

Introduction

End of Innocence: Tasmania's Search for Home

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In this current decade, homelessness as a newly felt vulnerability has arisen in Australian life, media and political culture in ways not seen before. Of course, homelessness and displacement are old sufferings at the heart of ongoing colonial home-making in Australia. However, the needed iteration of Australia-as-home — perhaps best captured in the go-to unofficial national anthem, *I still call Australia home* — is reaching fever-pitch in a nation currently riddled with housing stress. Both dispossession and homelessness trouble Australian narratives of identity and belonging and produce an astonishing defensive compulsion to claim, cleanse and contain. As more and more of us are without homes that embed us long-term in communities, our attention dwells — and is masterfully held, through canny politics — on the national homeland borders we think might still be defensible.

Tasmanians have been historically well-trained in imagining their island as a singular, white space. Likewise, homelessness lacks a

public narrative; we don't have the cultural competency to speak inclusively with or about those who live homeless on our island home. And it has to be said that while we can't imagine those homeless as part of our island, as part of what Tasmania is, then we will inevitably fail to re-

imagine, to re-forge a Tasmania which homes all its people.

What is certain, however, is that the innocence of Tasmania in the face of homelessness has now ended, and the struggle with how to understand, articulate and respond to the fact of enduring



When Compassion Is Conditional, 2016 by Rachel Bremner



The sky as shelter, 2019 by Michaye Boulter

homelessness in Tasmania has begun. For the moment, however, in my view, our community is suspended in a space of ambivalence and conditionality. In the space of conditionality captured by Tasmanian artist Rachel Bremner (left), I see the smothering of new spring shoots. I cannot help but think of the dearth of places in which unaccompanied homeless children and young people might rest their slender roots and grow. They push up into the monotonous chaos and fragmentation of adult homeless life is so powerfully depicted by James Kelly (see pages 10 and 11) that it is hard to take in.

Kelly's work, *The Yellow Brick Road to Services*, shows us what happens in the context of living homeless 'when compassion is conditional', to use Bremner's artwork title, when services stand in place of housing as the fundamental enabler of human wellbeing. The drama and business of poverty is palpable when the obvious need for stable, affordable housing remains unaddressed. Kelly's vision is of the frenetic landscape of well-planned, skilled services that nonetheless address themselves to the individual issues people present, not to people themselves.

The conditionality these two artists differently portray contrasts with the restful horizon Michaye Boulter offer us in her work, *Sky as shelter* (above). In her work, we get a clear sense of a viewer, emplaced and calm. Here we are engaged in a gaze of sustained connection with the Tasmanian landscape, and the work as a whole characterises both the physicality and emotionality of homeplace, in which growth, reflection, peace and protection are made possible. Boulter's work provides us with a striking reminder that enriched experiences of shelter offer such profound psychological and physical protection that we are freed to open ourselves outward to the world, curious, hopeful, joyful even.

As the contributors to this edition of *Parity* make clear, Tasmanians' grip on shelter-as-home and indeed on any shelter at all, is slipping. Housing Tasmania builds with the crumbs thrown by Treasury at the same time as a night shelter — the most essential, yet most crude of service offerings — opens doors for the first time in Hobart. In this, those working in the public and community sector stand shoulder to shoulder, and in my observation there is a collaborative strength yet to reach its full possibility; momentum remains sapped by the distraction

of commissioning and competition. Dragging all eyes up to the bigger question of the state's commitment to those in poverty, remains difficult.

The contributors to this issue nonetheless all have powerful and clear voices that speak of multiple strivings to confront, make sense of, and end homelessness in Tasmania.

In Chapter One, the issue begins with an extraordinary collection of reflections from younger and older Tasmanians who have experienced, or who are experiencing, homelessness. In some cases, these reflections make clear just what possibilities and pathways are enabled through provision not just of housing, but of home.

In Chapter Two we hear public sector voices and between the restrained lines a deep-seated commitment and pride in contributing to the care of Tasmanians resonates.

In Chapter Three, the community sector offers some critical appraisal of the authorising political environment which constrains public and community sector workers alike. Attention is also drawn to both enduring and emerging homeless populations — rough sleepers, older women and unaccompanied children and young people.

Chapter Four, which draws together reports of homeless service innovation across the state, offers a pause for celebration as well as concern; innovation in the context of affordable housing shortage smacks of desperation as much as of creativity.

Finally, the Opinion pages unleash with blunt eloquence the strongest possible call to embrace the end of innocence about entrenched homelessness in Tasmania and about the solutions needed to end it. This is a call for both government and community members to invest in Tasmania as an island home for all who live here through the infrastructural stronghold of public housing and through an interpersonal ethics of care.





Artwork for Homelessness Week — The Yellow Brick Road to Services by James Kelly, 2019