock but where did one go?
The ‘Original’ Diaries

Woodenbong Hotel
I’m sitting on my single bed in a pub with a six foot, barbed wire topped fence surrounding the beer garden, which is the only ‘open’ area. We pass various groups of Aboriginal people on the roads but none are in the pub. On our second night I see one Aboriginal man drinking quietly in the corner, completely alone but this is obviously not an Aboriginal friendly pub. I am scared. Susan and I are given a ‘twin’ room. We don’t make a fuss. In this place a ‘twin room’ is a single room with another single bed put in. There is just room between the beds for Susan to lie down to do yoga—just. The bags have to go on top of the cupboard. Since we asked to be furthest from any noise we are right at the very end of the curving corridor of this worn out, forties? fifties? building. It is a long weekend but no-one else is staying here. Later it turned out that their usual guests were the road or Telstra workers who stayed for the week. I think I am glad to be in single beds. They are a convenient, desperate sign of our normalness for this was no place to kiss your girlfriend at the garden gate, love is blind but this town ‘aint. As if coming here for what might look like a holiday could be considered normal! I am still scared and depressed. There is always the hope that ‘research’ will lead you to some obscure place that is an undiscovered gem. The researcher as tourist. Perhaps a big old pub with verandahs all around, cheap rooms with home cooking and work and holidays cojoin. But Woodenbong, on the back road to Casino, along a highway that is cut every time there is heavy rain, is not quite like that. It feels, I feel, trapped. Tomorrow we start on the journals.

The next day
E (Irby’s grand-daughter and holder of the journals) and her husband are very welcoming. Their little fibro cottage with its antiques and studio out the back is a haven. We have very formal morning teas and when invited for dinner know to dress up as much as we can manage. We ‘fit’, you see.

Later
After a delicious roast dinner that E has cooked we are mulling over the wine when E tells us how she was excluded from the Tenterfield centenary celebrations on account of her family’s involvement in the massacre, that Mrs ----, a local historian wouldn’t speak to her. I ask what she thinks about the stories and she said she never knew until she was told (she thinks by Mr ----, another local historian). I said I was surprised he didn’t have more questions about the connection between the Keating and Irby accounts having
obviously read the original documents etc, to which she said ‘He told me that his
Grandfather took part in the massacre’.

And later
Even later this same evening E tells us about some other relatives, the Campbells, and
asks if we would like to see some of their books. Of course we would. She reaches into
the veneer cupboard under the shelves and produces three medical volumes from the
fourteenth century. He (this particular relative) had been a doctor and a collector. She also
showed us some chips from the Great Pyramid. These were stored amongst the spoons
and plates and other bits and pieces of 70 years of life. Collecting, Hoarding. I’m
curating. Why is this book and the chip from the Great Pyramid more valuable to me than
the Di and Charlie wedding spoon or the plates from other places?

Reading the original Diaries
Irby’s original diaries provide the most extensive opportunity to engage with, invent or
read the culture that enabled the recording of the killing of Aboriginal people and which
emerges from the perpetrator’s own hand(s). But what happens as you carefully read and
write (and eventually record into the tape recorder) is the development of an excited
enthusiasm. It is like falling in love. You become a part of a tiny, exclusive, world. You
are the civilised, who care for these documents as thousands haven’t and then the content
begins to throttle you. You want to annihilate this history and this man; he and his friends
are the originary act of upper class male bonding: pack murder. But I am a true
researcher. I spend hours and days to do it right and the fantasy re-emerges of one
definitive story of the ‘Bluff Rock Massacre’. I will work out how he thinks; I will
discover the original sin. But of course much of the material is familiar from the
published ‘Memoir’ and the detail that has been edited out are the daily weather patterns,
the endless details of riding here and there and receiving x and y. The most obvious
textual difference between the ‘Memoir’ and the original diary is the removal of the
adjective ‘immediately’. Too many times for his editing daughter Irby records,
immediately saddles up, immediately sets out and immediately sent! Too much
immediacy? Is that how Irby imagined himself? As utterly immediate—without culture or
language and existing only through his actions?

I am back in the grind of details and contexts that tease and refuse to satisfy. The
erlier journals, which provide an account of the brother’s voyage to Australia reveal two
men who love to sing and joke and play their instruments but who are anxious about
missing a Sunday service and how best to deal with a mutiny. The later journals, the ones
I am most concerned with, are duller in their details and when he tells stories of any
length they are to do with tracking and sometimes finding and murdering Aboriginal
people. Irby is available as a player and perpetrator of ‘The Bluff Rock Massacre’
because he wrote and because he was published. What his diaries and his ‘Memoir’ suggest about those actions is the absolute presence of movement and form: horses and death.

