

# Mapping Regional Cultures

**Edited by**

**Warwick Mules**

**Helen Miller**

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# Mapping Regional Cultures

# Mapping Regional Cultures: Discourses in Social Contexts

Edited by

Warwick Mules  
Helen Miller

Rural Social and Economic Research Centre  
Central Queensland University

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# Preface

The Mapping Regional Cultures project at Central Queensland University, of which this book is an outcome, had its origins in a recognition some years ago by a number of CQU academics, that regional culture and society was a neglected area of study. In Australia, culture, or the way of life of people, their self-understandings, and the symbolic forms in which these understandings become public, is usually regarded as the domain of the metropolis. Rural and regional culture becomes a pale reflection of that found in the city; a second hand, impoverished form brought about by the pioneering, frontier realities which still inhabit the daily lives of those living in the regions. Or so the story goes. Those of us living and working in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia know that this 'story' does not reflect the true conditions of rural and regional Australia, since it speaks, as it were, from the centre, looking out. The Mapping Regional Cultures project is an attempt to reverse this story, so that the periphery speaks in terms of its own making, and not simply in response to the metropolis.

The Mapping Regional Cultures project was also inspired by the possibility of bringing together academics and other workers from the fields of Cultural Studies, Sociology and the culture industries; to draw upon each other's knowledge and insight so that a maximum intellectual power could be focussed on the issue of rural and regional culture. In the post-Dawkins era, with the establishment of Universities in nearly every region throughout Australia, the time has arrived when regions need no longer be neglected as spaces for analysis and study. The outcome should be a stronger grasp of the issues and problems facing rural and regional Australia in the contemporary globalising world, and hence a greater capacity for academics and researchers to provide sound advice to government and community groups as to ways in which regional interests can be advanced and transformed.

The book which you are hopefully about to read is the result of a great deal of work, beginning with the planning and administration of the Mapping Regional Cultures conference, held at CQU, Rockhampton, in July 1996. The efforts of my co-editor, Helen Miller, in helping to make this conference a success, are worthy of special mention. Dimity Lawrence's professional help in getting the book to publication is also gratefully acknowledged, while the advice of CQU colleagues Geoff Lawrence and Daniela Stehlik has been invaluable. I would like to think that Mapping Regional Cultures will contribute to a U-turn in the attitudes of researchers, academics, scholars, and those working in the culture industries, towards rural and regional Australia; a turn towards a greater understanding of culture and its effects in the social fabric, and a way of re-imagining rural and regional Australia as other than what it has been in the past.

Warwick Mules  
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# Introduction

*Warwick Mules and Helen Miller*

Culture, or the way people make sense of their world, their 'way of life' to borrow an anthropological term, is now recognised as one of the most important aspects of the contemporary social world. It is no longer sufficient to analyse society as an abstract structure; as if it existed purely in terms of the regularities and behavioural criteria extracted by the social and physical sciences, but to include the way people's self-perceptions enter into these structures and change them. This book introduces an array of statements about culture in this contemporary sense, and about the interface between culture and society located in rural and regional Australia. All of the chapters are drawn from papers presented at the *Mapping Regional Cultures* conference run by the Rural, Social and Economic Research Centre and Faculty of Arts, at Central Queensland University in July 1996, and represent a strong and sustained study of regional cultures from various disciplines throughout Australia.

Regional culture in Australia has always been caught in a contradiction; on one hand as the source of national identity and mythology through images of the bush and rural folklore; and on the other as a second rate copy of the metropolitan cultures of the cities. In many ways, regional Australia has had its culture assigned to it by the metropolis, as a function of its peripheral status. And in many ways, regional Australia contributes to its own form of subservience to the metropolitan centres. This can be seen for instance in the way regional authorities tend to seek out old colonial images as a means of projecting identity when faced with the task of defending their regionality in times of economic downturn. This dilemma, whereby regional cultures are trapped in a logic of peripheralisation, needs to be overcome if the regions of Australia want to prosper on terms more of their own making. The essays in this book should help re-imagine cultural identity within regional and rural Australia, as they challenge long held and dominant views about the country and the bush.

Colin Mercer's chapter 'Mapping Regional Cultures' provides a revision of the key concepts of region and culture through a discussion of regional urban planning and cultural policy. Following the work of economic geographer, Manuel Castells, Mercer asks us to see regionality in terms of the flow of different spaces (administrative, geographic, economic, functional and social), which provides a non-static three-dimensional model of a region. This approach leads to a deterritorialised understanding of regional cultures, emphasising the contingent sense of place which is felt by those who inhabit the region. Rejecting the conventional notion of culture as a 'high' art form, Mercer argues for a more anthropological version, based on the way of life of regional communities, as it is 'imagined' by the people themselves. This eminently populist and anti-elitist

approach is timely, given the need for regional and rural communities to re-invent themselves in times of declining state power and globalising capital. One such way is to throw off the shackles of regional identity based on old world colonial values persisting into the present, and to link more progressively with contemporary technologies of meaning-making and communication networking which will, in turn, allow rural and regional communities more say in the way in which their identities are shaped within the global order. Mercer argues that local government authorities should be more involved in these symbol making technologies and the human infrastructure which supports them, rather than the 'roads, rates and rubbish' policies which tend to dominate local government at the regional level. Offering some practical suggestions, Mercer proposes that local government become more heavily involved in cultural mapping to identify and marshal the resources which can help reshape regional communities.

David Rowe's article argues for a shift from historical to spatial analysis of regions. Like Mercer, Rowe, seeks to capture the contemporary interface between culture, society, and the economy as a dynamic and rapidly transforming local/global process, which destabilises traditional regional contexts, yet opens up possibilities for productive change and transformation. Following postmodern theorists of culture, Rowe looks at the city of Newcastle, as a 'peripheral' urbanised region, *vis a vis* the giant conurbation of Sydney, and suggests alternative ways in which Newcastle as a globalised regional centre might be imagined.

The next two chapters, by Grahame Griffin and Ruth Barcan, are also based on the idea of cultural geography, in this case looking at the way the cultural landscape in regional Australia is made meaningful through tourism edifices and consumer life styles. Grahame Griffin undertakes an archaeological geography of a number of Queensland holiday sites, through cultural memory and the textual dimension of the urban environment. Invoking the myth of the Australian seaside holiday and contemporary theories of landscape as discourse, Griffin draws out some of the contradictions and paradoxes between history, cultural meaning and the social through a discussion of a number of local tourist sites in Queensland, especially the Gold Coast. Ruth Barcan's absorbing discussion of Big Things as tourist iconography draws on a range of theoretical work in postmodern cultural studies. As 'an attempt to inscribe the rural into a post-modern national imaginary', Big Things are serialised fetishes within consumer culture constituting a network of sites, each of which is made meaningful because of its relationship with other sign-sites in a semiotic system. Through an insightful discussion of the relationship between nature, consumer production and commodification in postindustrialised contexts, Barcan weaves a complex theoretical and descriptive picture of Big Things as they relate to rural Australia.

Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove's chapter presents the findings of their research in the reading practices of people in the regional city of Rockhampton during the 1950s and 1960s. Through oral-history research, Cryle and Cosgrove uncover the attitudes of the readers of the time to material available in local libraries as well as to popular forms of reading such as comics and magazines. Their study provides a fascinating insight into a popular culture practice on the point of transformation with the coming of television.

The second section of the book looks at rural communities from a range of

perspectives. Warwick Mules' chapter is concerned with the need to develop a postmodern theory of community as it can be applied to methods of dealing with field research. Mules argues that in today's globalising world, communitiness is no longer based on primary face-to-face relations, but on a displaced sense of 'care' circulated within global contexts of mediation. The chapter asks for a re-orientation of the framework of theory related to sociological field work, so that it can deal with the shift from modern to postmodern styles of community imagining. The notion of the frame is invoked in the next chapter, by Geoff Lawrence, Daniela Stehlik, Ian Gray and Helen Bulis, which examines drought in Australia as a framing concept subject to academic research. The authors critique two existing academic studies of media based drought discourse, and foreshadow their own sociological approach, based on interviews and focus groups with farm producers. Through a stridently realist approach to what are essentially symbolic meanings, the authors confidently predict that their study will overcome conceptual and methodological difficulties they have highlighted in the media based research so far.

The chapter by Lisa Bourke, Steve Jacob and Al Luloff deals with traditional farming communities in the state of Pennsylvania, USA and their responses to government policy to preserve farm land in the face of encroaching urbanisation. Through a large scale sociological research project, involving interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions, this research analyses the conflicts between the 'Plain Folk', or Amish and Mennonite groups, and other communities within the region, indicating a 'transition in Plain Folk culture' away from rural style agriculture, towards manufacturing and service industries. Bourke's paper is important as a study of localised resistance to government policy and burgeoning economic and technological globalisation.

Len Palmer and Helen Quinn's chapter proposes that farmers need new ways of 'talking' about farming in the light of the contemporary farming environment brought on by an array of factors, especially the globalisation of the economy and the threat of environmental degradation. Using Foucault's idea of discourse, as well as Appadurai's analysis of the flows of discourses affecting rural farming in India, they analyse discourses about farming found in rural and regional media. Through an examination of a range of specialist farming magazines, Palmer and Quinn trace four different discourses as possible ways of talking about farming: traditional, self-sufficiency, permaculture, and agronomics. Following poststructuralist concerns for the formation of the subject through discourse, their work is concerned with the figural dimension to media discourses on farming, in the area of nature, gender, technology, ethnicity, capital and the individual farmer. Using Gramsci's notion of hegemonic struggle as the underlying politics of farming, they argue that agronomics appears to be emerging in the media as a dominant hegemonic discourse, with permaculture as a rival.

Trade Unionism in the central Queensland city of Rockhampton is the subject of Barbara Webster's chapter. Her historical study overturns the prevailing idea that the Rockhampton union movement was conservative to a fault. Through a comparison with the trade union movement in Townsville in North Queensland, Webster is able to draw out social, economic and cultural differences between the two major regional cities which led to different kinds of union cultures

during the first half of the twentieth century: one based on a radicalised rank-and-file (Townsville), and the other based on a more compliant membership under pragmatic, yet effective rule based leadership (Rockhampton). The 'conservatism' of the Rockhampton unions was due more to the stability of the work force, the uniformity of Anglo-Celtic ethnicity and relative economic success of the region, than to any innate weakness in unions themselves.

The final section of the book covers regional art and heritage. Jennifer Webb's chapter discusses the way in which art becomes commodified within the 'field' of social production. Using Bourdieu's theory of symbolic exchange, Webb analyses the 'logic' of the regional arts field, and the necessity of artists to constitute themselves as fetishised commodities in order to attract the necessary symbolic capital to survive as relatively autonomous practising artists. Webb's work is important because it provides a way of analysing rural and regional contexts and practices (in this case art), using empirically derived data (interviews, surveys, focus groups), yet maintaining a critical and theoretical stance to its object of study.

Gene Dayton's chapter is concerned with the mapping of heritage sites registered by local and state government authorities in Queensland. His analysis of a range of these maps shows that the number and density of heritage sites is a function of the relative economic prosperity and population density of a region. Separating the location of sites into 'heritage regions' and 'a-historic regions' Dayton is able to show that less prosperous regions of inland Queensland are more likely to have a greater number of heritage listed sites per head of population than the more prosperous and densely populated coastal regions, especially the conurbation of Southeast Queensland centred in Brisbane. Dayton concludes that declining rural and regional areas are more likely to depend on heritage as a last resort to prop up an ailing economy through image projection. The less prosperous the region, the more likely that heritage will be based on older colonial 'squattocratic' monumentality. When looking at Dayton's and Webb's chapters together, it would appear that the logic of the art and heritage field in rural areas is guided by a certain interrelation between economic and cultural factors, leading to a restricted view of regional identity, which may not be in the best interests of the region in the long term.

Andrea Ash's contribution explores the state of regional art in Australia. Focussing on Central Queensland, but drawing on art and artists from throughout Australia, Ash's essay argues that regional art in Australia is not simply a pale reflection of metropolitan art, but a rich and complex cultural practice, caught between localism and internationalism. Through a wide-ranging discussion of regional art and artists, and their relationship with the international art scene, Ash is able to show that regional art is 'at a crucial stage in the passage from ... painting as nature towards painting as culture'. For Ash regional art need not see itself as peripheral to the major art centres of Australia, but through recognising its own cultural significance, reach out beyond such limits, with an international perspective in mind. The final essay, by Dodie Roden, examines the museum at Mt Morgan, an old gold mining town in Central Queensland. Using Tony Bennett's arguments about museum policy and the institutionalisation of the 'gaze' in nineteenth century Britain, Roden is able to show how the museum

continues what is now an outmoded practice of display, thereby transforming its authority from one in which people were rendered subjects to the organizing power of science to one where the museum itself has become an object of historical fascination within a world of commodity exchange.

There is no doubt that rural and regional Australia is at a crossroads. As the world continues to globalise its economic, communication and cultural resources and centre/periphery relations become disarticulated, regional areas will be cut adrift from their traditional relations with the centre metropolises. This need not be a bad thing because it provides an opportunity to seek new ways of articulating with other forms of resources throughout the world. However, in order to do this, it is first necessary for regional cultures to re-imagine themselves as other than what they have been. Mapping regional cultures is all about this process of re-imagining, which will require a review not only of the 'content' of culture, but also of the various ways in which culture is analysed and theorised by academics, and professional and technical experts. We hope that this book will prove useful for those who see their task as advancing the cause of regional and rural Australia in this way.

# Chapter 1

## Mapping regional cultures

*Colin Mercer*

In terms of the mapping of regions and cultures, I think that we have a lot to learn from the past and a lot more to learn from the future. With respect to the idea of region, I think that our contemporary terms of definition are impoverished. There is the region as *administrative* space delimited by political indicators such as Local Government Areas (LGAs). There is the region as *geographic* space delimited by physical indicators such as mountains, plains and ocean. There is the region as *economic* space delimited by patterns of commuting, employment characteristics and retailing patterns - a *functional* region, that is, defined as a Local Labour Market Area (LLMA) in UK terms. There is, finally and sadly, in terms of current definition, the region as a *social* space defined normatively and in deficit terms, as 'non-metropolitan'. All of these definitions have partial merit. None will suffice on their own terms.

The key issue which I want to address in this chapter is: how can we hold these terms of definition together in multidisciplinary and real, problem-oriented terms to take account of political, geographic, economic, social and cultural realities? How, properly speaking, can we define the region as a cultural space?

Looking back at the history of the concept of region - to the late nineteenth century and early 20th century we come across some interesting approaches which, I think, can help us not only with the concept of region but also with 'mapping' and 'cultures'. Looking forward to the potentials of multimedia/new media and the space-challenging potentials of broadband service potential we can, I think, re-invent some of the past for the future - and the present.

Let me explain with reference to the past first.

My principal point of reference here is to the work of Sir Patrick Geddes, botanist, zoologist, eugenicist, sociologist, sexologist, advocate of civics and 'actual citizenship' and often described as 'Father' of the Town and Regional Planning Movement. A peculiar person with at least one good idea: the concept and practice of 'Regional Survey'. This concept is interchangeable, in Geddes' work, with both 'Social Survey' and 'Civic Survey' and is probably best described, in its functioning and implications, through the metaphor and eminently cultural institution in which it is physically embedded: the Edinburgh



Outlook Tower. This edifice and *dispositif* of knowledge is described by Geddes' biographer, Helen Meller, as:

... a prototype of a Civic and Regional Museum which all cities should acquire since it was at once a repository of knowledge for the city, region and the world and a culture power-house, generating by its activities a more 'scientific' interaction between citizen and the city, organism and environment, which would lead to a higher level of evolutionary development (Meller, 1979: 27).

The Outlook Tower in Edinburgh was host to a number of prominent scholars including Elisée Reclus, well-known communard and anarchist but perhaps better known as the founder of human and/or social geography in his 19 volume work *La Nouvelle Géographie Universelle, La Terre et les Hommes (The Earth and its Inhabitants)* published between 1875 and 1894. Another visitor, an early member of the Chicago School of urban sociologists, was Charles Zueblin, who described the Outlook Tower as 'the world's first sociological laboratory' in an 1899 article for *The American Journal of Sociology*. The Outlook Tower and its contents also provided good service to a number of international expositions including the *International Cities and Town Planning Exhibition* organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects in London in 1910.

Sociologists, geographers, planners, architects, museum curators, the convergence is interesting and instructive and one to which we have become unaccustomed in the departmental and compartmentalised pedagogical and policy structures of schools, universities and governments. These are, we should recall, the fundamental agencies for the definition of, and training in, mapping, regions, and cultures.

This convergence of disciplines generated by the Edinburgh Outlook Tower - 'the prototype of museums of the future, actual and possible' (the title of an unpublished manuscript by Geddes), was strongly informed by the influence of Frédéric Le Play - a mining engineer who, in his spare moments, paid a great deal of attention to the family lifestyles and consumption patterns of French and other European societies and which resulted in a signature work *Les ouvriers Européens* (European Workers) and a series of shorter studies known as *Monographies sociales* (Social Monographs) equally attentive to the lifestyle patterns of families but especially observant of the relations between the sociology of family structure, the geography of location and the economics of consumption. This relationship was established by Le Play as a continuum of *Lieu-Travail-Famille* (Place-Work-Family) and retranslated in matrix form by Geddes.

Le Playist sociology is especially concerned with the relationship between geographical and environmental factors on the one hand, and the determinants of social structure on the other. Hence - especially in mining communities - the focus on family structure. (Where would Emile Zola and D. H. Lawrence be without this level of insight?)

In disciplinary terms, Geddes rendered this relationship as one between Geography (place), Economics (work) and Anthropology (folk). These are the forms of knowledge that would be needed, and not in cumulative but in converged and interdisciplinary forms, for us to understand the region - how to map it and how to understand its cultures. As Peter Hall has described Geddes' method:

Planning must start ... with a survey of the resources of ... a natural region, of the human responses to it, and of the resulting complexities of the cultural landscape (Hall, 1988: 48).

The resources of a natural region - the human responses - the resulting complexities of the cultural landscape. What does this mean? It means, I think, that a region is defined, in perceptual terms, as a *culturally* defined entity. If you *feel* like a central, northern or western Queenslander or, crossing State boundaries, as a Riverina or Mallee or Central Australian or Desert or Long Grass person, and there is sufficient evidence that there are others who would identify in this way, and there is a culture of exchanges, traditions, rituals and common artefacts to support this feeling, then you have a region. This is an imagined community. But it is a *really* imagined community and that, after all, is the basis of our nations and polities.

