Voyage within you, on the fabled ocean, And you will find that Southern Continent, Quiros' vision - his hidalgo heart. And mythical Australia, where reside All things in their imagined counterpart.

James Mc Auley, in Under Aldebaran.

There is something fascinating about 'discovery'. At the humblest level, we are all curious and, at our best, human beings have a creative capacity. Our motivation to explore is innate and our desire to know well established. Yet most of us, and perhaps especially busy administrators, conservators, and directors of projects already starved for funds and bereft of meaningful policy support, find coping with present events and necessary practical decisions for the immediate future sufficient burden. It is hard enough to grasp essential daily details and summon up enough courage to survive the latest budget cut or political rejection. Any interest in the past may be a fine hobby, but seems to contribute little that is useful and helpful. This is to ignore the role of memory and reflection in human life.

History is the memory of an individual or community, the story of its identity, and how it became what it now is and can hope one day to be. Without history there can be no understanding of the present and future, no judgement and no vision. It is true that we can hope only to come to a conditioned and limited recognition of our past, and that memory can play tricks and be abused. It is also clear that history cannot be recycled, though, in George Santayana's phrase, those who ignore the mistakes of the past are often doomed to repeat them. Nor is the past always dead and gone. As Henry Reynolds reminds us, 'the past is still alive, is dangerously alive, in many parts of Australia'.

Truth may be difficult to ascertain, and unpleasant to face once discovered, but without it there can be no firm foundation, and, in St. John's searing words, 'the truth will make you free.' 7 Leopold von Ranke set historians an impossible goal, forever beyond human grasp, when he exhorted them to find out wie es eigentlich gewesen ist - what really happened, or, literally, how it actually was. But he also, as Barbara Tuchman notes, found 'the truth more interesting and beautiful than the romance', and she writes that even though we who investigate the past were not there and can never be certain that we have recaptured it as it really was, 'the least we can do is to stay within the evidence.'

Despite all the limitations and inhibitions experienced by, indeed inherent in the nature of museums, heritage trusts, and the various works of heritage professionals, and the anxieties which arise from financial, cultural, and political restrictions imposed even on the noblest and most established collections, there remains enormous potential in them (intelligently managed and maintained) to participate in the vital and intriguing enterprise of mental exploration. Alongside libraries and archives, with their lode of manuscripts, books, memoirs, sketches, photographs and so on, museums and 'depositories' can act, have acted, and must continue to act as liberating agencies for countless numbers of individuals and organizations who seek some order and meaning in their lives, a sense of cultural purpose, a grasp of historical memory or continuity, an introduction to the world of the imagination - a discovery or 'vision' of self.

In defiance of the various curbs to full freedom which are perhaps implicit in the very act of collection and certainly in the practice of selection, there can be a cogent case for regarding and treasuring museums and public collections as defenders of civic liberties and hence bulwarks of democracy. In times of recession and worse, the necessary stress on accountability and 'restraint' by planners and administrators should never disguise the fact that the destruction and starvation of...
the public heritage is closely akin to the burning and suppression of books.

In no area is the role of local, national and international collection authorities and cultural 'policy' (or the conscience of its minders) more vitally challenged than in approaches to that most seminal of all human contacts, the 'first discovery' or exploration of hitherto un sighted realms, landscapes, or peoples. It is no wonder that this aspect takes up so much of the time, space and attention of public institutions, policy makers and conservators. It is no less essential that the dangers, advantages, profits and losses of attending to this 'shock of the new' be considered in some depth. What Douglas Pike called 'the Commemorative business' * concerns us all but must never overwhelm us.

What is at stake is often an apocalyptic world-view of selected events which have, for better or worse, changed the course of history and with it the perceived nature of the relationships of all that live thereafter, sometimes - as in the case of the 'New World', 'The Pacific' and this 'Great South Land', long the 'terra incognita' of European geographers - none too subtly. We hardly need to be reminded in the year of 'Indigenous Peoples' and in the quincentenary of Columbus' 1492 voyage, of that 'fatal impact' which has routinely followed the trail of world explorers. It is no accident that two of the most popular treatises which deal with the 'opening' of our part of the globe to a wider public in the 18th century are Alan Moorehead's *The Fatal Impact*, and Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*. *

That history, 'past, present and future', (and perhaps with history the whole mechanics of its material conservation), belongs to the conquerors, is so familiar a notion as to have become a cliche. Yet, as we have been somewhat brutally reminded in the last few years as many artificially supported political systems have collapsed, bringing about much cultural debris and dislocation, in any crisis lies at once - as the Chinese ideogram would have it - danger and opportunity. The theme of 'world exploration' in its complexity presents many critical choices, some dangerous (if insidious) and some advantageous.