(5)

Transportative Colonialism:  
Horses and Death; Becoming Squorse

Horses were important to Edward Irby. Even before signing the agreement to go to ‘Deepwater’, he and Leonard are anxiously looking for mares. One arrangement fails through but then with some opportune assistance of a fellow lodger they are able to purchase two for 25 and 30 pounds, which was the annual income for a shepherd at the time (plus rations). He notes that they would have cost double that three years ago. Leonard provides a description of these horses to his sister Caroline:

Ted’s is a perfect Rosinate; it is what they call ewe-necked, that is, it has a neck like a sheep… There is such a sink in its back that you might put a sack of flour there without noticing it… nearly thoroughbred of course. Mine is just 5 pounds better, so we have some fine cavalry between us; but they are both sound and young, so they will do. (Irby, 1908:56).

They attempt to ride these horses in Sydney and are thrown two or three times, it being a ‘drawback’ that they had not had any practice: ‘It is very different riding here to what it is at home, particularly going over great stones and logs; your horse is liable to stumble every second step’ (Irby, 1908:46). It is interesting to consider what the status of the horse was at this moment. Carriages, tandems and the occasional four-in-hand are noted as symbols of the ‘gayness’ and pleasantness of Sydney. Some of these were presumably the usual mode of transport for the Irbys. However, on stations ‘beyond the limits’ where there were no carriage paths and bullocks pulling drays was the only method of bringing in supplies and walking (Shanks’ pony/mare) was the norm—the individual on a horse signified the squatter.

I am using Probyn’s chapter ‘On Becoming Horse’ (1996) as a point of departure. She manages to be specific while simultaneously suggesting larger canvases. She deploys her notion of desire around the claims to queerdom and the particularity of lesbian desire. Desire as an essence that spreads itself, as a series of movements and inscriptions, which is what I would want to call colonialism and more particularly what I would want to call the ‘myths’ and ‘truths’ of Bluff Rock. On the one hand I can see how a claim for colonialism as a desire might not be appreciated by Probyn. With Grosz et al she has spent some time in reinvigorating the palpable particularity of real bodies, FELT desire, the look, the curve of the neck, cunt-thumping-theory. But her reinscription of
desire away from psychoanalytic reductiveness and into the world of the social also allows me to claim it for colonialism. In the process colonialism itself becomes embodied, felt, the curve of the neck. ‘Colonialisms’ in the same way we might say lesbianisms, heterosexualisms or named practices like kissing and frottage or particular movements; immigration, emigration as a site of mediated practices which are always in the process of becoming and belonging. Becoming colonial (squatter/horse=squorse) ‘is also a strategy for figuring the undoing and the redoing of the lines between and among entities’ (Probyn, 1996:62).

Individual horses provided the means for separation and ascension. When travelling up with bullock dray and six others ‘we being the only ones who had not been convicts,…we always rode on with the stockman, who had to get the bullocks in the morning’ and while the stockman prepares a fire and hobbles their horses, the Irbys go off to see if there is any game about. So it is not just ownership of a horse that is so significant, but what one does with it. This becomes more obvious in the diaries where Irby records constant movements via the horse in circles of sociability as well as utility. Variously named workers have horses taken to them for particular tasks and they are also sent to catch the horses for Irby’s use but horses are as ubiquitous as air to Irby:

Rode over to Windeyer with the Cream of Tartar
Rode after the bullocks
I rode off to look over the run again...
Rode out to the shepherds
Rode after the bullocks
Len rode over to Robertson’s
Rode over to see Windeyer
In the afternoon rode to the gap but no sign of the sheep...
Rode over to pay Robertson a visit
Rode out early to tell the shepherds to keep away from the road...
Len rode over to Kelso’s for some seed corn
Len and self rode over to Mackenzies to eat strawberries. (etc)

The horses make possible the network of communications which makes the station productive in Irby’s terms. This includes the series of social and economic exchanges with the other squatters. One of the ritual exchanges is the gathering together of a ‘party’ on horseback to pursue a group of Aboriginal people. Horses, before the ‘employment’ of Aboriginal trackers, were an important tactical vehicle. Horses enabled the squatters to cover open ground quickly enough to prevent the Aboriginal groups reaching the protection of denser gullies and bush where the usefulness of the horse was minimised.
Horses and guns were the speed and weaponry that made action of Irby’s ‘will’ to ‘punish’.