The reference there, which many of you will recognise, is to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. The conceptual and analytical framework developed by Anderson in this book - attentive to economic, anthropological and geographical concerns and more especially the relationship between them, is one which could bear fruit in the understanding of regions and the analytical methods we apply to them. 'Communities are to be distinguished', Anderson argues, 'not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson, 1983:15). The styles in which communities are imagined are not well captured by a monodisciplinary approach - not economics, not geography, not history, not environmental studies, not yet cultural studies - and we need, I think, to develop new tools and approaches which will enable us to understand something of the complexity to which Geddes and others were pointing in the first part of the 20th century and which others - spatial historians such as Paul Carter in Australia and, especially, Simon Schama in his magnificent *Landscape and Memory* - are now trying to recapture.

How might we begin to go about this task?

As a consequence of the proposition that a region might best be thought as an imagined community the practice of mapping regional cultures becomes more plausible and manageable because we are working across a broader range of cultural definition. The cultures through which a region may be imagined - and therefore mapped, are not constrained by a narrow definition of culture as, for example, the arts or other forms of representation. The land and landscape are an integral part of the material culture of regional imagining. Patterns of work and family life are also part of this. Forms of consumption and leisure are

part of it. The idea of the region comes to be defined by its own internal complexity and texture rather than by reference to an externality - therefore, metropolitan areas. The region is not *non-metropolitan* but *extra-metropolitan*. This recognition is crucial if we are to move beyond the deficit understanding of the region - the place of 'locational disadvantage'.

An example from cultural policy:

In projects in which I have been involved in outer metropolitan rural areas in Western Australia and Queensland, it is clear that while there may be no major cultural centres, few galleries and museums or centres for the performing arts, there is nonetheless a rich and largely informal cultural life.

While the *per capita* spending of the local government authority may be low or non-existent in the established cultural funding categories, there is nonetheless a rich network of associations, clubs, and societies and multipurpose community facilities, from local government libraries (the most frequently visited cultural venue), halls and centres to the local pub or RSL club and even the local shopping centre. To suggest that these communities lack cultural activities, experience and rich cultural life is at best normative and at worst insulting. The citizens of outer-metropolitan and rural Wanneroo in Western Australia, for example, spend more on a weekly basis on cultural and other non-sporting lessons than do the citizens of Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Hobart, and as much as the citizens of Melbourne (*Joondalup: A Cultural Plan*). The indicators are complex.

Therefore, there is no simple or direct correspondence between the level of provision of cultural services and facilities by local, state or Commonwealth government agencies and the quality and extent of local cultural experiences, activities and life. The simple logic of provision - often supported by strategies for touring by national or state companies or exhibitions - and which often leads, in turn, to concerns for inappropriate dedicated facilities, is just that, a *simple* logic. While provision will remain a necessary component of government involvement in the arts and cultural activities, it will need to be more complex, rich and dynamic by another logic, that of *cultural development*. We only need to look around at the very expensive and under-used cultural centres in regional South Australia, or indeed, in Parramatta, to recognise some of the limitations of the simple provision approach.

Cultural development proceeds from the basis of the recognition of diverse local resources and a broader definition of culture than is customary in traditional policy frameworks. Where provision is governed by 'outside-in' thinking, cultural development is characterised by 'inside-out' thinking (the terms are borrowed from Diana Johnston, *The Arts in Rural Areas*, Arts Council of Great Britain). The 'inside' here is the local community, its cultural resources broadly defined, from the traditional arts to local customs and history, festivals, shows, heritage sites and the natural environment.

Indeed, the outcomes of locally-based cultural development strategies in art forms, events and activities are usually more responsive to local issues such as the environment, to the experience of women and children, to social issues, to local heritage and especially, perhaps, to the place-determined realities of

Aboriginal culture. Cultural development enshrines, in other words, that very important concept of the 'sense of place' and what it means to belong, to affiliate with, to participate in, and to enjoy a sense of the local.

There is no need to establish an absolute dichotomy here between the local and parochial, on the one hand, and the regional or national/international, on the other. Thea Astley writes somewhere that all art has its origin in the sense of the 'parish'. The point is that while this may be its origin, it is far from its ultimate destination. Thea Astley's own work and, in another genre, that of *Yothu Yindi*, are fine examples of the nationalisation and internationalisation of the 'parish'.

Nor is there any need to establish, from the government and policy point of view, an absolute dichotomy between provision and cultural development. The issue here is one of finding an appropriate equilibrium between 'outside in' and 'inside out', by blending in, for example, arts touring policies with local cultural development strategies. This will entail, at the policy level, a more generous recognition of the wealth and extent of local resources, a move away from the 'deficit thinking' of provision policies and a significant broadening of the agenda from the arts as traditionally defined in essentially European and aesthetic terms, to culture and cultural resources defined in broader and more 'anthropological' terms. If only we could recognise that the indigenous inhabitants of Australia have always had this broad, inclusive and everyday - operational sense of culture, this would not be too difficult in the long run.

Cultural assessment, as an integral and necessary component of cultural planning - and which establishes the objective presence of the community *within* the planning process rather than simply as an 'object' of planning - assesses a community's strengths and potential within a framework of cultural development. It establishes an inventory of local culture and takes a hard look at resources, gaps and needs enabling us to plan for better, livable, socially just and responsive communities. This is not just a social policy and community development agenda. It is an economic one too. In the economy of the 21st century, the cultural industries - those industries in the business of making meanings, signs, symbols, images, sounds - and the human infrastructure which supports them as both producers and consumers, will be paramount.

The key to cultural provision, development, activities and experience in regional areas is the local government authority, the form of government which is, in principle, closest to the day to day lives of people in their communities. As with the funding arrangements for this level of government, however, which is characterised by 'vertical fiscal imbalance' in the grants and loans system, there is equally a 'vertical policy imbalance' in the lack of attention to the potential for local government authorities to become involved in cultural development. This is partly a result of the authorities concentrating on 'roads, rates and rubbish' and being wary of getting involved in human services and community development. But it is also a result of lack of attention to and liaison with local government by state and Commonwealth agencies.

There are some notable exceptions to this in initiatives in local area 'cultural mapping' and 'cultural planning' and in the Australian Local Government

Association's Integrated Local Area Planning initiative. In the latter, the planning (and identification) of cultural resources is part of a broader integrated strategy involving infrastructure planning, environmental planning, economic planning and social planning.

This is an integrated and holistic approach to a wide range of cultural resources - from writers' centres to community festivals and cultural tourism maps. It involves, for example, community arts officers or community development agencies working with engineers, town planners, environmental protection and management agencies and economic development and tourism agencies in an approach which does not marginalise culture.

### **Some practical suggestions**

In order to redress this policy and resource imbalance there needs to be sustained liaison and coordination with, and encouragement of, local government authorities to develop local area 'cultural mapping' and 'cultural planning' initiatives through agencies such as the Australia Council, and the Australian Local Government Association (along with its constituent state bodies), ATSIC and the Australian Tourism Commission.

### *Cultural mapping*

*Cultural mapping* involves, quite simply, the identification of local cultural resources whether these be in the form of infrastructure (community centres, libraries, halls, outdoor and heritage sites), activities (festivals, shows, etc.) or local writers, artists, musicians etc. The mapping process is not simply one of 'listing', it can and should also be carried out in imaginative ways and through consultation and perhaps combined with a key community event such as a festival or show. It can involve communities identifying resources which they never knew they had - or which they had not counted as 'cultural'.

What are you mapping in this context? Cultural resources.

Cultural resources include:

- The visual, performing and literary arts and the skills and practices associated with them.
- The contemporary cultural industries of film, video, broadcasting, photography, electronic music, publishing, design and fashion and the training institutions and requirements associated with them.
- specialist crafts such as jewellery, ceramics, metal forging etc.
- The structures and skills for the management and development, distribution, marketing and audience-generation for the products of the arts, crafts and cultural industries.
- The quality, diversity and vitality of community life as reflected in -

- \* cultural facilities such as libraries, museums, art galleries, performing arts venues, community centres.
- \* retailing, leisure, recreation and entertainment facilities and services.
- \* the attractiveness and accessibility of streets, public spaces and the built form.
- \* local traditions of sociability (festivals, fairs, etc.)
- \* the positive presence of ethnic and cultural diversity.
- Historical, artistic, archaeological and anthropological heritage including local and introduced folk traditions and the ancient but still dynamically evolving resources of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Humanly created landscapes, amenities and features such as park systems, waterfronts, bora rings and gathering places.
- The natural environment.
- External and internal perceptions of the community: its 'image' and potential for residents and visitors.

It is crucial that the development of cultural resources be carried out on a wide ranging agenda if cultural development is to make long term and strategic connections with objectives in other fields such as the regional economy, the environment, social policy and infrastructure development. There is a need, in other words, for *integrated and strategic cultural mapping and planning*.

### *Cultural planning*

*Cultural planning* involves community organisations, local government agencies and elected representatives getting together and working out a vision and strategy for cultural development for the local or catchment area. This might be a component of, or related to, a local economic development strategy, a heritage management initiative, part of a new release residential development scheme, a streetscape and built form enhancement strategy, an environmental management plan, or a recreation and leisure program. The point is to make the connections systematically between cultural and other resources. It might involve more than one council and the State government in, for example, a regional development strategy.

### *Cultural tourism*

A key and topical catalyst in such programs of action might be a strategy for *cultural tourism* which is attentive to the integrity of local resources and their potential for sustainable development. The initiatives and recommendations outlined in the report, *Cultural Tourism in Australia* commissioned by DASET, provide a useful context though the existence and recommendations of the report and the very concept of cultural tourism are not well known at the local government level.

Cultural tourism is simultaneously a part of a cultural development strategy, an economic development strategy, and frequently necessarily involves environmental and heritage management components. This can be as important for many currently depressed rural communities as it is for inner city and urban areas. It has particular relevance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities not simply from the point of view of tourists but also from the point of view of training and community management and development strategies for these communities. These strategies need to be developed carefully and sustained with the full involvement and sanction of the host communities.

In the report of the former Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating's Urban Design Task Force, *Urban Design in Australia*, cultural development is described as 'a post-industrial mode of wealth creation' (1994: 28). If this is the case then regional and community cultural development - policy for, and the planning and management of, cultural resources - has a very special role to play. Much more than the formulaic gesture towards the importance of culture (normally understood as 'the arts') in the region, cultural development and planning have an especially urgent role to play in organising the human substance and relations of regions - in the *soft infrastructure*, or - a concept more recently developed in Australia - the *creative infrastructure* - which will be so vital in positioning regions and communities in the re-organised socio-economic relations of the knowledge economy in which the most important form of property will be intellectual.

To engage the new cultural and communications agenda of the 21st century and, in particular, the rapid increase in home-based access to the products of the new media in both CD and online forms, the ways in which we 'plan' culture in terms of developing appropriate policy settings and frameworks are going to be crucial.

Cultural policy (and planning) has been concerned historically with the cultural point of production - creators and institutions - rather than with the means and 'market' of dissemination of cultural product which are now present in most households. The 'democratisation' of institutions and forms of production pales into insignificance when compared with the explosion in the means of transmission and, increasingly, interactive consumption of cultural product by way of the rapidly expanding *infobahn* and the convergence of the computer, the telephone and the television. We need to know more about these new areas and forms of cultural production and consumption and their implications for our urban environments. And we need to know this for a number of very important and planning-related reasons.

First, regions and their cities are now demonstrating the contingency of nations and nation states by becoming, in the post-industrial economy, the key entities of economic life and much more. Regions and their cities are becoming crucial centres for import replacement in the goods and services of the cultural and communications industries. In this context, cultural development and planning have a crucial role to play in cities and regions because they provide the basis and conditions for innovation, creativity, diversity and, in brief, the *production of value* in much more than the purely economic sense. In a post-

industrial context, where the knowledge economy and the information superhighway are becoming as important as physical transport systems in the shape and nature of our communities, it is 'soft' and 'creative' infrastructure which are the special domain of cultural planning and development and which link the concerns with cultural *maintenance* (the 'things we want to keep') to those of sustainable and innovative *development* (how we agree to move on in the context of social and economic imperatives).

Second, there are no predictable outcomes to the greatly enhanced access to the new cultural resources and opportunities provided by information and communications technologies except that if any city - or community - ignores the implications of the global restructuring of the information economy, its citizens, its region and the national economy in which it is situated will be so much the poorer in economic, social and cultural terms. As Manuel Castells has argued in the context of what he calls the 'space of flows' produced by the new relations of the information economy and the need to look to *cultural* imperatives:

... local societies ... must preserve their identities, and build upon their historical roots, regardless of their economic and functional dependence on the space of flows. The symbolic marking of places, the preservation of symbols of recognition, the expression of collective memory in actual practices of communication, are fundamental means by which places may continue to exist as such ... (Castells, 1991: 350-351).

Castells goes on to warn, however, that this should not mean a recourse to 'tribalism and fundamentalism'. A full recognition of the importance and role of government at the local level is needed which, rather than being superseded by the global information economy, becomes, in fact, more important with an increased need, in the face of anonymous and 'placeless' global economic and political interests,

... to establish their own networks of information, decision making, and strategic alliances ... [to] reconstruct an alternative space of flows on the basis of the space of places (Castells, 1991: 352-3).

It is precisely in this context that the new information technologies acquire a strategic significance at the local level: 'Citizens' data banks, interactive communications systems, community-based multimedia centres, are powerful tools to enhance citizen participation on the basis of grassroots organisations and local governments' political will.' (353).

Finally, the cogency or otherwise of this argument depends upon our capacity to recognise the *connectedness* of developments in the economic domain (the knowledge or information economy) with those in the socio-cultural domain (sense of identity, access, participation, belonging and



citizenship), those in the domain of infrastructure (place and its uses), and those in the domain of environment (stewardship of natural and built resources). My argument is that this sense of connectedness is not well represented in the planning, management and development of regions and less well-represented on traditional cultural agendas.

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## Chapter 2

# Imagine no metropolis: The regional renaissance

*David Rowe*

### Introduction

To propose that we live in an age of uncertainty and flux is a little like asserting that there has been a decline in organised religion or that television is the most powerful contemporary medium of communication. In other words, it is to provide a rather banal comment that, nonetheless, needs to be offered, interrogated and deconstructed. Current theoretical literature in the social sciences and humanities abounds with references to globalisation (Waters, 1995), postmodernisation (Crook, Pakulski and Waters, 1992), 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989), 'new times' (Hall and Jacques, 1989), 'disembedding' (Giddens, 1990), 'risk' (Beck, 1992) and the ever-changing 'economies of signs and space' (Lash and Urry, 1994). While there is considerable variation in these analyses, they display a common assumption that constant, rapid and disruptive change must be confronted and explained. Each also bears the stamp of the revival of the concept of space occasioned by the acceleration of the possibilities for the 'global flow' of people, ideas, capital, technologies and images (Appadurai, 1990). As Dick Hebdige (1990: vi) has argued, following Michel Foucault, it is necessary to recuperate 'dead space' from the domination of temporal structures:

... a growing scepticism concerning older explanatory and predictive models based in history has led to a renewed interest in the relatively neglected, 'under-theorised' dimension of space. The preference for spatial rather than historical analyses and analogies in certain influential kinds of critical writing signals some kind of shift. It has become less and less common in social and cultural theory for space to be represented as neutral, continuous, transparent or for critics to oppose 'dead ... fixed ... undialectical ... immobile' space against the 'richness, fecundity,

life, dialectics' of time, conceived as the privileged medium for the transmission of the 'messages' of history.

Hence we have seen a new concern with 'spatiality' in its various forms at the expense of the grand narratives of progressive or evolutionist change which have become the ritual targets of thought influenced by postmodernism (Lyotard, 1984). If we have to re-think our position in space as well as in time, then this is as much a question of subjectivity and identity as it is of structural transformation and institutional mutation. The abstract concept of space comes into contact with the concrete concept of place, and we move beyond rationalist concerns with function towards the non-rationalist realm of meaning and affinity. Elsewhere, Hebdige (1989: 93) notes, before his own relocation from 'old world' London to the 'new' (or perhaps 'cyber') world of California, that:

We shall have to go on placing ourselves and being placed in relation to a bewildering set of local/ national/ [European]/ multi-national and international communities, interests and histories.

To this list of 'communities, interests and histories' we can add the region, which mediates between minutely localised and extensively globalised conceptions of space and place in which people and settlements are seen to be linked in various ways by propinquity, distance from metropolitan capitals, culture, history, political affiliation, economic interest and, not uncommonly, bureaucratic taxonomy. In other words, regions are available to be mapped using a range of charting devices and criteria. Regions can be both 'born' in popular memory and traditional spatial classifications and 'made' in the unfolding present of social, economic and cultural discourse. Regional cultures can be both found and manufactured, revived and recast.

### **Thinking the region**

There is little reason to believe that the region is any less a 'bewildering' phenomenon than any other spatial site of identification. Like the word 'community', the term region displays extraordinary connotative elasticity. It is invoked to describe, amongst other things, a large, multi-national and malleable stretch of the globe (such as the Asia-Pacific or Europe); a metropolis and its environs (such as the Sydney Region, which for various purposes often includes large provincial cities such as Newcastle and Wollongong); non-metropolitan urban centres and their hinterland (like the Hunter or Illawarra regions); or less 'centred' stretches of landscape (like Capricornia or the Sunshine Coast). In discussing regions we are not, then, engaged in a process of finding and 'deciphering' a discrete socio-cultural object in a manner analogous to the traditional anthropological investigation of the 'tribe'. Yet neither are we playing a game whose rules are entirely arbitrary, capriciously producing

regional labels sublimely indifferent to any significant historically-based linkage between people, spaces and places.

If essentialist notions of region must be questioned, so, too, is the effectivity of imagining and imposing new and implausible modes of regionality born of commercial or bureaucratic dreams, and created out of nothing more solid than the dream factory of boosterist public relations. If it is apparent that the region can be something of a semiotic battleground, we must first ask why regional identity should matter so much. To answer this question it is necessary to look outwards from any specific location to the forces and processes that are profoundly re-shaping the destinies of human settlements in their many permutations. In the process it will be apparent that I am sometimes working with the idea of regions as established empirical and conceptual entities, and sometimes 'de-naturalising' and problematising them. This tension between the solidity and elusiveness of regionality is pivotal in the process of 'mapping regional cultures', where charting, mapping and place-naming are, as Paul Carter (1987), for example, argued in *The Road to Botany Bay*, simultaneously acts of discovery, interpretation, rationalisation and reconstruction.

