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Afterword

Undoing the bonds of nation/rediscovering dead souls

Toby Miller

David Rowe, Graeme Turner, Emma Waterton and their contributors have done us a profound service by tracing the commodification of Australian cultural policy over the last quarter of a century. Their point of departure, the Federal Government's *Creative Nation* document, appeared in 1994. It forwarded a vision of the good life that was connected to commerce, but not limited to or by it – mammon was just one influence.

Nevertheless, the abiding lesson from this collection is that the policy's advocates birthed a commodified lifeworld, one that subsequently coursed through multicultural television, electronic games and pretty much everything in-between. Cultural nationalism was trumped by capitalism. In what follows, I'll engage with that position in the context of my understanding of prior Australian history before considering nationalism and cosmopolitanism from an international perspective (usefully done in this volume's chapter on Indigenous television by Ben Dibley and Graeme Turner).

The Australian situation

Our editors discern 'a pervasive tendency towards the commercialisation of national culture' and 'the increasing influence of globalism and/or transnationalism'. They argue that over the past two decades, a 'cultural nationalist model ... has been reconfigured and its discourses and principles,

Afterword

on the whole, devalued'. The evidence lies in 'a wave of deregulation and disinvestment across a range of cultural industries'. This transformation has reached the point where 'culture now tends to be located in those portfolios most directly responsible for national economic and industrial development'.

Australia's associated scholarly slippage from critical cultural policy studies to creative industries advocacy has been well-covered (see, for example, [Turner 2011](#)) and needs no further rehearsal in this context. Suffice it to say that my teeth started to gnash at the familiarity of this story, and to appreciate our editors' and authors' insights. The post-industrial futurism of the New York intellectuals of the 1960s has claimed its latest victims. The key 'sluggers' – Daniel [Bell \(1977\)](#); Zbigniew [Brzezinski \(1969\)](#); and Alvin [Toffler \(1983\)](#) – saw their predictions for a ternary U.S. economy redispersed to remake Australia, as per the warping vision of their latter-day legatee, Richard [Florida \(2008\)](#), and his pride of obedient antipodean acolytes (who, for example, helped him do 'a couple of very special things in, in Noosa').

In some ways, the transformation traced in this volume is unsurprising. Sooner or later, attempts by artists, the third sector and progressive critics to put monetary value on cultural production in terms cognizable by reactionary econocrats, led to the dominance of the latter's neoclassical sorcery. As Bogart tells Bergman in [Casablanca \(1943\)](#), 'Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow, but soon, and for the rest of your life'. [Merton's \(1936\)](#) rule of unintended consequences eagerly steps up to bat when conjunctures change, and formerly dominant discourses legitimize emergent forces or are transformed by them. The notion of art-for-art's sake (remember that '*l'art pour l'art*' was always something of a joke – after all, MGM Latinized it as a corporate motto, above that leonine roar) is always compromised by the overdetermining overlap of social and aesthetic norms and expectations. In Diego [Rivera's \(1932\)](#), p. 51) famous words, '[A]rt is a social creation'.

But there has been some kind of change. Always-already utilitarian uses of culture were once undertaken in the service of religion, the monarchy, or revolution. Now they seek to convert 'at-risk' youth in the global North to carefully calibrated, moderate conduct or to stimulate the services sector of the economy. George [Yúdice \(2009\)](#) uses the term 'culture as resource' to describe this mixture of identity politics, welfarism and secondary accumulation. The constitutive connection of cultural nationalism to corporate norms and state desires has been a defining problem for Australian historiography and the Left around the world ([Pascoe 1979](#); [Anderson 2016](#)). The Enlightenment teleologies of liberal and Marxist histories have never known how to manage the petty thuggishness and state violence of nationalism and its persistent capacity to overcome supposed world-historical agents of magical change, be they *bourgeois* individuals or social classes. In the Australian case, encounters between race and class have provided crucial fault-lines for understanding the past. Along with the dispossession of native peoples, the pre-Federation Australian Labor Party's (ALP's) strident anti-

Afterword

Asian rhetoric in the name of high wages helped to birth the country's constitutive racism (McQueen 2004). The Liberal Party's belated discovery of nationalism as a vote-winner in the 1970s was, in turn, an answer to the ALP's similarly belated discovery of working-class migrants as an industrial and psephological bloc, despite hopes that it bespoke a shift from nationalism to multiculturalism (Castles et al. 1988). The history is outlined in this book's chapter on multiculturalism by Ien Ang and Greg Noble.