These units of death had names: Smudge, Skipper, Speedy, Boxer, Blazes, Wildfire and Crib. When Skipper appears lame a sprain is suspected and her deteriorating condition is noted over the days and he laments that he does not have the required medicines. Skipper is bled and then help is requested. They put a rowel in his chest and drawing plaster on his heel. Finally he records, ‘Skipper much better’.

The horses are also a source of humour. When recording how he shot a turkey he notes that the sound of the gun also ‘shot Speedy as she was quite asleep’. This is the care of a necessary resource and the affectionate sentiment and anecdote of the familiar. Instead of Irby ‘becoming horse’ the horse ‘becomes squatter’. Their domesticated surfaces become conjoined with the locative networks of the squatter to become ‘embodied forms’ (Probyn, 1996:41) of ‘transportative’ colonialism. In calling this ‘transportative’ colonialism I am identifying the importance of movements within the world of colonialism, particularly on stations ‘beyond the limits’. These were movements of all sorts. In the first place the transportation of convicts provided the cheap labour which enabled the labour rich activities of shepherding. And for pick-pockets (reported as making the best shepherds) to be transposed into shepherds, the spaces and movements of colonial structures had to be bought to bear. ‘Transportative’ also implies the conveyance of sets of cultural mores in an ambivalent state of possibility. That is, one could be ‘transported’ to something beyond, a capitalist nirvana, or death... Or one could remain in a state of ‘transport’, a magical paralysis of mother country culture which stops the colonial subject in a state out of or ‘lost in translation’ (Hoffman, 1989). To ‘transport’ was also to kill and when Irby, Windeyer, Connor and Weaver kill the Aboriginal people they have trapped under the rocks, they are transporting them to a state of imagined barbarism and into a death of ‘punishment’.

The Sentimental Blokes

When Robinson and Westley die (these shepherds that Irby reports he was forced to allow into his kitchen due to a very heavy downpour of rain), Irby is careful to bury them properly. Westley’s mate commences the coffin and Irby begins the grave and then ‘we consigned the remains of poor Westley to their last resting place’. Days later a fence is put around the grave. The ‘melancholy business’ of burying Robinson, who died further from the head station and on very hard ground, difficult to dig, is soon over but weeks later Irby writes that he rides out to ‘see that the native dogs hadn’t disturbed poor Robinson’s grave’. This was at a time in which death, according to Ariès, was understood in western culture as ‘Thy Death’ (1974:55-85). This was a shift from ‘one’s own death’ to concern and attention to the deaths of others. A part of this was the invention of cemeteries, tombs etc that could be visited by family and were connected to
the place housing the remains of the departed. This was also the period in which he identifies the rise of hysterical (transported?) mourning. Only a very scaled down version of these events was possible on Bolivia but we can note the importance of adequately accounting for the remains of the dead, the burial and the fence. These modest graves were to perpetuate the memory of the deceased and made available a place entirely given over to his memory, which could be an inspiration to those who passed and could potentially inspire the romantic, overblown melancholy of the 1840s. It also indicates perhaps the cultural uneasiness with the idea of dying alone. A lonely death was a marker within Europe of poverty and yet here, ‘beyond the limits’, anyone, from any class might die relatively alone (although it was much more likely to be the shepherds and nightwatchmen).

Crib, a horse that dies, is also buried, as are the twelve sheep killed while they were being washed. Even these animals are too close to the ‘inhabited’ heart of the head station to be simply abandoned to rot. Was it the smell, the risk of disease or the simple aesthetics of order that would have been disrupted if these creatures had not been interred? Although these burials are of a more mundane nature than Robinson’s it only heightens the difference with which the bodies of the Aboriginal people are treated. Their remains, their bodies, are abandoned, even though Irby recognises that they had their own graves and burial system. Irby transports their bodies into a record about the death of a shepherd in a letter to the Commissioner. A report to the Governor’s representative replaces the space of mourning and interment. Their burial happens via a primitive bureaucracy. To kill Aboriginal people suggests many cultural frameworks at play, some of which may have been greed, theories of racial differentiation, expediency etc but to fail to bury the bodies shows the complete failure of an inclusive sentiment. Death was able to transport the looked-down-upon shepherd to a ‘poor fellow’ whose grave fence is fussed over but the multiple murders of Aboriginal people are ridden away from so quickly that they don’t stop until they are on the home runs. When finally they do stop, they eat quickly and go on to ‘write immediately’ to the Commissioner. The horse driven speed of these events is underscored by his final diary entry for that day, which is ‘We have indeed been very lucky in getting back the second day, we fully expected to be out a week and the chances against our coming upon the Blacks at all appeared very great. Fine. West.’