Public collections, museums, national trusts, and so on, unless they have been totally neglected, demoralized or corrupted, are in a privileged position to present raw materials for human reconciliation. Much more is possible, if they are run with courage and intelligence, to provide inspiration and replenishment. They may contribute substantially by empowering new generations to re-interpret and re-imagine their own past, brush away out-moded obfuscations and correct distortions, and reassert values which may have been forgotten, submerged or suppressed. Far from being necessarily the monum ents of the victors, a concrete method of popular control and dictation, or the playthings and showcases of economic, political, social or cultural elites, the public collections can and should be rich quarries for ever wider publics, providing firm foundations for rational research and reflection. They have the capacity to become reliable enablers of truly liberal visions not only of a tragic past but also of a better future, to which, in Gandhi's haunting words the signposts lie 'over the bones of a past on which we dare to tread'.

This vocational function of liberation, of promoting the truth within the limitations imposed, is conditioned certainly by time and space, but it is very different from that intended by the 'moral improvers' of the 19th century, and condemned by Humphrey McQueen in his forthright series of articles in *24 Hours* during the past twelve months. It is rather that facilitating talent and determination to represent reality which, he notes, could render the Australian War Memorial in Canberra 'a place where all Australians can honour heroism, lament folly, mourn the slaughtered and get wisdom'. *

No matter how ambiguous, the very adventurousness of 'exploration' can be valuable as a trigger to the imagination and can open up areas otherwise neglected. The disadvantages of the genre are clear enough on reflection - reliance on sensation, shock, and novelty. Yet the appeal of 'significance' and freshness makes 'discovery' a saleable commodity for exhibitions, research and publicity. It can and has nourished a triumphal climate of celebration where the explorers are heroes or villains, defying the normal routine, and calling for loud and monumental applause. No wonder that those whose duty it is to present both the extraordinary and the mundane are faced with
distasteful dilemmas. It is not always easy to harmonise the somewhat contrary demands of the uncommon and the routine. It would surely be a shame if the 'First Man' at the beginning of 'important' history were to be encapsulated indisputably in the perennial icon of a pioneering European navigator just at a time when an American professor of Japanese descent was arguing that the 'Last Man' was a Western capitalist, no matter how refined, liberal and democratic.

At least Francis Fukuyama seems to be on the right track in his search for the end point of 'mankind's ideological evolution' when he insists on the universal desire for recognition, a recognition so often denied to the 'victims' of world exploration and colonization. He may be too optimistic when he reports an overall tendency in the direction of democracy and equality. Sadly not all clocks move forward inexorably. But he is perhaps on surer ground when he notes an overall tendency in the direction of democracy and equality.

Words can help or hinder. J.H. Parry points out that 'all forms of discovery, all forms of original thought, are connected in some way, however distant.' Scientists are long familiar with the notion that 'discovery' itself disturbs, brings about a sea-change somehow, and leaves the 'discovered' vulnerable. In the case of explorers, the peoples and landscapes are 'discovered', sure enough: but there is rightly question as to whether the meeting is an 'encounter', a 'contact', a 'clash', or a catastrophe. Inga Clendinnen, the author of a recent evocative book about the Aztecs, prefers 'encounter', but she notes that in South America, as in the Pacific, what took place between the explorers and the 'natives' should not perhaps be ennobled by such descriptions. Rather two cultures 'painfully scrape past each other, getting rather badly damaged in the process, and this whether the intentions on either or both sides are good or ill.'

Certainly, in South-East Asia and the Pacific as elsewhere, the 'victors' control the historical record. As Inga Clendinnen continues; 'Their point of view is embedded, enshrined, in what can appear to us as much as to them, innocent description. Not only the appropriated people and the place become their possession, but the past as well, and therefore the victors control the present and the future', and she quotes Joseph Conrad, that indomitable discoverer of the dark places of mind and heart, who calls explorers 'conquerors of truth' not because they penetrated mysteries, but because they established ways of reading alien landscapes and peoples, asserting the superiority of their own civilization and values.