Australia has dependent cultural relations with the U.S. and the UK and economic ones with those nations, plus China and Japan. The economy has always been an intimate issue for this semi-peripheral, semi-metropolitan nation – wealthy but weak, worried yet weary, arrogant and anxious, vexed while vested. Born from post-imperial protectionism, and dependent for its development on being a farm and a quarry, Australia embodies the Dutch Disease (Ebrahim-zadeh 2003) so fully that it has generated its very own Gregory Thesis (1976).

Capital investment in natural resources has largely precluded the development of industries that add value through local labour, ever since neoliberal warlocks flexed their muscles via the first Whitlam government's assault on manufacturing through tariff cuts and the weasel-words 'Industries Assistance Commission' (Warhurst 1982). Twenty years later, just prior to *Creative Nation's* release, the task of building neoliberalism was declared by some to have overtaken that of nation-building (Pasey 1991).

Unsurprisingly, cultural policy in Australia indexes that story. It has routinely 'double-declutched' between artistic and industrial norms, from representing the nation to funding capitalists, from *avant-garde* short cinema to tax breaks for indolent local and Yanqui producers (Dermody and Jacka 1987; Burns and Eltham 2010) on the prowl for what they call free money (i.e., neither loans nor equity). Today's museums, with their neoliberal talk of visitor experiences and diverse publics, inherit the legacy of early Australian anthropology's British heritage in its museum-based dedication to racial difference (i.e., hierarchy – see, for example, Barrett and McManus 2007). And the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (formerly, Commission) has always been required to be popular in order not to appear elitist, while simultaneously being damned for taking away opportunities from the commercial sector by attracting mass audiences (Inglis 2006a, 2006b). I defer to *Making Culture's* authors' profound knowledge of Australia's slippery shift from cultural policy to creative industries and its oleaginous embrace of contemporary capitalism as part of that manoeuvre. But it is worth noting just how pragmatic and discriminatory local nationalism has often been. And that takes me to nationalism on a different *palette*.

Nationalism elsewhere

Afterword

For conservative ethno-nationalists, the nation is a constant across history, albeit changing with time and circumstance (Herder 2002, p. 297). It is sustained through supposedly indelible ties: origin myths, languages, customs, physiques and religions (Smith 2000). But, for those more in thrall to modernity, such claims are always already historical fictions carved from invented traditions (for example, Hindutva today; Nandy 1998). Far from being the outcome of abiding mythologies, the materiality and idea of the nation derived from the Industrial Revolution, which brought places together that had not previously deemed themselves linked in any way. Relatively isolated, subsistence villages were transformed by the interdependence engendered by capitalist organizations, the commodification of everyday relations and the sense of unity generated from nation-binding technologies and institutions, most notably print and the public school (Gellner 1988). By the time of 1919's Treaty of Versailles, the victorious powers regarded national self-determination (apart from freedom for their own 'possessions') as the best route to peace, along with a return to open markets and a state system of governance that would control the warlike tendencies of the losers and others. But imperialism was not dismantled, and when the Depression hit, the immediate response was restrictive trade practices, such as tariffs and other barriers. Alongside the emergence of fascist nationalism, it produced the conditions of possibility for the Second World War. Similar responses followed the oil shocks of the 1970s (Strange 1979).