It seems a trite conclusion to suggest that Irby lacked ‘sentiment’ for Aboriginal people, or at least those he had categorised as ‘wild blacks’, but lack of incorporation into the sentimental, combined with the speed and space of land ‘beyond the limits’, were the three vectors of possibility which I understand as allowing Irby the Damoclean ‘freedom’ to murder. Even as corpses, ‘wild blacks’ were unable to be accounted for within Irby’s system of ritual except as transmogrified bureaucratic detail (the nature of which we can’t be certain of). Irby as ‘squire’ can move quickly and violently into spaces which are far
enough away from his domesticated head station so that he is never confronted with the necessity to touch, bury or mourn those he has murdered. Another historical marker fails to come into being; more Aboriginal people are ‘disappeared’. An historical massacre. But this transportative power was not unlimited. Like the transportative possibilities of the virtual reality experiments, there is still the experience of putting your hands into the sweaty, smelling gloves through which you become virtual—the body never disappears entirely. Neither do Irby’s bodies or those of the people he kills...

(4)

The Fragile Body

Five days after the killing of the Aboriginal group, Irby writes, he ‘Was seized with violent spasms, took a dose of Rhubarb and Magnesia but found no relief from it so took an emetic which gave me some ease, at night took some catechu and laudanum’ (Wed 23, OM). This is not the first or the last time Irby reports being ill. Twice before he records bad headaches and being taken badly by dysentery which keeps him unwell for two days. And many months later, intermittently, he has several days in which he is ‘unwell’ but nothing again as dramatic as ‘violent spasms’.

What does it mean to be transported by not simply ‘desire’ but the desire to become? squatter? colonial? ‘Beyond the limits’ of location, within the possibilities of transportative desires—what becomes of the body? Brady quotes Coetzee’s description of space stretching out in front of the white man in a hot colony:

The operation of space is thus: the five senses stretch out from the body they inhabit, but four stretch into a vacuum. The ear cannot hear, the nose cannot smell, the tongue cannot taste, the skin cannot feel: the sun bears down on the body, flesh and skin move in a pocket of heat, the skin stretches vainly around, everything is sun. Only the eyes have power. The eyes are free, they reach out to the horizon all around (Brady, 1996:66).

Brady is suggesting that the non-Aboriginal, within the vast spaces of Australia, ‘loses any sense of limit’ and that the experience of infinite space in turn provokes ‘a kind of nihilistic violence’ (Brady, 1996:67). The emotional and to some extent physical experience of being ‘beyond the limits’ of one’s cultural location and beyond ones spatial sensibility is nicely sketched here but I would like to take its corporeal elements a bit further. Coetzee’s description is of overwhelmed senses and Brady’s evocation of a nihilistic voyager suggests too strongly I think the power of these ‘settler’ experiences. It is an easy step by a clumsy reader to see these white men as nearly Gods; yet their bodies hurt. Individually and corporeally they had to struggle to maintain its new order. After
shooting the trapped group, Irby contains the meaning of his actions through the writing to the commissioner and through the reassurances of Windeyer but later his body is in ‘violent spasms’. This reminds us that although he is God-like in his capacity to institute official silences and a very limited history he is also never entirely in control, never able to expunge the effects of being a corporeal subject.

His methods of controlling his violent spasms is first to take rhubarb and magnesium. The rhubarb is to make him purge his bowels and the magnesium to then settle his stomach. But the spasms continue and so he takes something to make himself vomit which helps a little. At night he takes catechu, which settles the stomach and contracts the tissues and canals of the body. He combines this with laudanum or opium which would have relaxed all muscles and probably put him to sleep. He is still ‘very bad’ the next day, but is ‘rather better’ the day after that. He sticks to the catechu and laudanum. Thereafter he is back cutting the lambs (removing their tails and testes) and visits ‘poor Robinson’s grave’ to check that the native dogs had not disturbed it. The fragile limits of the colonial body have been temporarily re-established.