The deceptively complex concept of the region has necessarily come to the fore as a foundation for the meanings of place that are key aspects of rhetoric in the strategic mobilisation of zones of social, political, economic and cultural activity, protectionism, alliance forging, demarcation and identification. The particular form of regionalism addressed at the Mapping Regional Cultures Conference - 'urbanised regional communities' - is essentially a construct of the global processes of capital 'flight', de-industrialisation, agribusiness development and so on - in short, of high and postmodernity - that have demanded a response from those settlements threatened with a severely circumscribed or fatally damaged future. Under a predominantly modernist, Fordist order, spatially fixed 'urbanised regional communities' were formed around relatively stable political economic regimes. For example, some absolute or comparative advantage in agriculture, extraction, manufacturing or service provision allowed enduring settlements to be established which, in time, developed those persistent and more-or-less distinctive cultural traits commonly referred to as 'regional character'. It is, no doubt, easy to exaggerate both the stability of Fordism and the immutability and inclusiveness of 'regional character', but it seems that in an age of 'fictional capital' (Harvey, 1989) 'all that is solid' does not so much 'melt into air' (Berman, 1983) as transmute into digitised lines of code available for swift recombination and redeployment.

There is, perhaps, an economically determinist imprint on this argument which is hard to avoid when the material survival of whole provincial cities, towns and regions is in question. Yet it is important to acknowledge that the old economic base-cultural superstructure model is no longer (if, as Stuart Hall (1989) argues, it ever was) adequate to the task of explaining and predicting social, economic and cultural change. The steady erosion of the boundaries between economics and culture is quickly revealed by the difficulty of conjuring up any non-commodified, non-monetised domain of civil and personal life. Sexuality, sport, heritage and cultural identity are but four examples of spheres

increasingly penetrated by the logic of capital accumulation. While this development may give cause to bemoan a commercialisation of everyday life, it also reveals the extent to which culture can be said to have colonised the field of economics. By this I mean that the interpenetration of economic and cultural structures and practices has accompanied - if not been precipitated by - a process of 'culturalisation' through which the exchange of signs, symbols and images have to an unprecedented extent become indispensable to the effective operation of economics (Lash and Urry, 1994).

The reason, then, that it is 'regional culture' that is privileged here rather than regional economics or politics is that culture is simultaneously the means of identification and the primary means of exchange of the post-Fordist, post-industrial order. 'Mapping regional cultures' is, as a consequence, more than the compilation of an inventory of locally idiosyncratic rituals and meanings for the purpose of historical record or touristic colour. It is an expansive activity of tracing and imagining the very rationale and trajectory of specific places in their particular historical and geographical contexts. In doing so, regional cultures are constructed in the shadow of the universal object that at once inspires admiration and resentment - the metropolis.

### **Imagine no metropolis**

Regional cultures are constructed out of an enforced differentiation as the other of the metropolis, the 'world city' (Whitson and McIntosh, 1993; Wilson, 1996) that perennially seems to undermine and feed upon the 'provinces', systematically draining them of resources and power. Metropolitan culture constructs itself in inherently antagonistic relation to regional culture, asserting its global superiority over provincial amateurism and 'gaucherie'. In response, regional cultures are required to assert their aesthetic competitiveness by stressing how their own cultural infrastructure and personnel match the universal standards set by the metropolis, and/or lay emphasis on the unique characteristics of place that condition 'peripheral' cultural production and which compare favourably with the faddism and inauthentic urbanity of the 'core'. Any conception of regional culture is, therefore, inevitably created out of a dialogue with the metropolis. As the title of this paper suggests, the metropolis may be 'wished further' by the regions but such critiques cannot be allowed to 'go too far' - a dissolution of the boundaries with the metropolitan domain would mean that regional cultures lack the necessary other to mark themselves against. This metropolitan-regional dialectic is, therefore, both productive and debilitating, creative and destructive, and has a critical impact on the mapping process.

Ironically, perhaps, central governments (both federal and state) have sought to counter the centripetal pull of the metropolis through the initiation of policies of de-congestion and de-centralisation, offering inducements for enterprise (and even immigrants) to set up or relocate, and moving governmental and quasi-governmental agencies to the regions (usually to an area whose political support

is of particular importance). The history of de-centralisation policies is, to say the least, chequered (Stevenson, 1994), and in any case may merely reify a core-periphery model of nations and states as 'traffic' is directed from the centre to and from the margins. Urbanised regional communities, however they define themselves, cannot rely on central governments to 'put business their way' in the stop-go policy world of free-market logic and the political pork barrel. It is incumbent on regional groupings to find ways of appropriating some power over their own futures, and to find new reasons for being that do not perpetually place them in subordinate positions to centralised government and populations. The 'regional renaissance' I have briefly prefigured has at its heart an attempted renewal - the (re)construction and (re)articulation of a tenable sense of place as it relates to viable programs of, in that rather protean concept of the moment, sustainable regional development.

To this point my discussion has been highly generalised and abstract - although it has been about the maintenance and rejuvenation of non-metropolitan spaces, it has not addressed actual regions and places. Any such deliberation must at some point be anchored to a material place, or the current focus on global processes will produce nothing more than a distantiated and disembodied analytic construct. In Australia, as elsewhere in the world, urban regional communities have sought to assert themselves over and above the demands of nationhood (Harvey, 1989). In this paper I will concentrate on one such provincial city and region - Newcastle and the Hunter - the part of Australia in which I live and work. In examining current debates concerning the 'imaging' of Newcastle I will highlight some of the possibilities and problems of 'mapping regional cultures' based on a small research project on city and regional imaging. Here I am discussing work-in-progress, proposing some preliminary conclusions from a case study which has implications for other current attempts at mapping regional cultures. Specifically, I will argue that a delicate balance must be struck between 'organic' and 'inorganic' culture, between cultural uniformity and difference, and between consensus and conflict, if the mapping process is to be any more than a limited promotional and marketing exercise in regional re-packaging. I hope that this preliminary cartography will resonate with those conducted in other urban regional communities seeking to chart (with plural nouns used advisedly) the presents and futures of their own cultures.

### **Imaging Newcastle and the Hunter Region**

I have written elsewhere on the general subject of urban tourism and city imaging outside the metropolis and, more specifically, on the somewhat ironic description of Newcastle (by a business magazine which in 1992 adjudged Newcastle to be 'Australia's best city') as a 'provincial paradise' (Rowe and Stevenson, 1994; Rowe, 1996; see also Brown, 1996). Here I point briefly to some salient features of Newcastle and the Hunter Region and current issues and debates surrounding them. Newcastle, it need hardly be said, is a place with

a reputation as an industrial city, what Nancy Cushing (1996) evocatively describes as a 'Coalopolis'. Yet industrial Newcastle has been subject to the vagaries of globalisation and economic restructuring that have seen Australia's largest company, BHP, increase its offshore workforce from one per cent about a decade ago to 'over a third today' (Lewis, quoted in Maiden, 1996: 75). The impact of BHP's redesign of its operations and workforce on Newcastle has been profound in both economic and cultural terms. The city which formed the entry point for BHP's move into steel manufacture in 1912 has experienced a cut in its BHP workforce from 13 000 in the early eighties to 3 000 today, a number that will fall to less than 2 000 by the turn of the century in an overall context where 'Newcastle is suffering from a decline in population and employment in its business centre' (Devine *et al.*, 1992: 8), with CBD employment dropping from '25 000 in the mid 1970's to an estimated 15 000 in 1991' (p.13). There is considerable anxiety in Newcastle that BHP will, in the near future, 'bail out' altogether from the city.

BHP has iconic status in Newcastle to the extent that it has been widely seen as a 'one company town' - by 1996 a BHP executive described it as no more than a "medium-sized employer" in the town' (Maiden, 1996: 79). Significantly, the secondary sector's Big Australian has been supplanted by the tertiary sector's University of Newcastle as the largest employer in the city. This shift from industry to service (and, later, information) provision is not unprecedented. Again, as Nancy Cushing (1996) has argued, Newcastle has swung between imaging itself as a 'Coalopolis' and a binary oppositional self-presentation as the 'Brighton of New South Wales', blessed with a 'healthful situation' and 'picturesque natural environment' at regular (usually twenty-year) intervals over the last century. The most recent manifestation of this shift is the harbourside Honeysuckle Development, in which there has been an attempt to arrest the decline of the 'heart of the city' by regenerating redundant and degraded waterfront land and transforming it into a residential, business, cultural and leisure hub along the lines of Baltimore, USA and, closer to home, Darling Harbour in Sydney (Stevenson, 1994; see also the Honeysuckle Development Corporation's promotional videos, such as Nancarrow's (1995) 'Honeysuckle Update'), not to mention Boston, New York, San Francisco, Vancouver, London and Barcelona (Devine *et al.*, 1992: 10). To re-image Newcastle as a sophisticated site of service industry and play is no simple matter. The Honeysuckle Newcastle Concept Masterplan, for example, soberly states:

As with other cities which have been dominated by heavy industry, Newcastle shares a poor image, particularly in environmental terms, reflecting the perception people have of an industrial city (Devine *et al.*, 1992: 16).

It is not possible or desirable in this place to examine the imaging of Newcastle as an in-depth case study, but it can be used to demonstrate some of the complexities of mapping regional cultures. First, it is unquestionable that

Newcastle is an important regional city, but what are the connections and boundaries between city and region? The city of Newcastle forms a conurbation with the city of Lake Macquarie, which has a larger but more dispersed population shading into suburban Newcastle and is also threaded around the shores of the Lake. Both are said to be in the aforementioned Hunter Region, which according to definition may incorporate the mining districts around Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and Muswellbrook; large provincial towns such as Maitland; rural (especially dairy and vineyard) areas such as Pokolbin; the resort area of Port Stephens; and even some of the Sydney dormitory expanse of the Central Coast. A visitor to Sydney may encounter tourist brochures for Newcastle and the Hunter Valley in which Newcastle is depicted as the historic 'gateway' to a Hunter Valley reduced, for obvious reasons, largely to vineyards and beaches. This touristic shrinking and erasure of places and pathways to them is of clear relevance to cultural mapping as it questions what counts in the institutional imagination of the region.

Conversely, Deborah Stevenson (1994) is critical of the opportunistic stretching of cities and regions in promotional rhetoric concerning the economic viability of the Honeysuckle Development in the Concept Masterplan, according to which:

By adding the anticipated future population of the Central Coast to that of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, a region is created that will have a population base of one million people in 2011 ...

... The arbitrary and unwieldy delineation of Newcastle in this way, however, is strategic. One million people provides the justification, on residential and commuter population grounds alone, for the recommendations subsequently articulated in the Honeysuckle Concept Masterplan ... Absent from the documentation and the rhetoric, however, is any discussion of the cultural and historical factors behind the orientation of Central Coast residents away from Newcastle to Sydney. Absent, too, is any discussion of how this identification with place might be altered. Any analysis in terms that address these and other complex but crucial, non-economic issues appear to be beyond the scope of the official discourses of Honeysuckle (Stevenson, 1994: 166-167).

By means of this creatively accounted construction of regionality, Stevenson argues that any culturally meaningful sense of regional identification is lost, so that:

Every preferred land-use mix recommended in the Masterplan is justified on the basis of Newcastle having a proposed catchment population of one million people. Given the questionable way this projected figure has been attained and the way it is being justified



it must surely be viewed as an aspect of the advertising or public relations rhetoric that has been adopted to 'sell' the redevelopment to residents and outsiders, and that this is a strategy designed to add to the perceived commercial viability of the State Government's Honeysuckle site, and not as an achievable or desirable objective. If, as the founder of the Hunter Valley Research Foundation Professor Cyril Renwick has claimed (*The Newcastle Herald*, 14.09.81), the original 'idea' of the Hunter Region was an 'economic one ... a gift from the Hunter Valley Research Foundation' on its establishment in 1956, then the redrawn Hunter Valley - the new space being delineated [as] the City of Newcastle - is equally an economic construct. (168-9).

Here we find a clue to one of the crucial functions of mapping regional cultures. This is not the repetition and reproduction of existing categories of regionality, but the critical deconstruction of highly interested (as opposed to apparently neutral) typifications of the region. It is not an argument in favour of a singular and uniform conception of the region, nor is it intrinsically opposed to the idea of a region, but it is concerned with understanding how and by whom particular versions of regional structure, culture and identity are privileged, by means of discursive power, over others.

### **Conclusion - Mapping without muzzling**

The process of mapping regional cultures, then, should never be a hostage to boosterist accounts, always shiny and endlessly optimistic, of the limitless potential of a region, the plausibility of which rely on the silencing and marginalisation of dissident voices. The usual claim is that such a dialogue is bad for business and will scare away capital investment. It is likely, however, that the conspiracy of silence favoured by some Chambers of Commerce (including, currently, Newcastle's) will obstruct the maturation and interaction of the constellation of social groups which comprise any regional entity.

Mapping regional cultures is not a technical process of cultural inventory (involving, for example, a useful detailing of local cultural industries; see Stevenson, 1996) or a search for a consensual meaning and image projection of place, but a continuing dialogue between the various constituencies which at any time stake an affective and material claim on regional life. That which constitutes regional life itself will always be contested is taken for granted - the social, economic, political and cultural worlds do not freeze still or iron themselves out for our analytical convenience. Regional cultures - perhaps more now than ever before - are subject to constant challenge and revision, but this need not be disabling or disarming but, rather, stimulating and productive.

At this point I should declare my own subject position as an inhabitant of a place in which I was not born and as an employee of the largest supplier of

labour in town. The non-metropolitan university is an ideal organisation for facilitating dialogue and debate about what constitutes regional culture. Other organisations, such as local councils and commercial organisations, have an important role to play, but they tend to have obvious political and economic priorities which are likely to foreclose debate and to discourage dialogical daring. There is, perhaps, not much left of the old-fashioned public sphere where ideas can be floated and tried out, but the public university is surely one such site.

In May 1996, with the help of some modest sponsorship, I convened an Imaging Newcastle Symposium (Rowe, 1996). An interdisciplinary list of academic speakers was assembled from History, Sociology, Fine Art, Leisure and Tourism, Geography, Communication and Media, Economic History, Employment Studies and Social Work, all of whom gave their presentations after a research academic from the Wollotuka Aboriginal Educational Centre spoke of how the the Awabakal people mapped their own regional culture long before the coming of 'Babylon'. Representatives of local government and business, including advertising agencies and tourist organisations, as well as other University staff and students, participated, often vigorously, in debates about the 'meaning' and iconography of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter. Perhaps it helped having a Faculty colleague as Lord Mayor, but it was hard not to feel that the various institutional spaces where regional cultures are made - on the street, in the workplace and home, the Newcastle and Worker's Clubs, local TV and print media, the Council Chambers, the boardrooms of BHP, the committees of voluntary organisations, the Newcastle Knights rugby league team, and so on - could in this forum at least be named, taken account of, scrutinised, linked and placed in context. There is much more to mapping regional cultures than this highly institutionalised and self-selected example, but it perhaps provides a pointer to a less bureaucratic and managerialist process of meaning making than that which has been classified, often in the most cursory of fashions, as 'community consultation'.

The postmodernist theorist Iain Chambers (1993: 188) has suggested, figuratively, that we should go forth 'to journey without maps', because:

the very idea of a map, with its implicit dependence upon the survey of a stable terrain, fixed referents and measurement, seems to contradict the palpable flux and fluidity of metropolitan life and cosmopolitan movement. Maps are full of references and indications, but they are not peopled (190).

Chambers is fascinated by the cultural chaos and (con)fusion of the metropolis, implicitly contrasting it with the stable diurnal rhythms of the rural and the regional. I have suggested in this paper that a corresponding typification of the 'Big Smoke' has been made by people in regional contexts, who would need to invent a metropolis if it did not already exist. That will not be necessary. Metropolitan centres do exist and in various ways have a crucial impact on regional life and culture. At the same time, the terrain of the regional is

unstable, unsettled, elusive and complex - and we know much less about it than the metropolitan environment dense with cultural intellectuals and thick with flaneurs. Mapping regional cultures is a useful and necessary activity - even if the reference points keeping shifting, the scale seems wrong and strange, half-recognised figures are moving across the landscape. For those of us who live in the shadow of the metropolis, the regional renaissance is more survival strategy than parlour game.

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## Chapter 3

# Lamenting lost places: Charlesworth Bay and the Gold Coast revisited

*Grahame Griffin*

The idea for this chapter began with a song and a chance discussion, both brought to my attention by my wife Helen whose contribution to the idea I gratefully acknowledge. The song, Charlesworth Bay, is written and performed by Judy Small. It is a lament for a seaside place of her past now changed utterly by 'progress'. The tenor of the song is encapsulated in the subtle and powerful image of a 'giant shadow where once the marsh and swamp were'. (The more prosaic of us pontificate less sparingly and tellingly about our coasts being spoiled by encroaching mass tourism, burgeoning high-rises and disappearing wetlands.) Helen pointed out the similarity between Judy Small's lyrics and a conversation she'd had with a woman in Mt Morgan (which, incidentally, is a non-coastal ex-mining town crying out for tourist development to keep it alive). This woman had childhood memories of Agnes Waters, a coastal settlement between Bundaberg and Gladstone, where a marsh separated a smattering of holiday houses and shacks from the beach. Now she hates going back because the developers have moved in, drained the marsh and covered it with an imitation of blond-brick suburbia.

Both song and shared reminiscence harmonise with and amplify the theme, so strong and persistent in our culture, of the memory of the seashores and beaches of our childhood and youth. Not so much the city or suburban beach as the holiday beach, the place up, down or at the coast comprising: ocean, inlet and lagoon; stretch of sand (golden or pure white); weekender or shack; and campsite, camping ground or caravan park. The more lyrically articulate and 'literary' journalists, freelance social commentators and playwrights take to and enhance the theme with relish, particularly in the up-market papers and colour supplements at the approach of the 'silly' summer season where they tirelessly evoke the aura-and sometimes aroma-of fish and chips wrapped in newspaper; kerosene lamps; decaying lino floors; sandfly insecticide spray; and the old picture theatre at the end of the street, de-mothballed for the season.

As well as rekindling the physicality and sensuality of these summer places, our social commentators have been known to focus on the less tangible but no

less authentic experiences of beach communities reforming every year as families met and shared their lives and their barbecues at the same shady spots.

The use of the past tense is deliberate here. Pockets of this summer way of life may still survive, but they are seen in a fading light. The old places are being ploughed, or rather bulldozed, under by the inevitability of progress, development, pressure of population and the growing scarcity of coastal land, along with the commercialisation and commodification of holiday tourism into 'sophisticated' resort style consumerism. The theme is therefore one of nostalgia for lost places with a hint of reflective melancholia accompanying the remembrances of things past.

Individual recollections of things past may circulate among friends or within family groups or in the main street of Mt Morgan, but as Zeliger (1995: 224) puts it 'in repertoire with other voices they work(ed) as collective memories'. I suggest that in this case the 'other voices' are those of the feature writers (see, for example, the 'Landscape as Art' series in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in January 1996, and Matthew Condon's 'The Sandfly Man', *The Australian Magazine*, 2-3 December, 1995) and to a lesser extent, the literary and theatrical voices: David Williamson's plays *Travelling North* and *Money and Friends* and the play and film *Hotel Sorrento* touch on the beach-memory myth, as do Hugh Lunn's popular autobiographical reminiscences.