So, the idea of nations as guarantors of peace was compromised by the victors protecting their own empires, then distorting the trading system because of an enormous economic crisis. Meanwhile, the ideology of nationalism, always close to doctrines of autochthony, autarky and autarchy, was used by the emergent great powers (the USSR, Japan, Germany and Italy) to justify political or racial superiority in much the way that the established U.S., French and British imperialists did. Although the claims and efforts of ethno-nationalists frequently fail to override more universal ideas promulgated through religion, democracy and human rights (Horkheimer 2014), where the *bourgeoisie* failed to adopt comprehensively liberal ideas, and technological connections across borders were countered by local demagoguery, collective ideas of superiority and destiny found fecund fields. A refusal to identify with humanity as a whole was at the core of this kind of nationalism (Adorno 1997, 2007; Adorno et al. 1950). Labour was conceived of as a national entity, along with ethnicity, ideology, and language, and new communications technologies were harnessed in the name of the sovereign-state. Ethno-nationalist and modern theories blended.

Consider the right-wing use of Gramsci's idea of the national popular by authoritarian and dictatorial regimes across Latin America from the 1940s to the 1990s. They harnessed class interests secreted as national ones, which became common sense for both left and right (Galeano 1997). The same applies to South Asia and segments of the Arab and African worlds (Halliday

Afterword

2005). The breakup of formal empires has seen an explosion of sovereign states and their attendant national myths. The number of countries across the globe has gone from a few dozen in 1945 to over 200 today, and most major conflicts since World War II have been over attempts to create new nations. At the same time, people keep leaving their places of birth in rapidly increasing numbers; mostly voluntarily, to make better lives for themselves, but also as desperate refugees. The United Nations (UN) estimates that 258 million people were international migrants in 2017, up from 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000. The vast majority live in Asia, Europe and North America (United Nations 2017). That mobility correlates with global warming in a reordering of the old climate-determinism argument that intense aridity or humidity lead to centralized control of water and oversized irrigation public works, thereby breeding despotism (Missirian and Schlenker 2017; Wittfogel 1967). The corollary is a tension between what is left behind, taken with, encountered, rejected and adopted (Banks 2014). The globe is full of people who feel as though they do not belong, either where they have left or where they have landed, as they flee the agonies of origin and experience the refusals of arrival. The essential hybridity of humanity is challenged by ethno-nationalism encountering global mobility, with each shaping the other.

Nationalism is routinely and rightly damned for its maleness, brutality, warmongering, and other failings: Rosa Luxemburg (1986, p. 331) spoke for many when she denounced ‘the empty wordiness of nationalism as an instrument of bourgeois domination’. The absurdity of nationalism is not confined to the Right: the spectre of Stalin is never far behind, lurking in off-screen space to jump us as if we were the second-last girl in an ’80s horror movie. ‘[T]he whole, disastrous experience of “state socialism” which came to so abrupt and dramatic an end in 1989’ has meant that ‘the entire historical basis and trajectory of “the left” in serious politics has had to be rethought’ (Hall 1995, pp. 25–26). And the desire of China to exercise ‘sharp power’ around the world takes culture as a core component of its desired hegemony (National Endowment for Democracy 2017).

That said, C.L.R. James (with Dunayevskaya and Lee 1986) always recognised the importance of nationalism versus internationalism as a litmus test of anti-colonial credentials – that a cosmopolitan worldview relied on appreciating local circumstances and working within them. The real enemy was bureaucratization, not nationalism. For Althusser (1971), it was essential that revolutionary forces recognize their specific conditions of existence, in workplaces and countries, but also that they identify with others, far away, speaking other languages, yet oppressed by similar forms of labouring life. The nation was, therefore, crucial, but its chauvinistic incantation in culture worked to pervert the kinds of identification that it engendered unless they were played with and contested, as per critical Mexican cultural nationalism’s wry, ironic, yet respectful stance towards the country’s foundational mythology and its cynical use by élites (García Canclini 1982).

Afterword

This is another history, of longing for self-determination and resisting imperialism. The nation has, of course, been a core resistive concept of decolonialization, providing a means of registering claims for inclusion in both narratives and institutions (Cabral 1973) – a veritable font of resistance to imperial suzerainty. Kwame Nkrumah (1969, p. 88) avowed that '[n]ationalism is the ideological channel of the anti-colonialist struggle' and Lyotard (1993, p. 238) viewed it as a key response to 'the profound *desocialization* produced by imperialism'. Du Bois (1942, p. 72) referred to the 'personal apostles of African nationalism, who wander across the vast distances of Africa and talk with the people'. And it is clear that peripheral and semi-peripheral nationalism can be democratizing and enabling as well as exclusionary and repressive. It successfully invokes theories and commitments that do not disappear, despite myths of anti-nationalism, globalization and technological determinism (Carey 2002).