The murdered, the unspoken of corpses, the efforts to make himself shit and vomit and the re-ordering through opium are powerful markers of the colonial body and rich in abjective possibilities. His self-induced vomiting and shitting can be understood as protecting himself from the corpses and his own capacity to make those corpses. To paraphrase Kristeva; He expels himself, he spits himself out, he abjures himself within the same motion he establishes himself as a coherent colonial body, as differentiated from the wild? the colonial? the Aboriginal? (Kristeva, 1982:3). The corpses he has created have instituted a space beyond the locatable limits of location for himself. He is without borders. He has the borders of his corpses oozing and writhing, sucking him out of himself but then he vomits and shits himself back into existence—or does he? For three days he is in an opium hollow where the body moves only haltingly at your command and where your world shrinks to small actions that you can minutely observe. Your own limits shrink back to the lifting of cups and the slow drift between sleep proper and daytime fug. The bowels and stomach retire and there is stillness. Little by little he moves out again. But it is not all OK.

Irby’s conflicted body may be able to temporarily establish some beachheads, ambiguously fortify self and Other but he can never stop being my abject. With his murders he has disrupted forever my sense of place and my capacity to believe in the secure banality of my own childhood. His shadow is long and pervasive. The murderous possibility he has left me is—Would I have done the same? Am I still murdering now? What is the point in saying I just wouldn’t have done it, I never would have done it. What morality? What sense of self informed by what, didn’t also inform him? What keeps me apart from him? Nothing but writing it, thinking it differently so that such a certain self is not possible. That’s why we write our theses; to save ourselves—spider
threads of life. And I was wrong to only say that Irby made me queer. In engaging with him, in engaging with the abject, I have to write across so many dichotomies that I’m not only queer, I’m fucking perverted.

(3)

Pathography/Ethnography
If Ethnography is concerned with cultures and the study thereof of then the concentration on the particular and the inclusion of the emotional (pathos) must produce ‘pathographies’ simultaneously.

Going There

Paddock Notes
(Getting there) Uralla: Am trying to coerce Susan my partner and unpaid research assistant (an historically ubiquitous and difficult arrangement to get right) into writing her thoughts—she seems very unwilling to participate as ethnographer. Where is Geertz’s quiet, appearing and disappearing wife? (1973:412-42). Susan is sulking on the bed with her boots on. The familiar smell of New England coming out of drought is all around us in the Uralla caravan park. All damp grass and undercurrents of mud. The proprietor shows us our double bed caravan ($24 per night) and shows us the possibility of another bed that folds out from the table—if we needed it but obviously not expecting us to use it. Is this simply lack of homophobia? Large family used to sharing? Or is there something wrong with the other bed?

Tenterfield, Raining
We begin going through the newspapers looking for reference to the massacre, deaths of some of the instigators, work reports, police reports, census etc. By 1908 (when Irby’s memoirs were published) all the ‘savages’ are elsewhere, New Guinea and Africa.

D, the caravan proprietor, tells me about the small child who survived the massacre and was brought up by whites on a farm nearby. Campbell had this same story in his article about New England history which he wrote in the sixties (Campbell, 1969). T from the history house tells Susan about the hail storm interrupting the massacre. This too is familiar to me but from where?

Next Day
I visit the Land Council and chat with a group of Aboriginal workers there. L says I should just go there, you can feel it is a bad place. Bad country. P says she wishes they
would tell the truth that it was whites who got killed up there, that the Aborigines had tricked the whites into following them without realising the cliff was there. She said she had read something in the archives at the Armidale History Resource Centre. I asked them if they were glad that at least Aboriginal presence is acknowledged but they all agreed with L who said ‘We don’t want to claim it or anything, we’re not like that’. It is not the most interesting thing to them. Their focus is elsewhere. Again I see the non-Aboriginal insistence on the Bluff Rock Massacre as the centre of events when for years (perhaps ‘forever’), the (most?) Aboriginal focus has been in the opposite direction toward Woollo Woollooni and Woolool Woolool. And what is there for any Aboriginal group in this story of massacre, this total destruction? But then what is there in the story for non-Aboriginal people? Supremacy? A hint of the silenced land wars? No one at the Land Council seems to think it happened in the way it is portrayed but there is no insistent, single other truth.

In the afternoon I talk to one of the Aboriginal tour leaders, who says he doesn’t care about the terrible things that happened to his people in the past he just wants to get on with the future. Points out that he’s never been in gaol, never been unemployed and yes there are some Aborigines that get in trouble but if he can just show them that you can live a normal life. He’d like to leave Tenterfield though since his kids are getting older and they need more things to do.