When we in our turn come to approach the past our minds cannot be empty, that is free of values, but we...
must insist on deeper vision, casting a cool eye on our own and others’ social arrangements and social expectations’. There is still, as Aboriginal historians have pointed out with regard to Australia, ‘unfinished business’ in which we must all become explorers. Manning Clark, in his Boyer Lectures of 1976, while accepting that ‘all history is about conflict’, yet lamented the ‘discourse of the damned’ by which white and black in Australia ‘could not speak to each other. They were people on different sides of thick plate glass - only able to see the grief and hatred on each other’s faces, but not able to hear, let alone understand what was being said’. 

Museums and public collections offer resources to tell the truth or at least to ‘nail the lie’, They cannot, and do not, merely stack objects. As Paul Fox points out, they have a key role as aide-memoires and as facilitators in removing both theoretical and practical hurdles to essential re-interpretation. Curators have a care to know what other scholars are saying and thinking, and with the use of the age-old ingenuity of communication, the art of the ‘showman’, and modern technology, to display and make available a more widespread capacity for revision, re-imagining, and eventually reconciliation. Like historians, they are the custodians of memories not our own.

Because of their dramatic content, it is no wonder that so much attention is paid to the ‘Age of Reconnaissance’, the ‘Age of Discovery’, or the ‘Era of Empire’. Apart from the economic and scientific imperatives which drove European overseas expansion, ‘world exploration’ derives its innate attraction from human restlessness and the desire for something beyond the ordinary. Explorers seek for Paradise, Utopia, El Dorado, Shangri-La, and so on. They are heroes like the gods, the Admiral of the Ocean Seas, the Great Navigator, - pioneers, and founders of a New World. Just as the current Columbus year has shown how many perceptions of the past can become subjects of radical revision even in the overcrowded pages of European and American history, the Pacific and South Asia are increasingly under sensitive scrutiny. It is noticeable how even the use of an adjective in conjunction with the noun ‘discovery’ has become the rule, as in Margaret Steven’s First Impressions: The British Discovery of Australia. London 1988). Yet these parts of the world have not been high in the priorities of the international community, so that they rank insufficiently in heritage listings, financial grants towards conservation, and research attention.

No matter that the stories, some of them expensively and painstakingly constructed, have their afterglow long after their foundations have been undermined - we are moving among myths and legends. The explorers have ‘invented’ themselves, and with them the world they inhabit. They conquer savages, quell villainous mutinies, occupy rich tracts of ‘vacant’ land, spread civilization, claim continents for their monarchs, and gain glory for God and the motherland. World explorers in the past held, and often abused, the privileged position or ‘mastery’ of their commissioning nations. The very making of maps and naming of places involved in voyages of discovery have been ‘weapons of imperialism’. The presumption of the explorers has been frequently that of ‘terra nullius’, i.e. land belonging to nobody, or at least nobody worth worrying about. This adds insult to injury, denying both existence and experience to the indigenous peoples. No wonder that there remain traumas to be redressed and whole worlds to be reconciled and redeemed. And no wonder that there is a growing mistrust of the unreflecting celebration of the heroic deeds of faultless pioneers. Too much acceptance of their bounteous patrimony leads to commemorative awe, undue reverence, the erection of shrines, and the enslaving of the mind.

Not all is lost. We are becoming accustomed to the popular representation of ‘vanquished’ cultures even in the cinema, as ‘Dances with Wolves’, ‘Black Robe’, ‘The Mission’, ‘First Contact’ and ‘Joe Leahy’s Neighbours’ attest. There are considerable scholarly efforts to redress the balance and give voice to the relatively voiceless. There is greater sensitivity to
understanding and recapturing the phases of relationship which typically have succeeded first contact, and to grasp the individual and particular as well as the general case. Even in history the vanquished had their champions, and such lives as those of Las Casas and de Vitoria are being re-examined and re-evaluated. As far as the Pacific is concerned, so huge and so complex, it is no longer common for scholars to represent either exclusively the dominant or the dominated.16

Anne Salmond, author of Two Worlds, the splendid account of Western-Maori encounter, notes how the European ‘explorers’ were in ‘charge of the drama’. She admits the popularity of the old themes, with explorers venturing venturing upon unknown seas, finding new lands and naming their coastal features, describing exotic plants, animals and people, surviving attacks by tattooed savages, or worse still, cannibals with spears. But her own insights into the Maori mind enable her to re-think the whole story with greater dimension, and to re-vision the human landscapes discovered.17