Cosmopolitanism?

What of cosmopolitanism as an alternative, emerging from much older origins than those associated with contemporary neoliberalism and globalization? A core Enlightenment ideal, cosmopolitanism suffered with the ongoing triumph of the nation-state and nationalist ideology, but became *au courant* again due to the need for ways of living together in a globalizing economy with vast migration and cultural exchange. Its linguistic heritage blends universalism with particularism – an encounter between the cosmos and the citizen staged again and again since Aristotle and frequently leading to a profound suspiciousness and doubt about one's loyalty (Benhabib 2011). This dialectic takes many forms: Edmund Burke (1774) addressing the electors of Bristol, Angela Davis (2003) calling for a new emancipation via the destruction of prisons, Jesus Christ teaching about universal equality and Immanuel Kant (2006) theorizing world citizenship.

Negative responses to it can be powerful, such as British Prime Minister Teresa May's (2016) asinine insult, 'If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word "citizenship" means', and Stalin (1946) referring to Jewish people as 'rootless cosmopolitans' because he regarded international cultural consciousness and identification as inimical to Leninism. But, for H. G. Wells (1902, p. 317), Jewish mobility 'gives the lie to our yapping "nationalisms"'.

Global capital is often regarded as a sign of cosmopolitanism's eventual triumph: socialists of the inter-war period welcomed multinational corporations as signs that economic nationalism had been succeeded by coordinated planning (Mandel 1968, p. 434). In the decolonizing burst from 1947 to the late 1970s, while some new countries sought import-substitution industrialization, others moved more successfully towards an export-oriented model via the New International Division of Labour. East Asian states, in

Afterword

particular, mobilized their reserve armies of peasantry to manufacture goods for the global North (Fröbel et al. 1980). Meanwhile, older nations in Latin America sought to elude, by any means possible, the horrors of dictatorship in the name of left or right-wing nationalism and the financial punishment meted out to leftist governments by international markets (Cardoso 2003; Vargas Llosa 2017). A third group favoured a fuller-throated Marxist anti-imperialism (Amin 1997). All these formations brokered a middle ground between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

And something else was going on, both rhetorically and institutionally, towards cosmopolitanism. The histories of the League of Nations and the UN stand for the failure of world government. But their less grandiose, more technical subgroups have managed with reasonable success the international relations of telecommunications, postage, health and immigration. Those entities arose from a notion that the anarchic world of states could be governed in much the same way as individual sovereign states managed their populations. Beyond the utopian rhetoric of global peace that was so derided by realists (Miller 1981), classical theorists have argued for the success of a relatively ordered and peaceful world system since 1945 thanks to the strength of large states, their desire to eschew direct conflict with one another and the emergence of a raft of international organizations operating beyond territories and armies (Bull 2002). The comparatively technical tasks in which the International Telecommunication Union, World Health Organization and so on specialize have remained relatively free of conflict, by contrast with peacekeeping or culture.

At the same time, the definition of what constitutes national identity is contested because of the necessary hybridity of humanity. Consider Colombia. Ethnic/racial difference is defined there in ways that are at variance with Anglo norms: the state counts people as mixed race who would be deemed Indigenous, black, Asian and so on in Anglo countries. The *mestizo* majority is mostly made up of citizens with mixed ethnicity, a blend of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Asian, European, Sephardim and Arabic heritage. The prevailing ideology of *mestizaje* assumes a norm in which Colombians are said to be a mosaic of Indigenous and Caucasian. As the popular saying goes, ‘Aquí en Colombia somos muy mezclados’ [Here in Colombia we are all mixed] (Restrepo et al. 2014). The latest census (2005) identifies three non-*mestizo* minorities: 87 national Indigenous groups, comprised of 1.4 million people who live communally and use their original languages (3.4 per cent of the overall population); 4.3 million Afro-Colombian descendants of slaves (10.6 per cent); and 5,000 Gitano [Roma] (0.01 per cent) (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística 2007, p. 33). These minorities suffer massive inequality, but part of their capacity to form themselves as blocs and argue for redress derives from cosmopolitan identifications with First Peoples and slave descendants elsewhere, and their deployment of Enlightenment