What can be deduced from the output and audiences of these collectors and collectivisers of popular memory? First, they are somewhat remote from the people of Mt Morgan and from those who can still just afford to take a few weeks at the nearest beach each year. The journalistic, literary and theatrical representations are decidedly middle class as are their target audiences. The beaches of memory might have belonged to the working class or to just ordinary Australians but they are being conjured up by and for the upwardly mobiles of the colour supplements. Second there is a sense here that the beach world has changed not simply because of the material forces mentioned above, but because the writers and readers have changed-moved onwards and upwards to higher social strata where they can enjoy and appreciate their accumulated cultural capital. They have advanced to more refined and stimulating pleasures and recreations, taking their ease in Provence or Tuscany or the Cook Islands, perhaps. The battlers may still spend some time at the coast each summer-just as likely in a holiday 'unit' or high rise as in a camp or caravan site. Meanwhile the middle-class chroniclers and readers of the upmarket supplements can afford to indulge in a little sophisticated and self-centred nostalgia for a piece of 'heritage' lost not only through physical transformation and destruction but also through their own growing away from the family, community and physical ties of the old beach places. And because those places now lie at the periphery of middle-class experience and identity the nostalgia is mixed with a pinch of guilt. But it is a guilt that is leavened by Howard-inspired notions of feeling comfortable and relaxed about ourselves and our national past and present, including the values and virtues of family life in the fifties.

So far this chapter has been touching on, and no doubt contributing to, what Huyssen (1995: 6) - a major contributor himself-calls the 'current obsession

with memory'. For Huyssens this obsession is a sign of crisis among the progressive, utopian, time-dissolving, information-overloading elements of modernism for which memory itself provides the antidote in the form of a contemplative and 'anchoring space'. But this hardly seems to account for the embracing of memory by those who have gained and prospered through the modernist ethic. Others (Connerton, 1989; Le Goff, 1992) are more inclined to attribute the recent upsurge in memory - more specifically collective or popular memory - to the construction and manipulation of a collective memory discourse by governments along with commercial, social and cultural elites (including the media and the arts) who have the power to transform, mould and reinscribe memory to suit their own political and ideological agendas, the Bicentenary celebrations being a case in point. In opposition to the cynical calculations and machinations behind the official versions of collective memory it is possible to find commentators verging on the promotion of an organically and uniquely authentic collective memory possessed by the people - or better still the proletariat - whose voice rises above or undermines the dominant authorised versions (Bommes and Wright, 1982; Negt and Kluge, 1993). One hesitates to assign Foucault's (1977) notion of 'counter memory' or Benjamin's (1968) *Erfahrung* (authentic lived experience linked to memory) to this category, although, the complexity of their positions notwithstanding, they seem to hover rather uneasily between an oppositional essentialism on the one hand and a more convincing Gramscian approach to collective memory on the other. This latter approach defines collective memory as a social and discursive construct that tells us more about the present than the past. Collective memory is a field of contemporary contestation and negotiation - a struggle over meanings by competing social forces and their interpretations of the past (Kammen 1991). Nevertheless, the weight of analysis and evidence - including that provided so far by this chapter - points to the persistence and resilience of dominant ideologies shaping and transforming collective memory for their own purposes and uses.

In her discussion of television and nostalgia Spigel (1995) carries the argument a little further. She concludes that dominant social institutions such as television may create nostalgic longings but only on the understanding that we can never bring back the worlds we have lost. The implication therefore is that we can't stop the inevitability of progress. As viewers of nostalgic or nostalgia-inducing programs we experience the warm inner glow of the past while believing in and approving of present day developmentalism: rather than being the opposite of progress, nostalgia has become its 'handmaiden' (1995: 29). This idea can be gainfully applied to other uses - or manipulations - of collective memory. Here postmodern built environments, including 'exclusive' housing estates and resorts such as the Gold Coast's Sanctuary Cove, come to mind. The tourist and shopping precinct of Sanctuary Cove with its use of corrugated-iron, bullnose verandah roofing and suchlike creates a kind of reconstructed memory of Australian country towns (albeit a highly pastiched and aesethicised fabrication) which does little to dispel - and in Spigel's terms does more to enhance - the overriding sense of what is big now and going to be bigger and

better (for a few) in the future. Davis and Starn (1989: 2) put it a slightly different way: 'The agents of dominant culture conjure up fond recollections of the old ways that they are in one way or another responsible for destroying'. And returning to the current crop of beach holiday memorialising I would submit that it, too, illustrates Spigel's (1995: 19-20) claim that dominant social institutions encourage us to 'engage in a kind of historical consciousness that remembers the past in order to believe in the present' - in this case the kind of present promoted and endorsed by the moderately rich and temporarily famous who grace the lifestyle pages of the upmarket press.

I want to leave the coast for a while and head for the hills - to the Gold Coast hinterland, or more specifically Mt Tamborine, which I now call home. Here you will find a stretch of road officially named Long Road but known locally as Gallery Walk. It's the tourist centre of the mountain, providing an assortment of Devonshire teas and damper and tea, and local arts and crafts and knick-knackery housed in a mixture of buildings ranging from Cotswold cottages to a kind of architecture I can only describe as Hansel and Gretel gingerbread, and finally to 'traditional' Australian and/or Queensland 'colonial' and vernacular variations. Here story book and nursery rhyme exotica are juxtaposed with home-grown Aussie nostalgia. Benjamin wrote about the phantasmagoria of modernism - the shadowy, unreal, elusive but endlessly appealing imagery of the commodity and the structures that protect and display it (Buck-Morss, 1991). Here on gallery walk are postmodern kinds of phantasmagoria: brighter, sunnier, perhaps even funnier - certainly friendlier and fuzzier - than the rather hard-edged shadows of the city of the coastal plain below.

A few months ago the foundations of a new enterprise began to take shape on a vacant block in Gallery Walk, and Helen and I began our own little guessing game: what era, fantasy or memory would the completed building evoke? Would it be Black Forest or Black Stump? In the end we were both well off target because what is emerging is totally unexpected. It seems that it's going to be a commercial operation merchandising German and Swiss cuckoo clocks - if the sign in the front yard is any indication. Nothing unusual here. But the odd thing is that while the clocks are to be sold in a rear section still under construction, the finished section fronting the walk and potential customers has been custom built in a style that cries out Australian State Housing Commission circa 1970. Unanswered - and perhaps unanswerable - questions hang in the air: is the latest addition a risible aberration totally inappropriate to the rather genteel, arty and tastefully-quaint ambience of Gallery Walk and Tamborine Mountain in general? (A sample of overheard derisory comments indicates that more refined visitors and locals *have* answered this question - in the affirmative.) Is it an 'authentic' (i.e., authentically manufactured) expression of collective memory - a building embodying an era of Australian working-class life and therefore not entirely out of keeping with the nostalgically eclectic spirit of Gallery Walk? Or - a question not unrelated to the previous ones - does it represent, unwittingly or not, a pricking of the somewhat inflated notions of Mountain-style good taste and respectability? To put it another way, do we have here an example of architectural ignorance, of postmodern pastiche (reinforcing



a culture of inclusion and consolation) or of gritty, in-your-face, don't-give-a-damn defiance?

### **Or do we have irony?**

To answer that question I need to take a detour to New England in the United States to follow a geographer called Smith (1993) as he drives through the countryside on a brilliant autumn afternoon lost in a reverie inspired by countless car commercials until he is suddenly brought to his senses by a farm truck that pulls onto the road in front of him. The truck is full of cabbages. This is a salutary experience for Smith because from it he develops his theory of landscape and irony. Basically it is this: landscape can be read as a text; landscape meanings and readings are mainly appropriated by traditional and conservative elements within the dominant culture to provide a sense of stability and permanence; landscape has been aestheticised to encourage reverie and nostalgia; the fear of 'spatial displacement' has caused landscape to be insulated from other, less appealing, meanings. But the meanings of landscape are not necessarily fixed and closed - they have the potential to be oppositional or alternative. Now there's nothing particularly original about this - it's a sign of yet another cultural geographer discovering and applying the Gramscian inspired cultural studies already alluded to. However, it is Smith's account of the impacts and meanings of irony in a landscape that I find particularly relevant and applicable to my own observations. Irony, according to Smith, is a discrepant, out of place symbol (a truck-load of cabbages) which intrudes or is inserted into a landscape, thus destabilising and betraying the pretensions imposed on it by privileged groups, allowing for multiple - even subversive - meanings to emerge, and affirming 'an order that is both wider and weirder' (1993: 87).

Can we return, then, to Gallery Walk, Mt Tamborine, to consider briefly the ironic possibilities of the house of the Little Aussie Battler - repository of cuckoo clocks? A wider and weirder world indeed.

Of course irony is a very problematic concept or construct, somewhat unfashionable these days with its purely literary connotations, although the impeccably credentialled Linda Hutcheon (1994) has recently transferred it to a more social, political and communicative context. As Hutcheon reminds us, irony can be a tool of conservatism and authoritarianism on the one hand, opposition and subversion on the other. And this gives rise to the questions that must be asked of it: Who is applying and interpreting it? At whom is it directed? Then there is the issue of ironic intention. Does the Aussie Battler House intend to be ironic? (Hardly, one suspects.) Or is irony in the eye of the beholder? Similarly, it may be necessary to distinguish between 'being ironic' and 'it is ironic that' (Muecke 1970/1982: 22, quoted in Hutcheon 1993: 116). Finally, just how widespread might this irony be? Can it circulate within a discursive community as Hutcheon suggests, or as in the case of the Aussie Battler House is it restricted to one dilettante observer?

With all this in mind I want to come down the mountain to the coast - the Gold Coast. Two dominant popular discourses lay claim to the Gold Coast. The first (hardly worth repeating it is so well-known) happily represents the place as dedicated to pleasure, consumption, entertainment and the high-life (the latter both literal and metaphorical). This is the image aggressively promoted by real estate agents and developers, tourist promoters, shopping mall investors and local universities trying to attract fee-paying overseas students. Visually the image draws attention to the glitz and glamour of the casino and the five star hotels, the fun of the theme parks, the magnificent erections of the high-rises, the not-so discreet charm of the canal-side mansions of the bourgeoisie and - exposed at the magic moment after sunrise - the majestic sweep of ocean, Broadwater and golf course.

Without this first discourse the second discourse would hardly exist. The second feeds off the first and is both fascinated and repulsed by it. This discourse creates a negative or at least problematic, image and it attracts a 'community' of diverse elements: academic, journalistic and popular. Empirical research reveals the paradox that while the Gold Coast is one of the most visited destinations in Australia it has the most unfavourable image with, for example, a sample of females over 40 declaring it 'frenetic but dull' (Young 1995: 284). Journalistic accounts tend to favour crime rates and the dashed expectations of southern 'wetbacks' (*The Bulletin*, 24 May, 1994; 11 October, 1994), while academics have warmed to the theme of the Gold Coast epitomising post-Fordism, post-industrialism, post-modernism and just about post-everything else. Mullins's (1991) empirical geographical study places the area in a context of tourism urbanisation, 'urbanisation based on the sale and consumption of pleasure' (1991: 331), while Symes (1994) inveighs against the 'crass,' 'counterfeit' 'spurious' ... and so on ... nature - or rather culture - of the place 'in which the simulacrum replaces the aura as the main centre of attraction' (1994: 31). Meanwhile Craig McGregor (1995) has produced a gentle piece about Australia and the beach, with references to the Gold Coast, arguing that there is still enough time and space left for us to retain something of our (now old) beach culture.

What unites the academic commentators is the sense that the Gold Coast is a perfect example of where we might all be heading on a global scale. I welcome and support this kind of analysis and I agree that the Gold Coast exemplifies certain trends in the consumption of leisure and pleasure. But I would also argue that constructing the Gold Coast as a kind of laboratory or exhibit is to produce yet another simulacrum not much removed from the despised theme park variety. If the Gold Coast is to be a model, exemplum or simulacrum let it be a little more diverse, multifaceted and complex - not one totally in thrall to or enthralled by discourse one: the Gold Coast stereotyped as a place of wealth, glamour and pleasure.

To return to memory and place: the built environment of the Gold Coast may be depicted as monolithically vertical or blandly brick horizontal, but I suggest that there is room for a new way of discussing and analysing the urban development of the area. We need a genealogy or even archaeology of place that

will account for the layers of landscape and building prominent along the main 'strip' of development from Southport-Labrador in the north to Coolangatta-Tweed Heads in the south. Specifically, I'm referring to the original layer of the weekender, the beach shack, and the camping and caravan park which constitutes a kind of residual landscape sedimented among the blond brick and plaster column futurism of the seventies' holiday and retirement units. Both these layers appear cheek by jowl - literally wall to wall in some instances - with the latest layer - the gleaming towers of the privileged. I recommend a *flaneur*-style stroll down Marine Parade Labrador where one can indeed detect - while attempting to emulate the involuntary and distracted manner of Benjamin's city wanderers - an aura of memory-inspired 'dreams and hopes implicit in now neglected urban forms' (Savage and Warde, 1993: 136; see also Benjamin, A. 1989: 131). However, while it has been claimed that Benjamin's techniques of urban exploration have allowed the 'force of tradition to be dismantled' (Savage and Warde, 1993: 136) as well as the phantasmagoria of modernism and the 'mythic metaphors of progress' to be 'unmasked and exposed' (Buck-Morss, 1991: 92) I would offer a less pressured and precious and infinitely less complex way of dealing with, and reading the cultural significance of, the outdated but persistently visible buildings of the Gold Coast. In short, inject a little irony into the scene. For surely there is a quota of irony in the kind of place we nostalgically hanker after surviving in the very coastal resort that has been made to epitomise the developments and changes that are supposedly destroying the old beach communities and culture.

Irony at this level could easily be seen as gentle, reflective and consoling, allowing the dominant culture to simultaneously accommodate both 'progress' and nostalgia - although the uncompromising tackiness and ordinariness of the 'old' Gold Coast surviving in embarrassing proximity and stark contrast to the developers' dreamscapes does allow for a sharper edged ironic undermining of the latter's pretensions, if not power. But also at work here is a different, darker kind of irony that is more destabilising - perhaps even threatening. And it is this: the fibro cottages (many of them run-down) and the caravan parks are no longer the temporary homes of happy family holiday makers. Now they are rented out to the growing permanent underclass of the region - the unemployed, the drifters, the impoverished elderly, students and part-time workers in the entertainment, hospitality and massage industries. The lower end of this housing market is a reminder that the golden image of the coast can look decidedly tarnished at times and that the demographics and economics of the region (Mullins, 1991; ABS 1991) may well cause the rich to ponder over the security - both financial and physical - of their waterside worlds. The issue of crime and security at the Gold Coast is a complex one. For example, the 'threat' of crime - imagined or otherwise - is seen as emanating as much from Brisbane (by way of criminal commuters on the new rail link!) as locally. Nevertheless, the presence of street beggars, decaying Falcons and discarded shopping trolleys parked in the dingy front yards of unkempt rented 'shacks' would hardly instil a sense of comfort and confidence in the well-heeled looking down from their burglary-bugged balconies. (The Gold Coast *Weekend Bulletin* [May 11-12,

1996] reported that people in security unit blocks were asked to become volunteer collectors for the Salvation Army's Red Sheild Appeal because in past years it had become increasingly difficult for collectors to gain access to security-protected blocks.)

So at the Gold Coast sites of memory can be found, but they are more complex and ambiguous than the traditional sites of fond beachside memories in that they have taken on a new dimension of discomfort and uncertainty. Meanwhile, the traditional benign memories have been siphoned off and transferred to nostalgic journalism and to the contemporary built environments of housing estate, resort and shopping mall where the corrugated iron and timber (never fibro) of the Aussie vernacular compete in a more relaxed and tasteful manner with imported architectural styles and materials.

The grimmer irony of the remaining fibro beach house hardly points to a form of tactical resistance (de Certeau, 1984; Gregory, 1994) by the disempowered who when dispossessed by landlords selling out to developers, quietly move on to the remaining stock of low status but relatively high rent accommodation. But it is a reminder of a darker, abject side of the post-everything future. A variety of phantasmagoria overlooked by Benjamin is emerging in the Gold Coast and similar locales - they are the houses and their inhabitants that survive and wait in the shadows of the high rises. The irony of their continuing existence may not move mountains or monoliths, but as others (see Foreword, Negt and Kluge, 1993: xxxii) have commented in a similar context, it might at least 'constitute a horizon of a different kind which in turn makes dominant publicity look incoherent and arbitrary'.

A small victory, this, dedicated to lost marshes and swamps.

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## Chapter 4

# Big things: Consumer totemism and serial monumentality

*Ruth Barcan*

This analysis of Big Things aims to raise some questions about regional identity and postmodern tourism. It proceeds from a persistent ambivalence about the ideological workings of popular culture. Beneath my analysis lie other, unresolved, questions: Is the commodification of the natural world and of place necessarily or always a 'bad thing'? How do fetishes and totems work? What are the political effects of the univocality of tourist identity? What is, finally, a region?

Let me begin with a modest taxonomy. Most Big Things are agricultural or horticultural: the Big Merino, Oyster, Prawn, Fish, Ear of Wheat, Banana, Pineapple, Orange, Apple, and so on. There are very few Big versions either of indigenous flora or fauna or of natural products that are not harvested or grown as resources; only the Big Koala and the Giant Earthworm come to mind. One or two historical Big Things wrest the business of history-making away from the realms of public statues and serious monuments, the Big Ned Kelly for example. A few Big Things represent people - types, like the Big Gold-Panner, rather than individuals. Even a few mechanical or man-made Big Things - lawnmower, tap and golf ball - have begun to dot the highways. Most Big Things are vertical, although there are exceptions (most notably, the Giant Earthworm, which strives to achieve horizontal massivity). Most importantly of all, for my purposes, Big Things are place-markers and place-makers. They are an attempt to inscribe the rural into a postmodern national imaginary. Big Things seem to me to be about both the dream of Having It All and the fear of Missing Out. Considered as a national network, the plethora of Big Things can be seen to contribute to a sanguine myth of Australian nationhood; Australia as a cornucopia, a land of abundance. A hyperbole of both size and number (monumentality and serialism) reinforce this myth.