Exhibitions and presentations can help restore balance and add depth. Already much has been done to list and target key areas for attention, conservation, and display. There must be no doubts in enlarging this sphere of heritage, despite a thousand difficulties. John Mulvaney’s Encounters in Place; Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606-1988 is a good examplar, and illustrates contact (not always hostile) between real people - Macassans, Afghans, Chinese, Japanese, Papuans, Torres Strait Islanders and the Aborigines. Increased sensitivity and knowledge can uncover new evidence of those ‘prehistoric’ explorations which can foster greater respect for places and material relics’. As Mulvaney writes, ‘A mature Australian culture should identify with these monuments or symbolic sites of legendary heroic deeds’.18 This sort of exploration is ultimately more vital than a sensational hunt for the latest Portuguese caravel.

Celebratory occasions, such as 1992, the Australian Bicentenary of 1988 or the various State celebrations of the 1980s, most of them triggered by some aspect of ‘world exploration’, can undoubtedly stimulate interest, inquiry and reflection. Following ‘exploration’ come the consequences of ‘discovery’ - ‘colonisation’, ‘foundation’, ‘settlement’, ‘pioneering’, and so on. Each has its explosion of new histories to serve - and occasionally to baffle, overwhelm and depress - the public mind. We need greater understanding not only of why things are but of how they came to be the way they are, and museums, galleries and public repositories offer the facilities for that essential task.19

The Pacific increasingly is well served. We have such treasures as Oskar Spate’s three great volumes on the ‘European Apprehension of the Pacific’ and the T.V. series and book edited by Alan Thorne and Robert Raymond Man on the Rim; the Peopling of the Pacific (Sydney 1989). W.K. Hancock’s Discovering Monaro (Cambridge 1972) and Eric Rolls’ splendid A Million Wild Acres (Melbourne 1984) and more lately his Sojourners (Brisbane 1992), an evocation of the Chinese experience of Australia, are but a few examples of responsible scholarship turning its attention to the human exploration of landscape. Bernard Smith’s European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850 (Oxford 1960) and his recent Imagining the Pacific (Melbourne 1992) - about the ‘imagining’ and the ‘imagining’ that took place in the wake of the explorers - provide a rich lode for reflection, emphasising the importance of material and intellectual context, the mental backgrounds and landscapes of both observers and observed. Concluding his last book, Smith comments that the great navigator James Cook was a ‘communications man’, of whom it could be said ‘more than any other person, that he helped to make the world one world; not a harmonious world, as the men of the Enlightenment had so ardently hoped, but an increasingly interdependent one. His ships began the process of making the world a global village’.19

For us as contemporary ‘discoverers’, guardians and interpreters of the past, there must be, and be seen to be, a sense of responsibility, however intermittent and imperfect. This was true also of the ‘explorers’, as Parry noted. Along with the curiosity, the ingenuity, the vanity, the courage and the greed, there sailed such values as peace, prosperity, progress, and tolerance - and much besides. We, like they, may come to grief, or create it. Perhaps it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. At all events, as Ernest Giles said ‘An explorer is
an explorer from love, and it is nature not art that makes him so."  

References
1 Henry Reynolds, Frontier (Sydney 1987), p ix.
2 John 8:32.
6 H. McQueen, 24 Hours, November 1991 p 56.
10 24 Hours, p 57
11 C.M.H. Clark, A Discovery of Australia, Boyer Lectures 1976, p 47, 23.
14 For example Nicholas Thomas, Entangled Objects; Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific (Harvard 1991) and ‘Fear and Loathing in the Postcolonial Pacific’, in Meanjin, Winter 1992, p 265 f; also in the same Meanjin Tony Birch, ‘Nothing has changed; the Making and unmaking of Koori Culture’ p 228 f.
15 e.g. Gustavo Gutierrez on Bartolome de Las Casas, Pacifica, October 1992 p 263f.
17 D.J. Mulvaney, Encounters in Place (Brisbane 1989) p xvi.

18 For example Roger Knight of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, on the First Fleet in J. Hardy and A. Frost (eds.), Studies from Terra Australis to Australia (Canberra 1989) p 121f and in European Voyaging towards Australia (Canberra 1990), p 163-8.
19 p 240
20 Parry, Age of Reconnaissance, p 344; R. Eriksen, Ernest Giles (Melbourne 1978).