Afterword

ideals (Cabezas-Cortés 2016; Perazzi and Merli 2017). But how does one deal with claims to universalism versus particular calls on rights in such situations?

Will Kymlicka (1995) seeks a *rapprochement* in the white-settler colonies of Australia, the US, Canada, and Aotearoa/New Zealand between majority White settlement, ‘immigrant multiculturalism’ (newer voluntary migrants, who deserve few cultural rights) and ‘minority nationalism’ (First Peoples, the dispossessed and the enslaved, who deserve many) via the notion of culture as an aid to individual autonomy through engagement with collective as well as individual histories. Conversely, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (1995, pp. 162, 164) argues that cultural maintenance and development should be by-products of universal access to education, a ‘primary condition of free and equal citizen participation in public life’. She opposes public funding to sustain familial or religious cultural norms, calling instead for a curriculum that will generate flexible cosmopolitans who learn about their country and its ‘global neighbors’. Rorty’s argument is a culturalist restatement of human-capital *nostra* about individuals maximizing their utility through investment in skills. She rejects cross-cultural awareness as a necessary component of good citizenship and justice, but endorses it as good business sense; come on down the creative industries, and claim your prize.

Conclusion

I used to walk into cities pretty much anywhere and see monuments to socialism and national endeavour: the post office, railway station, telephone exchange, power station, clock tower and the public school – the great initiatives of socializing risk and equalizing access that made Western Europe, Australasia and North America modern. Today, their shady, shadowy equivalent is the data centre – our dirty, coal-powered euphemized cloud. It, too, relies on socialized risk – the corporation running it almost certainly receives public subsidies, no matter where the server farm is located in the world. But this is no public monument to the nation; rather, it is a clandestine testament to today’s norm of capitalism for the poor and socialism for the wealthy, secreted behind an everyday office-block façade (a cybertarian shift is well explained here in by Brett Hutchins’ chapter on the digital).

November 2017, when I started drafting these words, found me in Catalunya, and a world where the centralizing force of capital seemed compromised by nationalist populism. Hundreds of thousands of people had marched the previous Saturday for the right to a referendum on independence. They wanted to become their own nation – or not; but above all, they wished to vote on the proposition. Anarchists, greens and leftists jumped on the local nationalist bandwagon – or perhaps they helped form it. Meanwhile, the political descendants of Franco who ran the government in Madrid sent in the Guardia Civil (akin to the Federal Police in Australia) to confront and batter those who attempted to vote. The international left rallied behind the Catalans.

Afterword

I think that they were right in terms of the anti-democratic police brutality of the national government, but they needed to consider such questions as widespread corruption, bigotry and a secondary labour market in Catalunya: two of the most powerless groups, working-class migrants from Málaga and Latin America who built the region's infrastructure and continue to characterize its proletariat. Catalans often refer to the two groups derisively as 'xarnega' (Niño-Murcia and Rothman 2008). Many of them refuse to learn Català, and they generally oppose independence. And, at the same moment as this bloc was celebrated on the left elsewhere, 60,000 Poles were marching with banners that read: 'Europe will be white or deserted' and 'Clean blood'. As *The Economist* (2017) has observed of resurgent nationalism:

The Alternative for Germany has won 94 seats in the Bundestag. Marine Le Pen of the National Front won a third of the vote in France's presidential election. In Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic nationalists have taken power, just as they did in Poland.

The same article also cites Britain's referendum vote to leave the European Union, Turkey's increased militancy, moves away from constitutional pacifism in Japan, the power of Hindu supremacism in India, China's heavily mythologised expansionism and Russian belligerence as examples of a global nationalist drift.