Another Day
Go and have a long talk with H, author of the tourist leaflet and local historian. He is very helpful, has a little separate writing office off the house, remembers my father well and with affection and is charmingly camp. Mrs H offers tea and their pet dog sniffs around. He knows that Irby’s grand daughter has the original diaries and promises to find her address. He asks me if I have run into Collins Creek and muses on ‘sugarloaf’, two pointers from Irby’s account that show Irby was not moving toward Bluff Rock but we are talking and I can’t really ask why he seems so clear that Irby’s story happened at Bluff Rock. I ask about Ps’ suggestion that it was whites that were killed and he says that he heard (or read) that Algernon Irby was speared through his top hat on Bluff Rock (no source).

Because it (and us) was there
Finally contact (another) Mr H and receive permission to climb Bluff Rock. It looked easy. You go straight up the ridge and you expect there will be a flat top but there is more and more heavy scrub. Still raining. We occasionally see one large footprint and Susan sees an unidentifiable animal. It is not eerie in the same way that the country near Mt Mackenzie was. This is regrown scrub. There, at twilight, ‘trapped in the rocks’ amongst the dieback trees and the grim granite boulders, unsaid history was palpable. But here,
even right near the edge, the bush is dense and the ground uneven; these would not have been easy deaths. Where could someone have balanced to pick up a body and throw? Even tumbling an inert or dead body over would have been difficult. Those corpses would have been ‘trapped’ on all the minor overhangs. Perhaps at the side but again, some ‘goh’, some ‘crippled’, how would they have got up? It would have been quite difficult for horses up the ridge but impossible on top so that at least makes sense but Irby’s trapped under rocks does not. The country is tough and much more majestic from a distance. Walking the stories out brings irritation rather than revelation. I cannot see it, I cannot feel it. More drizzle as we come down and we get slightly lost in the very thick ti-trees. What bloody tree line?

Susan’s Account

Yesterday we went to Bluff Rock, up an unmarked road and up and down an unmarked track. The rock towers menacingly and the stories we have heard about the massacre hang heavily like the mist and the threatening rain on the nearby hills. ‘Follow the tree line beyond the paddock’ we are told by the guardians (?) of the rock, the Hs of the closest farm. The first hill is unbelievably heavy going, how could a ‘chase’ happen here, how could you be motivated to stagger up here let alone chase your quarry—let alone be chased—why would you be chased uphill? Wouldn’t you divert sideways? The words of Irby along the lines (I’m roughly quoting)—They would have got off if they had taken to their heels but they got their fighting men together. So did the fighting men go uphill in order to gain the upper hand? With a cliff as your final defence? Unlikely, unlikely, I mutter under my breath (what breath, there is none left as I drag foot over foot requiring the most dedicated, focussed effort to continue up). We lose sight of the rock, a moment of doubt with neither compass nor track, where is the rock? are we heading in the right direction? No doubt really, we know the rock is up. At the top, I see the hind quarters of a strange animal, large cat size, perhaps a large cat or a hare (sighted later running definitely not a hare), maybe a feral cat or dog. Sensational view and much welcomed view at top. Lots of droppings; sheep says Katrina, sheep? More and constant speculation about the possibility of the mass murder, fascination with the edge: where is the edge? Where is the cover you would seek by coming this way? But there is none that we can see. Still seems a most unlikely tale. But a spectacular one. A sensational one. The rock is so awesome, looming over the landscape, visible from every which way, sheer, massive. If you wanted revenge, why not the rock as the setting—it knocks one’s breath away, it’s a darned good yarn. Certainly D and P and Katrina as a child, wide eyed at the horror of it—it certainly evokes a response from the listener. In the shadow of the rock here at Tenterfield it’s a darned good story. Climbing down we lose our way, where is the tree line, we’re in the midst of trees, thick scratchy, dense low ones, tea trees, where are we? Real moments of uncertainty—will we come to a cliff and have to
retrace our tracks and scratch our legs all over again, its steep and a long haul, follow the stream says Katrina it’s the shortest way down. But water falls, down waterfalls Katrina. Come on, come on, you don’t know the country, there’s no waterfalls here. At last a bleat near the stream, a flash of green and we’re back in the paddock, right on course.(End of Susan’s account)