### **Serial monumentality and the logic of the collection**

Big Things are serial phenomena, deriving their meaning from the fact that they form a network. They partake neither of the banal and therefore seemingly invisible serialism of, say, the suburban kit home, nor of the elite aura of the unique, authored architectural form, like the Opera House or Parliament House. Paradigmatically, they signify in relation to other monumental structures, such as towers, pillars, antennae - all popularly readable as phallic; to site markers and place-makers, such as statues and plaques; to other tourist sites; to roadside stalls; and to the natural features to which they refer. Most importantly, they signify in relation to other Big Things. As semiotic phenomena, they are iconic signs - representations bearing a necessary relation to the original to which they refer. They stand in metonymic relation to the region they represent; that is, they function as a part standing in for the whole. In Dean MacCannell's (1976) terms, they are markers that have themselves become sites.

Big Things can also be read as partaking of the logic of the (bourgeois) collection.<sup>1</sup> Susan Stewart (1993: 153) claims that collections are about a logic of wholeness. Individual elements have meaning in relation to the whole, not for themselves (1993: 153). Big Things differ from a collection in that they are scattered over space and therefore over time; they cannot be visited simultaneously, and rarely will any one tourist see the complete network. The meaning of any one Big Thing relies on the overall taxonomy and the principles of organisation that underlie it. A visit to any one Big Thing is not so much an intrinsically exciting tourist event as a participation in a larger system of classification; visiting is to some extent a process of ticking it off a list ('look, there's another one').

Since the collection works to extract individual items from their original contexts, its logic is fetishistic in character. It is also therefore latently consumerist, as commodity fetishism is one of the primary processes of consumer culture. The collection 'represents the total aestheticisation of use value. [It] is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context' (Stewart, 1993: 151).

The playful nature of the Big Things network is thus not only a result of the sanguine myth of natural abundance that it dramatises, but also, perhaps, an inherent feature of the logic of any collection. Stewart (1993: 165) argues that the collection, insofar as it masks the context of origin of its constituent items, presents the illusion of a world that is magically given, not produced: '[I]n the collection, the mode of production is made magical. In this belief in fortune we see a further erasure of labor'.

There is also a transformation of labour at stake. According to Robert Hewison (1987), post-industrial capitalism has witnessed the rise of tertiary industry at the expense of secondary industries. The industries of modernity sometimes incorporate - and frequently give way to - postmodern simulacra. Hewison gives the example of miners redeployed from ailing coal mines in the north of Britain to become tourist guides around those very same mines. This phenomenon is not unknown in Australia. Farmer John Bull, for example, takes

tourists on tractor rides around his farm, over which presides, of course, the Big Cow (Walker, 1991). Dean MacCannell (1976: 36) calls this phenomenon 'work displays' - where essentially industrial sites are converted into tourist sites in 'a museumization of work and work relations'.

## **Size**

According to Susan Stewart, the gigantic was - in European mythology at least - associated with nature and with myths of foundation. Stewart (1993: 71) details many examples of mythological giants who figured in tales about the formation of the natural landscape, often in the form of mythical projections of the giant's body onto the land. Stewart (1993: 79-80) charts, though, the gradual extraction of the giant from the natural world and his/her abstraction into the world of commerce.

Whereas the gigantic was once a figure of ambivalence - being both generative and destructive - it has been domesticated and acculturated, such that its disruptive, ambivalent and carnivalesque meanings have by and large been abstracted, de-corporealised and domesticated in consumer culture:

The twentieth century has signalled the appropriation of the sphere of the gigantic by a centralised mode of commercial advertising. Contemporary giants such as 'the Jolly Green Giant' or 'Mr Clean' are nothing more than their products. Behind them we see not labor but frozen peas and the smell of disinfectant (Stewart, 1993: 101).

Big Things remind us not only of the transformation of nature into produce, but also the commodification of this produce, as witnessed in, for example, the annoying sticky labels on fruit. The relentless productivity of capitalism means that novelty pales quickly: 'the transition from the exotic to the commonplace traces the history of most commodities in a society where abundance means surplus' says Susan Willis (1991: 47) in her essay 'Learning from the Banana'. Bananas, 'commonplace' fruit, unable to be upgraded each year with a new scent, colour, design or package (Willis, 1991: 46), can only be differentiated by the logo sticker, argues Willis (1991: 50-51), which 'in the absence of any clues as to how the bananas were grown, ... packaged, ... shipped, ... marketed and distributed ... seems to offer itself as some sort of explanation'. It welds the corporation onto the produce and thus, in some sense, onto 'nature'. In the Australian context, the Big Banana at Coffs Harbour presides over a local community where growers are under increasing pressure to become part of multinational corporations and accept the conditions of corporate uniformity that go with this (not only the compulsory stickers, but also the throwing out of 'undersized' or 'unacceptable' fruit).

I do not hold the Big Banana personally responsible for this late capitalist transition. For Big Things participate more ambiguously in the



commodification of the natural world, on the one hand celebrating the transformation of nature through agricultural labour, while on the other hand having pretensions to speak for region rather than company, although occasionally intertwining the two. They celebrate labour and selected histories, while also effacing them in favour of the fruit/site commodity.

Big Things reflect consumer culture's obsession with novelty. Gigantification is part of the spectacularising impulse of post-industrial popular culture, an

articulation of quantity over quality, of 'façade' over 'content'. ...  
[T]he gigantic in pop art celebrates the proliferation of the new. ...  
The pop gigantic exists in the abstract space of mass production.  
The human body is not gigantic here; the image is, and the image  
is an object whether its referent is in fact an object or not  
(Stewart, 1993: 92-93).

As postmodern simulacra, Big Things come to exceed and in some sense precede the real on which they were modelled, since no real prawn, for example, can ever hope to match the lustrous orange of the Ballina Big Prawn nor the eerie glow of its eyes at night. The Big Banana is a Platonic ideal, modelled from 'the ideal that every banana grower would desire', according to the Consulting Engineer for the Banana project (Walker, 1991). The Big Cow, too, is modelled on a photo of a 'genuine' local Ayrshire cow, and has been awarded a blue ribbon by a cattle judge (Walker, 1991).

This postmodern aesthetic is also complicit with the logic of advertising (see Crilley, 1993), which draws on the familiar in order to anchor its messages firmly within compelling and already functional paradigms. According to Darrel Crilley (1993: 237), much postmodern urban redevelopment is an insidious form of architectural advertising, insofar as 'the public' are interpellated as spectators at a series of triumphant architectural displays'. For Crilley, postmodern urban redevelopment, like advertising, is fetishistic in the Marxist sense, in that it diverts attention away from conditions of production; crucial material questions like 'who builds what, where, for whom, with whose finance and at whose expense' (Crilley, 1993: 251) remain hidden beneath discussions of 'style'.

I don't see Big Things as in any way 'insidious' (they're far too homely for that, they may well incorporate elements of pastiche, and in any case, they're not part of the urban redevelopment that Crilley is describing). Nonetheless, to the extent that they can come to stand in for the prime activity or identity of a region, in the short-hand way of tourist iconography, they are a fascinating blend of place-makers, architecture, popular art and advertising.

What labour, what flow of capital, what environmental practice, what appropriation of land, goes into the production of, say, a shiny orange? The social and temporal relation of the fruit to the land is obscured in favour of the static and spatial relation of thing to thing - the place of a Big Thing in the network. Under this postmodern sign, some material and historical conditions

are deflected by the fruit-as-spectacle: environmental questions - histories of land clearance and degradation, soil erosion, pesticides; labour conditions and contexts - the sometimes unacknowledged stories of Aboriginal farm workers, the unpaid labour of women, or the toll exacted on rural workers by city dwellers whose demand for perfect fruit and vegetables at minimal prices all year round determines what can be grown, how, and how profitably.

### **Commodity relations**

Big Things, then, are about the exchange of both images and capital, and the relationship between these two. On the crudest level, most are combined with gift shops. Sometimes the shop seems to have motivated the Big Thing; at other times the Big Thing has produced the shop. Big sign, small building, is the (rather Freudian) logic of popular commercial architecture, say Robert Venturi and his colleagues (1972). According to the duck/decorated shed opposition formulated by Venturi *et al.*, Big Things are definitely ducks. That is, they are 'buildings-become-sculpture' - buildings that are a symbol, rather than buildings that have symbols applied to them in the form of ornamentation. Big Things are themselves the sign out the front of the shop.

Big Things help affect a commodification of place, often exceeding their status as advertising a product and coming to advertise a region. The commodification of place is, of course, crucial to postmodern economics, as an essay in Philo and Kearns' (1993) book *Selling Cities* makes clear. Local government representative Andrew Fretter (in Philo and Kearns 1993: 165-72) itemises 'the essential elements of place marketing', under the following headings: 'Vision', 'Know Yourself', 'Define Your Customers', 'Adapt and Improve Your Product to Customer Requirements', 'Know Your Competitors', 'Find A Real Point Of Difference' and 'One Voice'. Here, the unironic adoption of the language of marketing points to the supremacy of commodity relations as paradigmatic in late twentieth century western thought (Bowlby, 1993). 'Place marketing' is not just a matter of individual entrepreneurship, it is now a central role of local government. It involves more than simply selling:

Selling is trying to get the customer to buy what you have, whereas marketing meets the needs of the customer profitably. ... Place marketing ... can now be viewed as a fundamental part of planning, a fundamental part of guiding the development of places in a desired fashion (Fretter, 1993: 165).

Thus, place marketing is heavy cultural, economic and mythological work.

## **Myths of place**

Photographer Paul Ryan, who has been engaged in a long-term study of Big Things and the people who build them, pointed out that many of them were built by migrants and were thus crucial acts of home-making.<sup>2</sup> As semiotic phenomena, they seem to me also to partake both of the fantasy of abundance and the fear of Missing Out. They create the fiction of a unique, singular, optimistic and ahistorical regional identity. They are implicated in the process of naming 'empty' spaces, in 'the classical image of an Australian space as structured by a void or an absence which needs to be filled in' (Morris, 1982: 56). This colonial trope is the linchpin of the legal fiction of *Terra Nullius*. Striving to compete in a semiotic economy that privileges individual 'sites', Big Things inscribe identity onto otherwise 'empty' or 'featureless' regions in a fetishistic attempt to displace a perceived lack. In this, they also resemble advertising which, according to Darrel Crilley (1993: 237), aims to 'fill the "hollowed-out" world of consumer goods with meaning'. Advertising must create lack in order to be seen to fill it.

Big Things testify to a fear that we have no history. Of course, the fear that we have no history hides the history that we fear - that is, the history of colonial invasion, appropriation of the land and the attempted subjugation of Aboriginal people. Constructing monuments that invent regional identities is a logical extension of *Terra Nullius*, though of course I'm not suggesting that the makers intend them that way. It seems to me no coincidence that there are virtually no indigenous animals or plants in Big form and that there are few individualised people (though Ned Kelly is one exception). Thus, Big Things are unlike urban public art, which is often authored and abstract, and unlike public statues of heroes, historical figures or pioneers, which memorialise certain historical narratives about individuals. They are also unlike that other network of rural sculptures - the town war memorial, which celebrates and names but does not represent local, 'ordinary' people. Big Things differ from all these: they represent things not people and types rather than singularities. Thus, they replace histories with icons - or rather, they memorialise some stories and not others.

In this, they again resemble collections, which are ahistorical in impulse:

The collection replaces history with classification, with order beyond the realm of temporality. In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world (Stewart, 1993: 151).

Big Things create some regional identities at the cost of others, since tourist identities work best when they are distinct, relatively singular and easily reproducible visually. As Andrew Fretter (1993: 172) advises, under the heading 'One Voice': 'Confused messages weaken the argument'. One concerted marketing message will help potential tourists and investors believe

that the place has 'got its act together', he claims (1993: 172). Difference gets subsumed under the marketing logic of brand recognition.

Tourist identities, then, are ultimately part of the far-reaching myth of coherent identity. They claim to represent an identity that is single rather than multiple - let alone contradictory, identities. So, following Stephen Slemon (1987), who has argued that allegory is a preferred colonial mode, since it is predicated on an assumed identity between things, we could say that Big Things work allegorically, effacing, most notably, Aboriginal definitions of regional, tribal, spiritual, linguistic or other space.

### **Postmodern totems**

Thus, Big Things are produced by and help to effect change in the writing of history, an inscription and reification of identity and a production of community. But there are many ways of thinking community, some of them more friendly than the reading that sees Big Things as a metonym of colonialism.

To turn for a moment to the community of tourists who visit Big Things. Cultural studies might encourage us to imagine Big Things as postmodern phenomena open to playful readings, and to consider the variety of ways in which these monuments are visited. Such approaches would encourage us to recognise the knowingness of both tourists and architects, the diversity of tourist responses, and the potential for parodic consumption. Certainly, it would be hard to imagine an unselfconscious visit to a Big Lawnmower. I'm thinking here of Feifer's (Urry, 1990: 100) concept of the 'post-tourist', one who recognises that the modernist search for the authentic tourist experience is doomed to failure and who engages in a knowing and sometimes whimsical play of signifiers.

Such a celebratory and anti-elitist reading might be suggested by the approach to the urban vernacular suggested by Venturi *et al.*, in their seminal book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1977). They argue that Las Vegas teaches us

to reassess the role of symbolism in architecture, and ... to learn a new receptivity to the tastes and values of other people and a new modesty in our designs and in our perception of our role as architects in society (1977: xvii).

Since Big Things are the archetypal 'ducks' of the formulations of Venturi *et al.*, it might seem reasonable to approach them with a postmodern respect for the popular.

Another friendly reading of Big Things is suggested to me by Tom Mitchell's (1994) recent fruitful speculations about 'what pictures want' - in particular, his distinction between fetishes, idols and totems. To paraphrase Mitchell: fetishes are beautiful objects wanting to be adored in private interchange with the gazer; idols are sublime, wanting masses of beholders;

totems are companionable forms - friends, rather like dolls. They are the objects of playful game playing and they interpellate the beholder into a community.

Inspired by Mitchell's categories, I would want to suggest that despite their monumental massivity and their role as fetish, Big Things could also be read through this third category - as totemic icons to be regarded familiarly, often ironically, as representations of ordinary things that function to produce a sense of communal identity.

This reading of Big Things as companionable and familiar seems to do justice to their homeliness. For Big Things seem rather benign in their crudity. This might be partly because of the intrinsically paradoxical nature of the simulacrum, which, as a second-order imitation, locates the locus of desire back in the original even while, as bad copy, it comes nonetheless to precede the real. To draw on Andrew Ross's (1989: 145) charming distinction, Big Things are 'schlock' rather than kitsch or camp since they are 'truly unpretentious - nice, harmless things ... designed primarily to fill a space in people's lives and environments'.

But the notion of familiarity returns me to those 'other' companionable forms - the Aboriginal totems that were implicated in prior circuits of meaning, prior social relations, prior forms of community, prior forms of exchange, and prior inscriptions of meaning onto landscape and region. I want neither to romanticise the circuits of exchange that preceded commodity culture, nor to engage in an ahistorical, anti-environmentalist and anti-postcolonial romanticisation of the ironic spectacle of popular culture. So I'm left wondering what to make of the clash between these possible 'readings' of Big Things, which seems to point as much to the limits of hermeneutics as to the complexity of Big Things. Just what the relationship might be between academic readings, popular practices, political action and social change remains - for this paper - the Biggest Thing of all.

## Notes

1 I take Stewart to mean, primarily, bourgeois collections rather than museums. Certainly, her argument works best in relation to these.

2 Discussion with Paul Ryan after delivery of paper at the Mapping Regional Cultures conference, CQU, 1996.

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## Chapter 5

### Mapping print cultures: The Rockhampton reading project

*Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove*

This chapter presents the preliminary findings of an ongoing project to map regional print cultures and to complement existing Australian Council studies (1990, 1995) which focus predominantly on metropolitan centres. Following Lyons and Taksa (1992), the research methodology combines survey questionnaires with selected follow-up interviews, designed to reflect the age and gender balance of the larger survey group. While several of the forty-five responses predate the period in question, the time-frame for the project remained 1950 - 1970, a time when Australian publishing was still struggling in competition with imported British and increasingly American books and print. These were also transitional decades when electronic media like film and television exercised growing appeal in competition with a broader range of print media including newspapers and magazines. At the outset, it is worth restating Raymond Williams' advice to study reading within the context of everyday life and culture. For:

[t]o the highly literate observer there is always a temptation to assume that reading plays as large a part in the lives of most people as it does in his (her) own (1961: 297).

Williams' statement is pertinent to regional communities like Rockhampton at a time when material development and progress were paramount under its long-serving Mayor Rex Pilbeam. This preoccupation is reflected during the 1950s in such events as the opening of the new Rockhampton bridge, which attracted tens of thousands of residents, and in the Centenary events of 1959 which sustained pride in local pioneering. In regional communities preoccupied with material progress, reading could be seen as tantamount to shirking or even regarded as subversive of community identity. This was equally so in the family when one child was accused of avoiding household chores, a useful ploy after dinner. Readers could also be seen as anti-social and in need of physical and outdoor activity, especially sport - no easy task in the heat of the subtropics. At a

time when the city's ethos was rural and rodeo and Australian sporting heroes were mostly male, is it surprising that reading and books appealed so strongly to local women?

The study of reading and books, in the context of remembering and oral interviews, raises other issues which impact on the finding of the study. One approach, explored by French cultural historians, is the study of 'mentalités' or the ways in which reading perpetuates regional traditions and values. Much could be written about the role of religious instruction and Sunday Schools in fostering an interest in myths and fables as well as the Scripture itself. After all, children's reading in the 1950s was expressly moral and didactic in its intent. While we included the influence of family and upbringing in the survey and interviews, most respondents remembered their reading in the context of leisure and personal development rather than as instruction or formal schooling. Here the role of memory and voluntary responses play a significant part since most of the relatively young sample (45 - 55 years) recalled little about their reading prior to their early teens. In this respect, Hoggart's (1957) distinction between supervised and unsupervised practices may be useful though those interact in situations like home reading and library borrowing. To sum up, mapping regional print cultures post-war necessitates the exploration of cultural tensions associated both with regional 'mentalités' and the new technologies, both print and electronic, which impacted, albeit unevenly, on Australians after 1950.

### **Getting started: Reading in the family**

Great store has been placed on the value of reading in early years and our survey confirmed the influence of family habits and tastes on Rockhampton readers. After all, most of us began by reading (or was it raiding?) our parents' books before our own. Hence the influence of the children's classics. But first came the preparatory period and the Golden Books along with fairy tales or Beatrix Potter. In some cases, both parents were involved, but more often it was mother who maintained the tradition of reading to the children before bed, something not too long and certainly not too alarming.

Reading matter for children in the 1950s was often didactic and carefully supervised more so than television or video viewing today. One popular text was *Uncle Arthur's Bed Time Stories* which was promoted as 'wholesome', 'truthful', 'uplifting', and 'inspiring'. Despite their high reputation, Australian titles were less in demand until the mid-late sixties. Some of our readers only discovered local titles when they read to their children in the seventies. Most read of children's fiction was Enid Blyton, followed by Georgette Heyer at age 13 - 14 and interspersed with the Girls' Own Annuals. The children's titles we received reflected the strong response by women (who comprised three quarters of the survey), as well as the maternal influence. What were boys reading? Some of the same? Boys' Own? We would like to know more.