Jean Baudrillard, annoying gadfly of the dialectic that he was, shared the following confession:

I operate from a prejudiced position against nationalism, one which is anti-nationalist, or even anti-cultural. Somewhere within me there is a distancing away from what is closer to the bone, for that which is closer to one's own culture, one's country, family is that from which one cannot escape.

(2015, p. 92)

Baudrillard is assuredly one of Samuel Huntington's (2004) evocations of the 'dead souls' lamented in Walter Scott's (1805) poem 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' guilty of denying the value of national affinity. But is Stuart Hall (2010, p. 185), whose recollection of Britain's birth of a New Left found him avowing that '[a]s a colonial, I certainly felt instinctively more at home in the more socially anonymous metropolitan culture'?

Scott's ode to nationalism, with its stirring lines 'Breathes there the man, with soul so dead, Who never to himself hath said, This is my own, my native land!' may resonate with Scotland's struggle and complicity with English empire. But its arrogant denial of identifications beyond the immediate, and fetishization of national unity, is no model for today, tomorrow or soon. Yet it seems ineradicable. The dilemma that divided dissidents of the post-war Russian empire continues: 'should Sovietization be resisted with cosmopolitanism or nationalism?' (Kristeva 1997, p. 8).

Afterword

The key lesson to draw from these writings is that, wherever the creative industries operate, regardless of their incarnation in culture, policy or business formations, their principal mission is to animate and empower capital (Kleinbans 2011). Now that the nation's role in decolonization is formally over, it functions partly as an easy conduit for capital formation, and partly for its unfortunate diversion into ethnic identification. But that said, the cosmic ambivalence of my opening stanzas remains – as Perry Anderson (1989, p. 103) insists, nationalism is ‘a mass phenomenon of elemental force in the last two centuries’. Consider the concept of a minor literature – ‘the literature a minority makes in a major language ... effected by a strong co-efficient of deterritorialization’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 16). And there is a lengthy leftist history of accepting and even promoting the nation ‘as the primary mechanism of defense against the domination of foreign and/or global capital’ (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 44).

Neoliberalism has a poor record of economic growth next to the statist capitalism of China's ‘powerful, centralized state authority firmly committed to a policy of techno-nationalism that has its origins, well before the reform era, in Mao's nation-building decades’ (Ross 2009, p. 54). That provocation recalls a moment in Harry Watt's *The Overlanders* (1946), a British film set in Australia, when the laconically iconic Chips Rafferty rebukes John Fernside, who is playing a rather dubious English remittance man with plans for a ‘Northern Territory Exploitation Company’. Chips says it's ‘a national job, too big for little people like you’. They'd been instructed to perform an impossible droving task to save the country from occupation, one recognizing that ‘bullocks are more important than bullets. The urgency and formality of the mission is that it is sent by telegram, that classic nation-binding technology of its day (a tendency examined in Graeme Turner's television chapter here). So this volume stands testimony to the continued relevance of just such a gentle but assertive form of nationalism, brokered through the hybridity of multicultural policies, as a blend of the cosmopolitan with the local that engages in a mixture of conflictual and complicit relations with capital. ‘Staging’ that conflict is crucial if we are to make a difference.

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Afterword

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- ¹ This essay is dedicated to Julia Lesage and the late Chuck Kleinhans, with Julia's kind agreement. Their progressive, cosmopolitan, radical vision has long been an inspiration. See, for example, [Kleinhans and Lesage \(2016\)](#).
- ² I last lived in Australia before *Creative Nation* was released, and have since spent a total of perhaps six months there, so my remarks are not those of an expert, though I hope they may be of some interest.
- ³ Others discern similar tendencies, but are much more sanguine about their effects ([D'Regan and Potter 2013](#)).
- ⁴ Florida's claim to own the 'creative class®' is asserted with the US Patent and Trademark Office via registration number 3298801. Bill Grantham alerted me to this wonder.
- ⁵ Thanks to Stuart Cunningham for confirming my understanding of this sequence.