More Paddock Notes
We go to the Henry Parkes Motel Country Resort in the spirit of ironic post-modern observers but we are also hungry and want a treat. While we are meandering along the front flower bed E comes over from the garden he has been working on to talk and talk and talk about his dream of having a guest house type establishment like his family had in the Dandenongs. But this motel is bright pink with blue trim. People are moving in and out with a sort of glee, families of course, children slightly dragging, pleased parents; ‘I can afford to give my kids this—at least’. We go into the bright pink palace and are flooded in Meaghan Morris Land. Is it hiding or isn’t it? Does the very intractable stature and history of Bluff Rock make this place work in a particular way? Outdoing its ‘homeness’, does it save us from the ‘real’ quiet of Bluff Rock? And is it just a trained class response when you see after all the beautiful gardens, the vinyl chairs, yick carpet, aluminium window frames etc to think it is all wrong? A heartfelt, personal revulsion at the country getting it wrong by the standards of taste of the city class? And the awfulness of those vinyl cliches being one man’s vision, the way the smallness, the individualness of country towns make it all so personal. Anything different becomes an act of personal superiority, ‘putting on the dog’, ‘sniggering’. How I long for some sort of easy campness as a way out of this, where I can JUST LURV IT DARLIING and leave it without being insincere or unfair. Camp as moral solution. Someone is playing the organ in the ante-dining room/bar. It is Send in the Clowns and Sound of Music and she is quite an old woman. It makes me sad. What if this woman is Meaghan Morris’s mother? The room is like my stepmother’s house. Beige, floral, plenty of plastic wood veneers and pink. Two more dykes come in—is all this pink attracting the wrong types? The food was expensive since we were paying for chicken breast with ‘mango sauce’ and extra vegetable. It seemed to take a lot of energy to survive the night. We were over dressed as tourists and underdressed as locals. The Romance of reading great works in the places that inspire them, becomes impossible. It’s too local for me. I’m worried ‘At Henry Parkes Hotel’ might hurt Es’ feelings, I’m worried about the woman making beds who might have gone to school with Meaghan Morris, let alone her mother playing in the bar. Back to the caravan.
Next Night

Last night I became another sort of racist. I went to dinner. I didn’t know I was going. I arrived at the manager’s house of Bolivia Station (the owner is a QC and lives in Sydney) for what I thought would be about an hour to check locations, look at the homestead etc but my maps were missing a final corner and the manager knew his neighbour had a bigger map so they rang the neighbour and the neighbour said he would be over after the Sixty Minutes Gun Debate. (This was the time when another ‘massacre’—that at Port Arthur in Tasmania—was on people’s minds). So C and T asked me to tea. We talked (as yesterday’s killed meat was cooked, the mash and the gravy microwaved) of who was who and who had died and where I fitted in in the families of things. The drought had driven them off their own place at Red Range and so they were managing, hoping at some stage to get back their own place. They had known my best friend from school and told me her lovely grandmother was still alive. C had another Bluff Rock story. This one was to do with the trickery of Thunderbolt’s gang who were famous bushrangers in the area. When cornered on top of Bluff Rock they threw their horses over the edge to fool the troopers into thinking they had gone over and when the troopers left their horses to come over and check, the bushrangers made off with the troopers’ horses. (‘Black Mary’ was Thunderbolt’s partner in crime and this makes me wonder how many Aboriginal victories through trickery have become the stuff of bushranger legend.) A big pot of tea and fresh white bread from the freezer was then put on the table and we ate our way towards it through steak and gravy and mash. Eventually the neighbour arrives and we go over the maps and we talk of the weather and round and flat boned cattle and kids and they feel at home with me and I with them. Suddenly the hospitable and kindly C says of her eldest son working in the Kimberleys ‘He’s sick of the blacks. They’re lazy. The kids and wives are always trailing along. When you hire someone up there you get the whole family. Great experience, he’s learning tolerance’. Laughter. I didn’t say a thing and I easily could have. If I had said something, I might have seen something better but I didn’t. The description of ‘lazy’ followed an account of how all the workers up there go for twelve to fourteen hours a day and are paid a lowly two hundred dollars a week but what applied to her son didn’t apply to ‘the blacks’. Then when we were talking about how quickly a horse could go in rough country particularly if we could imagine the country of the 1840s, W (the neighbour) said; ‘Well they had the Aborigines tracks already here’ to which C asked ‘But wouldn’t something happen to them [the settlers] if they did that?’ W: Well I think that’s how they found their way, maybe the Aborigines weren’t using them at the time. C: Well I don’t know what happened to them [Aboriginal people] but they were gone before we got here. This said with a sort of humorous finality that didn’t let me ask (or so I imagined) how she explained the Land Council office in town or the Aboriginal tours.
Would a more ideologically formed non-racist have been able to resist this better? No wonder there are so many suspicions about multiple subjectivities and culture as ways that might stop this complicated, after dinner chat, gossip in the street, lovingly inclusive thing called (inadequately) racism. I’m sick of the country. I’m dying for a margarita. I’m ashamed of myself. I feel sick and I want to get away from HERE. Do you? Did I? really have to be silent because someone has been nice to you? It would have been so easy to say something. Have I already, at the slightest push ‘gone native’? Or was I being over polite because I was ‘really’ a stranger?, a guest?, a dyke?, overeducated? I hate this self that they think they’ve seen. And I know if I see them in the street I’ll thank them for a lovely dinner because of course they are more than these few words, of course they are but what am I? Wholly made of words. I want to get away from here. I WANT A MARGARITA.