### **Out and about: The lending community**

If family members and school libraries provided a promising start, it was the School of Arts Library in Bolsover Street which was remembered in the context of regular reading and borrowing. Grace Perrier, after whom the present Perrier Collection is named, retired in August 1952 and her influence on the collection should be acknowledged. Once again, there are gaps in our knowledge which need to be filled. Librarians appear as rather hazy figures though they were undoubtedly influential in a number of ways (more positive than negative we would contend). One of those was giving advice to readers about the titles in their collections.

In the mid 1950s, when subscriptions were the norm, the number of children or junior readers at the School of Arts exceeded that for adults, and the Children's Section occupied as much space as the Adults'. In all, about one quarter of the Rockhampton population were regular users, a figure which increased dramatically by the end of the 1960s when subscriptions were wound back and non-fiction borrowing became free. Perhaps it was just cheaper to buy children's books with the limited Council budgets available but Rockhampton regarded itself as at the fore of local governments in this regard. One interesting addition was the installation of fluorescent lighting in the building in 1953. How much easier did that make reading? Are our books printed in smaller type now because of this improved lighting?

Many respondents recalled early and regular visits to the Library during week day evenings with parents. Friday night when the East Street shops were open became a family night out. They had less to say about the Saturday and weekend sessions when children assisted the local librarians with repairing existing and damaged stock. Perhaps the more ardent readers avoided such activities. In any case, the Library was remembered as a friendly and relaxed place rather than as the forbidding institution that it has sometimes been depicted.

### **Juvenile reading: the 'Age of Comics'**

Juvenile reading represented a retreat from family to peer values. One male respondent remembered the post-war years as the 'Age of Comics'. Comics were unavailable in libraries but could be located in second-hand book shops - one at Lakes Creek on the northside and another upstairs on the corner of East and William Streets, at the bottom of what is now the City Mall. Who cannot recall the waiting rooms of the period? - barber shops and hairdressing salons where both comics and magazines were read and reread.

Although they were not treasured in the family or by libraries, comics were an important component of reading by the 1950s. They catered for a range of tastes, starting with adventure (Phantom, Mandrake, Archie, Little Lotta) to the classics (*Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island*, *Great Expectations*). Sometimes in small booklets or in the familiar A4 size, they were usually part of the reader's leisure

world distinct from schooling. A large pile under the bed was often the most available location, and comics, like magazines and second books were lent, borrowed and discussed. Comics, while frowned upon (several attempts were made to ban American titles in the 1950s), were useful for schooling as well. Who does not remember consulting the comic version of one of the classics in preparation for the next test or assignment? In this way, comics also impeded literacy by providing dubious outlets but their popularity suggests that they received grudging recognition in the home.

A second popular category for juvenile readers was adventure which could combine with romance for girls or with crime and war reading for boys. From the *Biggles* series and war escape stories, readers advanced to Ian Fleming and Alistair McLean. By the 1960s, film had become important in stimulating and maintaining the appetite for such fiction. By no means all readers remembered discarding their youthful tastes. Science fiction and adult romance remained significant, though tasted broadened and shifted more readily with age.

### **Reading institutions: the *Morning Bulletin* and the *Women's Weekly***

Why select the *Morning Bulletin* and the *Women's Weekly*? Because a 1968 survey, conducted by McNair Anderson, showed that 90 percent of the regional population over 10 years read their local daily, including 93 percent adults and 91 percent teenagers. Teenagers followed sport, film star items and comics, while adult reading ranged across the classifieds and correspondence. Ninety percent of these papers were home delivered and 65 percent of sales were in the city area. This is a very high level of readership (about twice that for national and capital-city papers in regional Australia) and suggests that the local dailies were a significant influence on Rockhampton readers. This local allegiance carried over from other centres when residents moved to Rockhampton and continued their subscription from their previous place of residence. As one of our respondents who moved from a smaller centre declared:

I keep my finger in the pie down in my own area. I lived all my life there and I like to know who's who and what's what and whose had children and who's died and whose bull won ... at the show (interview with L.B.).

Another indication of the pattern of divided allegiances was the relatively high Rockhampton readership of rural weeklies like the *Queensland Country Life* which appealed to people from a landed background (McNair, Anderson, 1968: 24). Among the influential Rockhampton editors of the period was George Westacott, himself an active member of the Historical Society as well as the Journalists' Association. The sentiments expressed in the *Morning Bulletin* of 1961 (July 8: 4) that 'nothing is taken more for granted than the daily paper' are in keeping with its high readership levels at this time. The boast of the regional newspaper was its capacity to cater simultaneously for both the

scholarly and the rudimentary reader. In the years immediately before the coming of television, the newspaper still reigned supreme, or as the *Bulletin* put it:

In spite of telegraphy, radio and television, no-one is satisfied until (s)he has seen the record of the happening in print (July 8, 1961: 4).

Comparable with the popularity of the *Bulletin* in the 1950s and 1960s was that of the *Australian Women's Weekly* which according to a reputable source was read by half of the Australian population on a weekly basis. Popular features were the recipes, games and puzzles. As such, it was a major cultural resource, kept for projects and cut up into home recipe and scrap books (interview with S.G.). Nor was the *Weekly* read solely by women. One male respondent remembered it for the stories and crossword puzzles.

Unlike newspapers, magazines tended to be a circulating medium and were shared between friends and relatives, having rarely reached a use-by date. Apart from the available English version of the *Weekly*, other American-based titles were popular in Rockhampton, one of which, the *Reader's Digest*, attracted a wide following throughout Australia. One respondent found it 'good reading' because it had a variety of subjects and 'always had a condensed book in it' (interview with P.W.). In addition to their fictional and entertainment value, magazines were also a source of information on science and health topics. A consistent feature in this vein was *National Geographic*, which was reread and shared among family members. To sum up, our survey suggests that the *Australian Women's Weekly*, while popular, was not always the same dominant force in the country, or in Rockhampton, that it may have been nationally.

### Collectors and bookshops

While the local library or School of Arts was fundamental in inducing regularity and socialising regional readers, it could also engender frustration among dedicated readers, anxious for new titles and popular authors. One established pattern confirmed by the survey was the practice of following particular writers, especially fiction writers, and hunting down their latest works. Here, newsagents and bookshops played a supplementary role in supplying up-to-date reading matter. We identified at least four bookshops operating in Rockhampton by 1975 and some 16 listed newsagents (CQ Telephone Directory, 1961, 1975). While newsagents were scattered across the southside and northside, most of the bookshops were situated in East Street. Among these was Munro's, an early local firm which advertised 'The Best in Paperbacks' including Ian Fleming's *Thunderball*, Neville Shute's *A Town Like Alice* and Richard Porteous' *Cattleman* (Morning Bulletin, 8 July, 1961: 4). In 1962, the Queensland Book Depot began its state-wide expansion from Brisbane when it bought McLeod's bookstore in Rockhampton (Bennett, 1985: 5). Each of the QBD shops included

a Christian literature section and competed with local church outlets in the field, as well as carrying the coffee-table reading which became its trademark.

Even so, impatient local readers sometimes preferred southern shopping trips and subscriptions to fulfill their requirements. The upshot of these steady acquisitions was in some cases a specialised personal library made up, in one instance, of more than one hundred biographies which were shared with close family members (interview with D.F.). Larger private libraries which existed both in and around Rockhampton comprised fiction and non-fiction as well as reference works like the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The Voss Library Catalogue, compiled in 1958, of the family collection housed at Port Tanby on the Capricorn Coast, while atypical and somewhat early for our purposes, exhibits some persistent trends of the period, including a large body of fiction. This body of work (of which only a small component was Australian) had a substantial World War Two collection as well as travel, European and American material (including the inevitable Ion Idriess) was housed in a single large room. These works were classified by the owners according to size, genre and period (CQC MS R40).

### **Readers and writers**

A further example of the social value of reading was the role model of the writer and of writing itself. In a number of instances, intensive reading fostered literary ambitions in later life, whether it be writing poetry, history or keeping and editing a private journal. Like reading, writing catered for a range of styles and interests from the more objective forms to the intensely personal. The desire to preserve the past or write autobiography were motivations for the shift to writing, in conjunction with strong moral and religious training and professional motivation. A predominant formative pattern for reader-writers was fiction, often in its more demanding forms - John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce, as well as some Australian classics and poetry - Judith Wright, A. D. Hope, Ernestine Hill which enjoyed renewed popularity by the mid to late sixties. In Rockhampton, several associations actively promoted reading and writing, notably the English Association after 1959 and the Writers' Club, recently documented by Dr Wally Woods of Central Queensland University, which developed as an offshoot from it. These organisations promoted reading as a collective endeavour while encouraging the reading of Shakespearian plays, poetry and the classics in preference to the popular tastes which prevailed after the War.

### **The eclectic reader: An overview**

A more utilitarian view of books and reading, by no means absent from our survey results, was that of filling in time. Reading, in childhood or adulthood, did not always pursue a particular social or cultural purpose. When writing of

magazine readers, Joke Hermes recently described a 'pick up put down' syndrome and questioned notions of identity and community for such readers (Hermes, 1995).

While Rockhampton had its specialists and collectors, we were struck overall by the diversity of reading tastes. The survey showed that the general reader was someone with eclectic taste, ranging across fiction and non-fiction material. Although we had anticipated that women would gravitate to fiction and men to non-fiction, our survey suggests otherwise. Only about one in four women respondents read fiction exclusively and male readers of non-fiction likewise. Moreover, women readers exhibited a wider range of non-fiction interests than men exhibited. These included biography, travel and military history. Women also enjoyed both serious and light fiction, including crime and romance while men opted for either crime or romance but not both. Criticisms of both these popular genres as either too sentimental or explicit were also recorded although, when interviewed, some readers made a distinction within popular romance and indicated those titles which they considered were better written. Generally speaking, local readers took both fiction and non-fiction, relying upon a range of outlets including the School of Arts as well as bookshops to satisfy their needs. Their preference was for evening reading at home.

### **The box and new audiences**

But what of television? How many from the 1960s succumbed to the visual appeal of *Bonanza* and *Rawhide*, to say nothing of *Four Corners* or *Homicide*, forsaking their favourite authors and newer titles in the process? We were interested to know whether our respondents considered that television and radio had altered their reading habits, perhaps irrevocably.

In response to our question about changes to reading habits, about half of our respondents cited television as the single most significant factor while some forty percent felt that no change had resulted. The remainder cited outside interests as competing attractions. This was after all the age of the Holden and car travel was becoming more popular, especially to the coast. The coming of television was not automatic in regional Australia. The significance of radio and film, the former popular with all age groups, probably slowed down the inexorable advance of television and with it, the creation of a commercial climate which favoured family viewing and consumption over the individualised but highly satisfying world of the reader. Along with newspapers, radio was the mass medium most used by respondents till 1970. Eight out of 10 respondents mentioned radio listening, especially ABC radio, as a regular activity unlike television, which was consumed more heavily in some cases, but less evenly than radio and the press across the regional population.

## **Notes**

1 The authors would like to acknowledge Andrea Witcomb for her assistance in the early stages of the project, as well as Leo Tidey of the Central Queensland Library Collection and those members of the community who participated in this research.

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## Chapter 6

# Imagined communities and postmodern mapping

*Warwick Mules*

### Postmodern mapping

Modernity has long held a claim over the theoretical imagination of researchers working in the field of the social sciences and the humanities, a claim which often goes undetected in the *modus operandi* of the researcher. In today's rapidly globalising world, where societies, economies and cultures are dissolving, transforming and reshaping themselves according to transnational flows and forces of information and resourcing, local contexts can no longer be approached as if they were modern; as if they were self-enclosed realities with their own special characteristics and dynamics of localised interaction. Rather, localised contexts now need to be approached as postmodern: as radically open sites, subject to an 'inside/outside' process of feedback and transformation, in which mediation, transparency, difference and contingency take the place of proximity, opacity, sameness and certainty. Although this 'postmodern' situation is often acknowledged by researchers as a framework of ideas about the way social contexts are now being configured within a globalising world, there is nevertheless always the risk that in the research procedure itself, a residual commitment to modernist concepts will re-assert itself, thereby interpreting what is essentially a new form of social interaction in terms of old ways of understanding.

In this chapter I want to sketch out some terrain for the development of what might be called a postmodern approach to the analysis of regional and rural communities. I am assuming here that what is involved is a certain kind of field work, where the researcher needs to gain access to communities in terms of the 'lived experience' of people. My concern then, is not so much for any postmodern theory of society as such, but for a revision of modernist methodology as it might be applied in the field. No research can be undertaken on a *tabula rasa* basis: the researcher always has in mind a certain concept of what a community is, no matter how provisional. In other words there is always a framework which guides and motivates research. It is here, at this point where the research frame - its guiding concepts and theoretical orientation - meets the

context in which the researcher interacts with people, that I want to situate my discussion.

Let me begin then by invoking a distinction which will help define the various elements involved. A map is a representation of a territory. To map a territory is to re-inscribe the territory according to a code (a *langue*), making it intelligible to the map reader, but not necessarily to the person who is 'in' the territory. Maps and territories are the stuff of sociological field work. To ensure that maps are not confused with territories seems to me to be the fundamental ethical task of sociology. However, there is a problem which appears *before* the separation between map and territory takes place, a problem which is distinctly modern. Gregory Bateson puts it this way:

We say the map is different from the territory. But what is the territory? Operationally, somebody went out with a retina or a measuring stick and made representations which were then put upon paper. What is on the paper map is a representation of what was in the retinal representation of the man who made the map; and as you push the question back, what you find is an infinite regress, an infinite series of maps. The territory never gets in at all. The territory is *Ding an sich* and you can't do anything with it. Always the process of representation will filter it out so that the mental world is only maps of maps of maps, ad infinitum (Bateson, 1972: 454-455).

This Kantian problem is distinctly modern in that it places special emphasis on the interiority of the mind. Here the map becomes confused with the territory because everything is reduced to a mental representation, leading to the insolubility of an infinite regress. The conventional way out of this dilemma is through a transcendental move which secures the processes of map making as a rational process, both 'in' the mind, yet somehow outside it, in the pure realm of abstraction. For instance, statistical data as 'maps' lay claim to a certain kind of knowledge (logico-mathematical) transcending the conditions in which the territory is 'experienced'. The statistical 'machine' which does the calculating is proposed as belonging to a different order, yet remains somehow part of the territory itself, as its master code. However, this too, can be subject to critique from within, as Derrida (1974), Garfinkel (1984), Latour (1993), and Bourdieu (1990) (to name just a few critics of modern 'transcendental' scientific method) have shown.<sup>1</sup> In any shift from a modern to a postmodern approach to the mapping of territory, we need to understand the 'logical machine' as already part of the territory, and not separate from it.

This problem can be overcome, if instead of imagining maps to be an interior mental representation, we see them as already 'exterior' forms. This is implied in Bateson's discussion: 'What is on the paper map is a representation of what was in the retinal representation of the man who made the map'. So, maps are always 'exterior' to the mind of the map-maker (if we allow a retina to stand as an interface organ, outside the mental process). Instead of an infinite regress, we now have a proliferation of *difference*: 'what gets onto the map is, in fact difference' (Bateson, 1972: 451). Territories are themselves maps, and vice



versa, so that what counts is not keeping them apart, but in analysing the different ways in which they interrelate within different contexts of research. To do this we need to analyse the *discourses* through which distinctions between maps and territories operate, not just by the researcher, but by the agents of 'lay' knowledge living in the territories themselves. We can move forward, then, by a kind of pragmatic 'unpacking' of the articulations between discourse and the things to which discourse are attached, such as behaviour, practice, action, mental cognition, and 'lay' knowledge revealed in talk, all of which can be used as 'data' for any mapping purpose. What I propose, then, is a non-transcendental and hence postmodern pragmatics which seeks to uncover the articulations between discourse and its effects, within radically opened, that is 'globalised' contexts in which community exists both as a 'lived experience' and as a concept available for mapping.<sup>2</sup>

### **Community and the imaginary**

If communities are to be thought of as objectively defined groups of people, living in close proximity and sharing similar day-to-day life experiences, then they must also be thought of as an *idea* which inhabits their members in various ways. People belong to communities not only because it is possible to map objectively shared cultural characteristics, geographical propinquities, and common social and economic denominators, but also because people *imagine* themselves to be attached to something beyond their limited experiences of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the nation as an imagined community Anderson writes:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 1991: 6).

Despite its suggestions of interior mentality ('in the minds of ...') Anderson's arguments provide a useful starting point for an analysis of communities as non-interiorised yet imagined states. Imagined communities are not based on the primacy of face-to-face experiences of individuals, located in close proximity to one another, but on the mediation of such experiences by discourse. Anderson uses the example of the mass reading of newspapers to make his point:

We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day and not that. ... The significance of this mass ceremony ... is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion (Anderson, 1991: 35).

From this perspective, membership of an imagined community of readers displaces face-to-face experiences of community, so that the individual reader becomes much more aware of an absent 'presence' (the imagined community) built into every aspect of everyday life. In mass mediated societies such as exist everywhere in the world today, communities are always imagined at the same time as they are experienced as quotidian realities. Ideas, attitudes, events and knowledges circulating in the mediated realm of mass media and other symbolic forms are appropriated by the reader into the meaningfulness of localised contexts in which the daily rounds of life take place. Community life thus proceeds by this 'inside/outside' process as knowledges circulating in the wider world enter into and affect ways of imagining within more localised community locales.

To imagine belonging to a community is not to have a false consciousness, as if the real community could somehow be shown as 'proof' of a misguided belief.<sup>4</sup> Rather imagining is a *constitutive* process, a 'making' of community as it translates into various kinds of action, practice, policy and ways of being together. Anderson refers to this as a 'style' of imagining: 'communities are not to be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.' (6). In rural and regional Australia, the style in which communities are imagined can be diverse, and often subject to ideological refraction. For instance, in a recent study of the way a regional daily newspaper in Central Queensland - the Rockhampton *The Morning Bulletin* - constituted a sense of community through reporting on the drought which has gripped most of rural Australia in the 1990s, it was found that the newspaper framed the drought almost entirely in terms of the rural experience, despite the fact that most of its readers were not rural based farmers, but light industrial workers, small business owners and staff, government employees and welfare recipients, residing in urban areas (Mules *et.al.*, 1994). The readership of *The Morning Bulletin* was unable to imagine a sense of community as anything but one based on an essentially rural idea of themselves, despite the fact that their everyday life was urban, working class, and service industry oriented. This ideological refraction of the image of a community serves to entrench long held values of what a community is, often based on older styles of imagining where the class relations and the distribution of resources were founded on different social and cultural structures and in accordance with different economic and governmental situations from another historical era. This residue of meaning which is constantly reproduced within contemporary readerships is not just a false way of seeing things, but plays an active, constituting role in the formation of community values, leading to a certain inevitability in the framing of policies, practices and styles of doing things. In only being able to imagine themselves in a rural style, the constituents of the 'Rockhampton Community', perhaps unwittingly, continue allegiances to the bush and to rural interests forged long ago by their forefathers, but which no longer apply in today's globalised world. As a leading media form, Rockhampton's *The Morning Bulletin* continues its ancient connection to landed interests, even if in symbolic form, despite the fact that most of its readership will never own land except the suburban quarter acre block.