What self was Where? (On Writing To)

It was in part the experience of walking over Bluff Rock that made me doubt it as the site of a massacre of Aboriginal people. Walking out the textual body of Keating and Irby’s account on a local landscape didn’t make the fit I was looking for. I kept thinking that Aboriginal people who would have known this country so well would never have let it happen like this. They would have got away, they would not have run up to a cliff and there wasn’t the open country for the squatters to force them on horseback. The Land Council worker’s story of Aboriginal trickery makes more sense. Or was I simply so intrinsically non-Aboriginal, so caught in my desire for another sort of history, that even looking at the rock I still couldn’t see destruction like that? I knew Aboriginal people were massacred, usually, according to my readings, by grisly shooting parties and poisonings. I wanted it to be true. For it to be true and for me to go on being witness to its truth would be to be a good, educated, white. My father (in particular) and mother would have been proud. My grandfather would have done the Anglo equivalent of spitting in my face. I would be nicely placed as speaking for an injustice to others. I would be a hero of sorts, almost a sort of Judith Wright (without, unfortunately, the poetry). But the sort of conditional truth I was looking for was grubby and unrecognisable. As a lesbian, wanting to get out of town, nothing I said could rise above the history I wrote. I had written out my own messy racism and ended up with no place to call my own. I was sick of being Bluff Rock.

When you go back to your childhood for work some strange things happen. In the first place it wasn’t quite home. The towns of Glen Innes and Tenterfield are 60 km apart. And so I could visit Tenterfield, particularly under Susan’s influence, as an almost
tourist. We wandered up beautiful country lanes in romantic mists and lived out this version of an area that my own small town geographer would have once construed as simply the wrong end of town. Run down cottages and paddocks of mixed cow breeds, once sure signs of the disorder of poverty, became quaint and scenic and the inhabitants safe and unrecognisable. We did things no-one ever did in my childhood. We citified, yuppified, middleclassed, arts student-upped, lesbianfied, outsiderfied the landscape with our ritual exercise and dusk drinks at lookouts. With our questions and tasks and insouciant naivety we were not afraid, things could be said, questions could be asked. We played table tennis after dinner.

(1)

Writing Up
Writing up. Even the words are hopeful. From a mixture of journal entries, readings and different visits I can write ‘up’ what going there was all about. Like ‘talking up’ a bad proposition, I can inflate the quality of my insights, expand, through careful selection, my growing awareness, my located-ness. I now write down the coherent theorisation of what happened. Instead I find my self writing to you. You, my reader, were not an imagined presence at the time. Then I really was ‘just’ writing down, just tracking, just disciplining myself to record. Now I am chopping up, sauteing, broiling those records to invent (partial) stories for you. And although the ‘I’ is still writing, I’m not the I, I used to be. And what a convenient catch ‘you’ are, my invented ears that hear this speaking out. But I’m writing too fast I can’t keep going back and taking away, something must be left. I’m running all over my parents’ lives, I’m shitting on the hand that fed me, I’m school captain gone grunge, I’m mucking up and sending down the things that people died for, I’m writing too fast, I can’t see or hear, my sisters are dead but I’m just writing too fast. There’s nothing to witness, nothing to say, it’s snow dry country with no animals in sight and I’m writing too fast. It’s dying all over their feed lot cattle, its dying all over the quick buck crops that blow the brains out of the soil, that’s my country Jackie (Huggins)—see why I can’t go home? But I write real fast. I’m keeping my toes tingling and my tongue twisted so high in the air that I’m making a place of my own up here. It’s not much but you come visit. Any time.

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