A community comes into being through a past/future process based on an enduring sense of 'care'.<sup>5</sup> However, care cannot be perceived as rooted in any

primary face-to-face qualities, as if people were possessed by a peculiar quality of life essential to the bush or the country, but emerges out of an enduring, yet misrecognised set of imaginary relations between economic, social and cultural elements built around and into the infrastructures and trajectories of meanings, resources and interactions experienced by people on a daily basis. A community, then, is both a shared sensibility based on care (an imaginary), and a symptom of an underlying infrastructure, so that one 'feeds' the other.

### **Community and the sociological imaginary**

The imaginary is not finite: people are able to imagine themselves as caring for more than one community at the same time. Herein lies a conundrum, since people's allegiance to one sense of community will always come into conflict with their residual sense of caring for others. Furthermore, the kinds of community to which people imagine themselves caring for will not necessarily match those objective 'realities' mapped by the social or cultural geographer. Thus we find ourselves in a three way struggle for definition, between the claims of objectivity (the map), the claims of subjective content (the imaginary element), and the claims of the geographer whose frames of reference (theory) organise and control the 'narratives' whereby analysis reaches the light of day as institutionally valid knowledge.

Because of this relativised situation, research cannot presuppose that any one of these claims has priority over any of the others. For instance, it would be a mistake to use any objective definition of community as a means of showing that individual subjective perceptions by community members were somehow wrong, or partial, or misconceived, as happens through the use of indicators of normality and deviance for instance. Likewise, it would be a mistake to assume that a community was constituted by the collective perceptions of all of its members (as happens for instance in the naive notion of a democratic community, where free choice is said to exist). It would also be a mistake to assume that the research frame - its *modus operandi*, its methodology - were able to neutralise its own imaginary, and hence play no hand in constituting of community as a specific value, as happens, for instance when researchers appeal to statistics, or to methodology as a 'guarantee' that the subjectivity of the researcher has not entered the equation. All statistics, all methodology is loaded with theoretical framework, and hence oriented to specific cultural values and primed towards certain social relations. Always, something gets excluded, or disappears between the differential 'cracks'.

How then, can progress be made in the mapping of communities? An answer lies in the idea that communities are not 'wholes', 'structures' or 'essences' to be defined by an overarching theory or methodology, but partial and contingent *projects*, emerging through various sites of struggle and contestation between competing groups and interests, where things are done not necessarily in the context of collective achievement, but as a response to threat, a desire for 'other', and from fear of dissolution or transformation into something else. In this case, what is at stake is not the community as a specifically-populated territory, but *communitiness* as a sensibility which can be used at various times and for

different purposes to marshal belief, action, and resources (much the same as the concept of 'democracy' is used by all sorts of people for widely-diverging purposes). Before they are anything else communities are ideas, and hence values for exchange.<sup>6</sup> Communities are thus also sites of appropriation and exploitation; where the interests and resources of one individual, group or strata are subject to 'investment' and reallocation according to the power-laden 'logic' of exchange.<sup>7</sup>

In this agonistic scenario, there is no one vantage point whereby everything else can be seen as an ordered, structured, functioning system. Ordering, structuring and functioning exists, but not in the service of an over-riding principle or concept of community which would settle everything in its place. Communities then need to be understood as sites of political engagement, in the sense that what 'structures' a community is not reducible to a functional model (which is merely a map, extracted from the community as territory), but the power-laden relations between competing groups and individuals, in their efforts to secure favourable and dominant positions within a finite province of resourcing.<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, the researcher becomes yet one more 'player' in the field, appropriating resources (information, data) for the purpose of gaining 'objective' knowledge beyond the needs and desires of the community members.

Despite its adherence to scientific rigour, the researcher's method (ethnography, statistical survey, functional/structural modelling) will never free itself from the political claims it makes over the territory it wishes to dominate.<sup>9</sup> Mere acknowledgment of this situation in any research procedure is insufficient to counter the objectivising desire of sociological method, because the connections between the research and the context being researched reside not in the mind of the researcher, but in the discourse of analysis, and its 'narrativisation' in academic papers and other such public documents.<sup>10</sup> However, this ineluctable connectedness to the context of research is not necessarily a fatal flaw in research method, but can be used to benefit both the researcher and the research participants.<sup>11</sup> If research is seen as an appropriation of resources, and not as the gathering of 'neutral' data, then research can also be seen in a way which makes it more amenable to political allegiance, since it is free from the requirements of an impossibly idealised objectivity, and hence from the claims over it by the powerful hierarchies of discipline, institution and state authority. In order to be 'free' from its bureaucratic masters a research committed to social amelioration in the name of the community needs, paradoxically, to announce its own stake in appropriating the resources which the community 'owns'. In this case, 'lay' knowledge becomes recognised as an important element in the constituting of community, since it can now be seen as a legitimate local resource, and not as a form of misconception lacking in expert understanding.

### **Community and discourse**

In many ways, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that sociological research into communities is 'all about language'. The use of statistical data, as well as

ethnographic data, requires the researcher to translate a 'lay' language used by respondents and participants into a more abstract, sociologically 'readable' language, which can then be read back into the community context as a means of gaining objectivised knowledge, *which is always excessive to the 'lay' knowledge of the participants*. Even in those circumstances where the object of research appropriation is not the words and concepts of the participants, but their actions as observed by the researcher, these actions are always framed by *accounts* of them, by those who engage in them, by those affected, and by the overall researching framework which may also include accounts of the researcher herself.

No action has meaning therefore, unless it also indexed to a discourse.<sup>12</sup> In simple terms, discourse can be thought of as a set of organised statements articulated to a context of practice (Foucault, 1972: 26 ff.). From this perspective, action (including thought as cognition, and speaking as a form of articulation) gives way to *practice* which takes place within the authority and limits of discourse. One of the tasks of research into communities should thus be to clarify and delineate the matrix of discourses at work in any given context where community is an issue, in order to show how practices are made to account; that is, how they are justified, made possible, made meaningful and effective in the name of 'the community' however imagined (the small town, the urban conglomerate, the nation, the community of women, the indigenous community); as a way of appropriating resources, and of securing conditions which would alleviate threat, and ensure continuation of command or subservience, depending on the 'style' of community imagined.

Ethnographies, focus groups, surveys and other forms of 'data gathering' should gear themselves towards the contradiction between accounts of practices, and the practices themselves, insofar as they can be 'objectively' defined.<sup>13</sup> In the focus group situation for instance, research participants need to be seen as taking up positions concerning their experience of community life, which will not immediately correlate with their 'objective' positions within the community field itself. This is because in order to make an *account* of her experiences, as required by her subjectivity as a research participant, she needs to engage in an act of transitivity, whereby her subjectivity is re-constituted out of the research situation and into an 'imagined' community setting, which may or may not correlate with any real situation insofar as it can ever be ascertained.<sup>14</sup> Transitivity will thus be affected by a range of research factors such as the particular relation between the research analyst and the research participant, the kinds of limits placed on the research process, as well as the specific desire of the participant to invoke her special interests and experiences, all working together and in contradiction, at the same time. This 'mess' need not necessarily be seen as an impediment to sociological knowledge, since it repeats the same kinds of mess found in other (non-research) contexts where community is discussed, debated, and, in short, imagined by its members. In general, to uncover the contradictory, contested, and refracted field of the community, it is necessary to treat the research setting as itself part of this field, thereby taking seriously the idea that community is always a value staked in the struggle over the right to speak on its behalf, which as we now see, never exists as such, but is always virtual to the context in which it is invoked.

## **Community and hegemony**

From the perspective which I am trying to build, community is not an objective group whose characteristics and structure can be determined purely by 'objectivising' analysis. Community needs to be understood in terms of the discourses of communitiness which operate and flow through any given context, which, in turn, allow people to 'practice' communitiness in their everyday lives as it is anticipated and understood as an imagined value, based on care. Because there is no essence to community, the sense of coherence, permanence, and durability which the concept of community invokes has to be seen as a contingent, mutable and contested value, which prevails for reasons other than the fact that it is simply there. These reasons need to be analysed within the fraught arena of the politics of everyday life, as they affect individuals, groups, institutions, and strata.

The concept of hegemony can be usefully applied in this situation. Originally proposed by the Italian social philosopher Gramsci, to account for the fact that in Western democracies people appear to submit to the authority of elites without any outward coercion, hegemony has now entered into the parlance of social analysis as a term to denote the domination of one powerful group over broadly defined class and national domains (Connell, 1977: 6). Some of the intricate meaning of the original term has been lost in this process. In terms of the analysis of community, hegemony can be understood as a concept which defines the contingency of power relations within broadly defined communities, where the dominance of a powerful group is not guaranteed in advance, but is subject to a constant process of negotiation and affirmation, involving the securing of *consent*. In a hegemonic relationship, power does not operate by imposition, but through a complex process of symbolic exchange whereby weaker groups and strata are 'invited' to acquiesce to the leadership of an elite group, thereby binding their interests to those of another, which nevertheless is also bound to act on their behalf.

In a hegemonic relationship, the processes of symbolic mediation take on significant proportions. Through the circulation of discourses *via* the mass media and other public cultural forms, hegemony operates between the 'masses' and the elite groups and organisations which speak and act on their behalf. In this case power does not operate from above, but in complex lateral movements where the 'struggle' for dominance takes on a more indirect, displaced character. Grossberg's extended discussion of hegemony as it relates to popular culture is worth mentioning at this point:

In a hegemonic struggle ... the social field cannot easily be divided into two competing groups. The diversity of 'the people' confounds any such simple divisions; for while the masses appear to be undifferentiated, social differences actually proliferate. The differences between subordinate and dominant cannot be understood on a single dimension. Power has to be organized along many different, analytically equal axes: class, gender, ethnicity, race, age, etc. each of which produces disturbances in the others. At the same time those holding the dominant position do

not constitute a single coherent group or class. Instead, a specific alliance of class fractions, a 'bloc' which must already have significant economic power, attempts to win a position of leadership by rearticulating the social and cultural landscape and their position within it. This rearticulation is never a single battle, but a continuous 'war of positions' dispersed across the entire terrain of social and cultural life (Grossberg, 1992: 244-245).

The imagined community can be seen in the light of the 'hegemonic struggle' for position within the broader cultural field, where local power blocs (allegiances between small business, media and local government for instance) re-articulate versions of communitiness in a bid to win the consent of those constituencies through which community is confirmed, ordered, avowed, justified and made sustainable. Since communitiness is never finite, and always a contested, multiple value, then larger power blocs (allegiances between metropolitan based groups, state government bodies and more local constituencies) will also play a leading hand in the struggle over local communitiness. For instance, the controversial proposal to develop prime wetlands in the Hinchinbrook area of North Queensland in 1997, has led to a struggle between two power blocs: between on one hand, an alliance of state government, local small business and an individual property developer, and on the other, an alliance of the nation-wide environmentalist movement and local environmentalists, over the kind of communitiness which has the right to govern the natural resources in the area. Each group has appeared regularly on local and national television in a bid to win over a broadly defined constituency in the knowledge that power operates through consent and not through direct imposition. In this case local struggles for control of resources and community values are not confined to local issues, but reach well beyond, into national and international fields, where they are fed back into the local, empowered through a displaced mode of democratic consent-making. All localised struggles need to be understood as 'deterritorialised' in this manner, as 'always already' connected to broader processes of decision making, and resource allocation, which often feed directly into the local arena, as the struggle takes place.

In rural communities, such deterritorialised struggles take place all the time, between power blocs whose interests extend well beyond the local. These struggles are not based on face-to-face relations except in the rare instances of direct physical confrontation.<sup>15</sup> Rather they always take place within discourse, where communitiness, or the *value* ascribed to an imaginary community state, is 'localised' along various axes of class, gender, age, ethnicity, and race. These struggles within discourse also take place in different ways; through the 'governance' of government and corporate institutions (e.g. state primary industries, welfare departments, taxation office, banks) situated within rural areas, as agents of technological, administrative and economic support; where the concept of rurality as an underlying community value is constantly staked between old landholders and new forms of land management, between landowners and service providers, and between an imaginary based on a distinction between 'town' and 'farm'. Analysis of local contexts therefore needs to be careful to delineate the articulation of discourses as ideological contents

inscribed in 'texts', designed to convince and persuade local constituents of their unique values, needs, aspirations, and qualities, but from a position of control well and truly remote from the site where these are supposed to take effect.

### **The postmodern community**

Communities have never survived by isolating themselves from the rest of the world. There has always been an interconnectedness between a community and local, regional, national and international contexts. What makes communities 'unique' is a modern idea which places emphasis on the moment, the event, the action, the setting, and the site. From a modern perspective, community is its own unique self, prior to its connection to anything else. In other words, communities are a product of the theoretical imaginary driven by modern concepts of rational ordering in space and time. What has been lost in this insistence of the self-enclosedness of community? Precisely its primary interconnectedness to other sites, locations, processes, events and moments. The modern concept of community can no longer serve as an adequate model to describe the way people interact with each other in the contemporary world. It should be dropped. Communities are now subject to globalised 'flows' of information which displace and redefine the way in which local interactions take place (Lash and Urry, 1994: 17; Dirlik, 1996). Face-to-face experience can no longer serve as the primary characteristic of community life, since it is always mediated by discourses circulated through the mass media, and by economic, social and cultural resource management where the boundaries between source and destination have been made 'transparent'. Computerisation has led to the possibility of 'globalising' any site so that it can hook into the vast informational resources of a thoroughly transnationalised world economy and culture.

This situation has enormous potential for those sites which, under modern regimes, were consigned to a peripheral status. For instance, rural and regional communities no longer need to define themselves in terms of an opposition to the metropolis as centre. In fact, a centre ceases to be a primary commanding site, since it becomes simply one of many centres through which informational resources are able to flow. Companies and other resource managers might just as well set up in a small centre, as well as a larger one, since what counts is not the proximity of resources gathered together in a single spot, but the amount of purchase that the 'centre' can have over various trajectories of globalised information.

In this postmodern world, the primary site of resource management is not based on the hand, the machine, the voice, or the eye, as they 'lay hold' of the immediate world around them, but the generational defiles of the computer and its capacity to simulate the world through the processing of digitised information. The age of the mechanical machine gives way to the age of the electronic machine. The key factor here is *simulation*. A simulation is a model or map, which does not simply designate a territory, but reproduces it in such a way that it has an affective power capable of interacting with the territory itself. Such is the case with computers, where information is useless unless accompanied by a programme (i.e. a 'machine') which renders it useful within the local context in



which it is run (hence the shift in the late 1970s from centralised mainframe computers to portable computers and miniaturised technology). Programmes can be extremely dense with algorithmic power and hence have all the advantages of a centralised command station, yet compact enough to be located anywhere. No one 'owns' a computer programme since they can be bought in the market place for modest sums. Yet they are indispensable for the generation of informational knowledge which keeps local contexts viable within the global order.

Communitiness can be thought of as a function of the generational capacities of community models, acting like computer programmes, which generate informational knowledge 'globally' through locales in which community members reside. Community politics becomes focussed on the circulation of the *idea* of community not just within the finite province of community life, but also within the global circuits which extend into the virtual spaces of an 'elsewhere' constantly looking in. In order to defend and protect a community interest, it is therefore necessary to make it transparent to the rest of the world, as a 'commodity', exchangeable for interest, concern and care. If modern communities were defined in terms of the sentiments of communal belonging (care) based on face-to-face interactions, then in the postmodern community such sentiments do not disappear, but need to be established yet again, except through the mediated realm of simulation, where face-to-face dealings give way to interactions with the television and computer screen.

In suggesting that communities are now based on postmodern relations, where the primacy of face-to-face experience has given way to electronic mediated forms of caring, I also want to suggest that this offers new opportunities for communities previously stymied by their peripheral status, to re-establish themselves, as other than what they have been in the past. Under the old modernist regimes, peripheral communities were always under the thrall of the metropolis, and thus forced to define themselves in terms not of their own making. In a globalised world, where everything is turned inside out, and the power of capitalism can be concentrated in portable clusters of simulated information, communities can reinvent themselves by strategically re-aligning their infrastructural connections so that they are more globally oriented.

In order to do this, it will be necessary to re-imagine 'care' as the shared sensibility which binds people together in relations of communitiness. The question to ask today is not how do we maintain care, but who can we share caring relations with? This can be as local as 'ourselves', but it can be as global as is necessary to secure favourable conditions for the community to survive and flourish. It needs to be both, at the same time. Research might well help regional and rural communities towards re-imagining themselves as other than what they have been. In this case maps need to be made which seek to re-articulate communities into the globalised flows of economic, social and cultural resources. Through collaboration, a 'power bloc' allegiance can be formed between research and the community to provide the intellectual resources whereby communitiness can be re-imagined in global terms, yet with a distinct local preference for the wellbeing of the people within a finite province of daily life.

## Notes

1 Basically the problem of transcendence is exposed as an *aufhebung*, or an uplifting movement which simultaneously represses a surrounding infrastructure, while attempting to maintaining control over it. In this case, infrastructure as a non-reducible plurality needs to be seen as the primary element in any context whatsoever. See Rudolphe Gasché (1986: 147).

2 The term 'globalisation' should not be limited to the contemporary transnationalisation of economies and communications systems, but rather means a way in which a context is structured both internally and externally by an infinitely complex matrix of intersecting flows which connects everything to everything else. Globalisation is a non-hierarchical de-structuring process, in which resources are evacuated and filled along multiple trajectories, coalescing into nodes. Contexts are 'nodal' in that they exist at the intersection of global flows, of economic, social, cultural and informational resources. A context has a determined character (wealth, identity, energy) because of a capacity to appropriate resources out of the flows which pass through it.

3 Despite its suggestion of a mental condition, the term 'imaginary' refers to an externalised sensibility. This view gains theoretical validity in the work of Deleuze (Smith, 1996: 34).

4 The concept of the imaginary is also found in psychoanalytical theories of culture, as a positive, yet misrecognised mode of constituting subjectivity within the symbolic order. The imaginary always implies that the world is meaningful as a symbolic order, and not as an empirical given. See Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (Wilden, 1980).

5 Heidegger proposes care (*sorge*) as a primary mode of being together (Heidegger, 1962: 364 ff.).

6 As an idea, a community can be thought of as signified in the Saussurean sense, which gains meaning from its diacritical position within a semiotic system (*langue*) (Saussure, 1974: 66).

7 Bourdieu's work is of value in this area. Bourdieu offers a way of analysing social contexts as agonistic sites of symbolic exchange (fields). Using an economic market metaphor as a guiding principle, Bourdieu's arguments lead to a thoroughly relativised account of the processes of capital accumulation and exchange which goes well beyond a political economy approach, since it treats capital as a symbolic element in a field of exchange occupied by positions of unequal strength. Thus all forms of social relations (not just economic ones) become subject to the logic of the field, considered as the site of potential exchanges of symbolic capital in unequal distributions, involving struggle, contestation and domination (Bourdieu, 1983, 1990).

8 Functionalism and structuralism have long relied on metaphors drawn from mathematics and linguistics to explain and describe social structures (functional hierarchies, generative grammars). While enabling an understanding of the *rationale* behind various accounts of social structure, this approach, because of its universalistic tendencies, idealises social contexts, depriving them of the agonism of political life.

9 For a discussion of these aspects of scientific method, see Bruno Latour's critique of the 'modern' stance in science (Latour, 1993). See also Latour's

discussion of 'control at a distance' in science (Latour, 1988: 159), and Bourdieu's discussion of the objectivism in science (Bourdieu, 1990: 26).

10 See James Clifford's excellent discussion of this issue as it relates to ethnography (1988: 21-54). Clifford argues that any context can be understood as a textual one; rather than observe behaviour, the job of the ethnographer is to 'read' textuality, including the textuality of ethnographic procedure itself.

11 This point is well made by Bernstein (1983) in his call for a return to praxis, as a way of getting around the problem of relativism in the social sciences.

12 The shift from a theory of action based on the mind or intention of the actor, to one based on the discursive possibilities and restrictions to which the actor is subject, underlies the work of such Continental poststructuralist thinkers as Foucault, Derrida, de Certeau, and to a degree Bourdieu, and is prefigured in the phenomenological critique of mental and social categories in the work of Husserl and Schutz to name a few. The consequences of this shift, which also has its Anglo-American counterpart in the appropriation of the later Wittgenstein (1958) into a linguistic/social pragmatics, as well as the ethnomethodological movement of the sixties and seventies, is to decentre the human subject as the source of structure and function, and to admit its trace (discourse, *écriture*, grammar, narrative, language) as a primary affect which inscribes and institutes subjectivity in various ways. In its extreme form, this results in various announcements of the 'death of man' (Foucault, 1970: 303-343), and the 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1982). These Nietzschean statements should really be understood as the death of the 'concept' of man, and the author, leading to a 'liberation' of theory from its humanistic obligation to defend man as a privileged form of subjectivity (white, male, middle class) so that it might explore other forms of 'being subject'. The linguistic turn in philosophy is really a form of anti-humanism which informs most of the social and cultural theory prevalent today.

13 Bourdieu describes this contradiction in terms of a distinction between two different kinds of spaces within the field to be mapped: 'the task is that of constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings in which they are expressed.' (Bourdieu, 1983: 312).

14 For the concept of transitivity, see Jayyusi (1984: 50).

15 Even in such cases where direct action by unionists and environmentalists leads to physical confrontation, these are nearly always mediated by the media, so that the struggle really takes place as a symbolic form, displaced into the public sphere as a 'media event'.

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## Chapter 7

# Framing the drought: A sociological approach

*Geoffrey Lawrence, Daniela Stehlik, Ian Gray, and Helen Bulis*

### Introduction

With an average annual rainfall of some 420 millimetres, Australia has the lowest level of rainfall of any continent. The areas of highest rainfall, known for sugar production and horticultural activity, are found along the tropical east coast of Australia. Only 11 percent of the continent has what is described as an acceptable annual average rainfall for agriculture (over 800 mm). Approximately 30 percent of the entire continent is either arid or semi-arid, receiving less than 200 mm per annum. Another 50 percent receives no more than 300 mm (see Lester, 1994). Although rainfall is low over most of the continent, this is not the real 'problem' for primary producers. It is the unreliability of rainfall that provides a major management difficulty. Most of Australia experiences extreme rainfall variability. In inland regions this is also accompanied by high average mean temperatures, creating the desert and desert-like landscapes which feature so heavily in advertisements for four wheel drive vehicles, but which most Australians rarely experience.

The high rainfall variability on the eastern side of the continent has been found to be associated with the pattern of warming and cooling of the Pacific Ocean, giving rise to quite significant changes in atmospheric pressure. Called the 'El Niño effect'<sup>1</sup>, the rise in water temperatures off South America usually coincides with cooler sea temperatures off northern Australia. Cooler waters and the presence of a high pressure system combine to produce cloudless skies and little rain. If such conditions persist there may be the onset of 'drought' in parts of Australia.

### Conventional assessments of drought

For the meteorologists who have sought to increase the predictability in forecasting through measurement of such things as air and sea temperature

changes, variations in wind patterns and who have charted periods of rainfall excess and deficit, the onset of drought coincides with periods in which the average annual Southern Oscillation Index (the difference in air pressure between the eastern equatorial Pacific - around Peru and Ecuador in South America - and the Indonesian region - the waters north of Queensland) has been strongly negative (Partridge, 1994). By tracking changes in the SOI it is possible to predict (with limited accuracy at this stage) the general likelihood of rain. Not surprisingly, drought is, according to the meteorologists, associated exclusively with rain deficiency: an area is drought affected when rainfall for three or more months is within the lowest 10 percent of recorded rainfall for that same monthly period. A drought 'breaks' when a month's rainfall is well above the average for that month, or where rainfall is above average for a period of three months, following 'drought' (Daly, 1994; Partridge, 1994).

The Drought Policy Task Force (1990) established by the Federal Government indicated that several features were usually associated with drought conditions in Australia the most important being rainfall deficiency, the period of deficiency, and rainfall variability. However, it established a definition which moved beyond the concerns with measuring rainfall *per se* in suggesting that 'drought represents the risk that existing agricultural activity may not be sustainable, given spatial and temporal variations in rainfall and other climatic conditions' (Synapse Consulting, 1994). The decision to frame drought in terms of agricultural concerns is interesting. Do people in capital cities ever experience drought? Presumably, while there is access to tap water, drought is a non event in non-agricultural regions. In the cities, direct rainfall is not necessarily the crucial issue. In farming areas - although irrigation plays an important role in water provision - pasture and crop growth is largely determined by rainfall. Synapse Consulting (1994) report several other definitions: the Queensland Government's Policy Task Force (1992) eschewed linking drought exclusively to water deprivation. The Taskforce believed drought to be the effect of severe climatic conditions upon the management practices of primary producers such that producers were exposed to risks beyond those which they might otherwise have been expected to plan for. Another definition is that of 'chronic disaster' - based on the effects of prolonged periods of rain deprivation upon producers. According to Synapse Consulting (1994) the three typical definitions relate, therefore, to a significant shortfall of rain; to the increased level of production risk as a consequence of rainfall deficit; and to a period of widespread 'disaster' experienced by producers, but without any attempt to attribute cause or 'blame' (drought is something which simply 'happens').

The second definition is much more in accordance with what the Federal Government has adopted. For example, for the Land Management Task Force (1995: 31) drought is seen as a 'normal feature of the Australian climate and, hence, of agriculture'. Farm management under drought conditions is viewed as a 'challenge' requiring the adoption of a whole farm systems approach incorporating the results of research aimed at 'better climate forecasting, pasture and stock monitoring, and decision support systems to manage stocking

rates', as well as the use of 'financial buffers' (such as Income Equalisation Deposits and Farm Management Bonds) ( Land Management Taskforce, 1995: 31). The aim here is for the individual producer to anticipate that drought will occur as a normal event, and to plan for it.

Daly (1994) has provided an interesting variant on some of the ideas above. He has classified drought not as some objective reality agreed upon by all, but as a condition which is perceived according to the priorities and interests of various social actors. (While this has sociological overtones it is not Daly's intention to do anything more than point to the confusion in establishing the 'reality' of drought at any particular time and place.) **Meteorological** drought - as defined by weather forecasters - is an abnormally dry period (a 'severe' or 'serious' rainfall deficiency lasting for three or more months); **agricultural** drought occurs when there is insufficient water available to provide adequate soil moisture (for plant growth) and stock water; an **hydrological** drought arises when the surface and underground water supplies dry up (some pasture and crop growth may occur from rain events, but with no dam, creek/river, or bore water stock may not survive); and **socioeconomic** drought is experienced where periods of low rainfall 'appear' to cause a drought, but the image of dying stock and failed crops is really linked to poor management (overstocking and overgrazing) which itself is based on the inability of producers appropriately to manage their properties. For Daly, this form of drought is not a 'natural disaster', but reflects the socioeconomics of agriculture: producers are keen to offset input costs and respond to market demand by intensifying production and/or by moving production into marginal areas. When the inevitable decline in rainfall occurs, their decisions appear to have been imprudent. Owing monies for the expansion during the 'good' years, they are often financially crippled. It is then that they appeal to governments for assistance (Daly, 1994: 19).

In the above approaches (with the exception of Daly's 'socioeconomic drought') drought is largely assumed to be an objective reality that can be measured according to oscillation indices, rainfall charts, soil moisture readings, levels of dams, and the condition of stock and pastures. It is 'framed' according to climatic, agronomic and environmental conditions in a manner which allows such things as drought declarations to be enacted and drought relief to be provided. Drought may have a 'problematic' side - it does not affect every producer in the same way - but its 'reality' as a feature of the Australian landscape is taken as given. It is normally only the severity, location and duration which become issues for debate.

### **Towards a sociological understanding of drought**

In past decades sociologists and cultural theorists have tended not to enter discussions about the meaning and impacts of natural events such as droughts, floods and fires in Australia. There might be a number of reasons for this - we would suggest at least three. First, many of the above events directly impact upon the rural regions rather than the cities. There have been very few city-

based social researchers keen to investigate rural social issues. This has been left to those in the regions. Yet, in the regions, social science based research is in its infancy. It is really only in relatively recent (post Dawkins) times that significant numbers of sociologists and cultural studies theorists have been located in regional areas. Second, and notwithstanding the above point, rural issues are not necessarily the focus of research for regionally-based social researchers. For many, the regional universities are a place to secure a job before returning to the cities. To specialise in rural issues may be to limit future employment opportunities in the cities through an identification with 'rural' concerns. Third, there has been little economic incentive to study such issues. It is only in the past decade that bodies such as the Rural Industries R&D, and the Land and Water R&D, corporations have begun funding research into the social aspects of agriculture. That is, with minimal professional and financial encouragement to study the changing structure of agriculture, natural resources management, farmer behaviour, and related topics, researchers have tended to avoid these areas.

There exist two recent sociological approaches to the study of drought, and one which is developing. These are discussed below.

#### **i) Drought as symbolic threat**

In a recent research note (and a forthcoming note) in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* Brad West and Philip Smith (1996; forthcoming 1998) argue that, from an extensive qualitative analysis of media discourses on drought, it is clear that droughts are - despite their regularity of occurrence - 'consistently defined as unexpectedly severe in their intensity or duration' (West and Smith, 1996: 94). Tracts from parliamentary debates, newspaper editorials and reports, and from popular culture are studied - and some quoted - to provide support for the arguments that:

- virtually every drought is reported as being an 'unprecedented threat' to society (95)
- each major drought is presented as being worse than the last (94)
- drought is part of a 'people against nature' narrative in the same way that folk-devils become the 'Other' during moral panics (95)
- the drought narrative acts to convince society of the need for moral discipline and social unity at a time of threat (95-96)
- since low rainfall will persist in some regions, such conditions constitute 'an immediately available resource through which threats to moral and national communities can be constructed' (97)
- because of the above, drought discourses should be viewed as not representing some 'truth' about the actual extent or impact of rainfall deprivation but, rather, as responding to symbolic and cultural needs which are independent of meteorological or other criteria for assessing drought. Drought is socially constructed, but is misrepresented as a 'natural fact' (97).



In their second paper the authors examine other so-called 'natural disasters' such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones and bushfires and conclude that none has the potential of drought in, 'sharpen(ing) the collective conscience and remind(ing) "upright citizens" of their sociality' (see West and Smith, forthcoming 1998). They follow Harvey (1988) in suggesting that particular discourses will arise from various connections between time and space, and the semiotic tradition (Barthes, 1973) in emphasising the role of mythology in people's understanding of nature.

The basic argument here is that it is the time and space dimensions of drought that interact to provide opportunities for a national discourse of disaster. Cyclones and floods are not of significant duration (and are limited to particular areas of the continent); bushfires do not tend to occur at one time over the entire continent; and earthquakes are rare and limited to particular regions. Only drought - which spreads over several States and for long periods - provides 'functional opportunities' for uniting the nation against the 'Other'. That it resonates with important Australian myths about people's struggle with the elements increases its potency as *the* functionally useful means of constructing and maintaining a symbolic threat to society (West and Smith, forthcoming 1998).

The authors recognise a number of problems with their approach: that it has failed to recognise the 'institutional dynamics' among the media/state/farm groups; it has not addressed class and power relations; that there are no connections made between civic discourses and popular beliefs in rural and urban Australia; that alternative explanations for the efficacy of the drought discourse have not been fully canvassed; and that there is the perpetual problem of functionalist analysis - that it is 'dogged by familiar problems of causality and agency' (West and Smith, 1996: 100). Placing these concerns to one side, the authors conclude that 'theoretical dividends might come from a wider application of a Durkheimian approach to Australian culture', (West and Smith, 1996: 100). While this approach does provide a sociological alternative to the supposedly 'objective' accounts of those who understand drought as little more than a manifestation of climatically unsavoury events (West and Smith forcefully argue that drought is a social construction rather than a meteorological 'fact'), it nevertheless suffers from a number of problems not readily acknowledged by the authors.

First, to what extent is the nation symbolically 'brought together' during drought? This is an assertion: it is not something which has been (or could be) adequately assessed. Editorials and Ray Martin-esque stories of ravage might bring sympathy (again, from whom and under what circumstances would be hard to establish), but that is not to say that they 'bind' society together - symbolically or otherwise. Drought appeals may be suggestive of some sort of social unity. How might this be understood, in terms of some homogeneous 'society' against the 'enemy' of drought? At any time there are many natural events as well as social, political, economic and cultural issues which would 'confuse' any attempt to view drought as having the effect of bringing the nation together. It would be methodologically extremely difficult to disentangle

'drought' from other social constructions (and 'enemies') at particular periods of time in Australia's history.

Second, the notion that a society has a 'need' for symbolic binding is part of a discredited ahistorical and class-less view of society as a social organism which, while purporting to expose myths may, instead, create and perpetuate them (the main one of which is that social divisions are functional for society). It would be more instructive to see whose interests were served by the drought discourse than to suggest that the discourse acts in some unexplainable manner to bind all Australians.

Third, in arguing that drought is socially constructed, the authors had the opportunity to consider how different groups interpret what is, to many observers, an otherwise 'objective' condition. To compare and contrast various positions taken by social groups would be to highlight the formation and reproduction of particular ideologies, something which should be at the heart of any attempt to understand power relations and to assess who is advantaged/disadvantaged by particular constructions. The idea that 'society' is advantaged ignores several obvious divisions which appear at most times drought is declared - that is, between those growers who receive assistance and those who do not; and between the city and the country. In regard to the latter point, while the authors claim there is a symbolic 'social unity' produced through media discourse, there is a need to explore the opposite. Sections of the media have, in recent times, been promulgating the view of government that the effects of drought are linked to on-farm drought management strategies. The discourse of 'act of god' or 'natural disaster' is undermined when the proposition is advanced that drought = poor individual planning. Many farmers, and many urban dwellers, may now believe the latter to be the case. To what extent is the social unity/moral discipline thesis of Durkheimians undermined by the more individualistic notion that droughts are a failure of the farm manager properly to plan?

Fourth, it is one thing simply to claim that drought has a special role as the epitome of natural disasters, and yet another to demonstrate that this is so. West and Smith (forthcoming 1998) provide selected quotes from newspapers to suggest that bushfire news dies down quickly, earthquakes make their rumble but are soon forgotten, and cyclones whirl for only a short while in the mind of the public. They argue too, that cyclones and floods contradict a narrative that Australia is the driest continent on earth - something at the heart of the drought myth. They believe that 'discourses cannot overemphasise the importance of water-related natural disasters because to do so would be to contradict the basis of Australian nationalism' (West and Smith, forthcoming 1998) and they suggest that, in contrast to drought, both floods and cyclones are often 'framed as a natural friend, not a natural enemy'. There is a mixture here of intentionality in media reporting which borders on conspiracy, and a denial of the writings about floods which they have chosen to ignore. The evidence presented is wanting: selected quotes from (largely) city-based newspapers does not, we would argue, equate to some 'national consciousness'. One could suggest that cyclone Tracy had a more powerful influence on the Australian

psyche than any drought. But this is simply a counter 'claim'. And, methodologically, how could either claim be substantiated? Similarly, we know of farmers who have 'used' the drought to their advantage, just as we know others whose lives have been devastated. Until fieldwork is conducted to provide a comparative understanding of the significance people place on events such as cyclones, droughts, floods and fires, it is speculative at best to make claims about any supposed hierarchy of disaster with drought at the peak.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the issue of what research needs to be undertaken is taken up by the authors. They suggest that 'ethnographic approaches have been dominant' in the exploration of natural disasters and that there is a need 'for a more broadly based semiotic and comparative approach ... which examines natural disasters in terms of their impact and meaning beyond the level of the individual and community ... (so as to determine) how these wider discourses and collective representations influence both national and local responses to particular disaster situations' (West and Smith, forthcoming 1998). The problems here are these: we do not know of very many ethnographic approaches to the study of natural disasters in Australia - the work appears not to have been undertaken; and, what the authors are suggesting is a 'national' level study of discourse, when what is missing from their own study is local experiences (local 'voices') and how they somehow translate into any 'national consciousness'. The concern in relation to the latter point is that wider (read: city based) discourses are likely to be construed as representing a national social consciousness. The extent to which media accounts equate to any supposed 'social consciousness' is problematic, as too is the belief that there exists such a consciousness. Such an assumption returns us to our first concern in relation to the Durkheimianisation-of-drought - its presupposition that society acts in some deliberate manner to 'protect' itself against the 'enemy'. This sort of thinking ignores the influence of the media in promoting ideology, the importance of class and other social groupings in framing 'disasters' to serve their interests, the divisions between farmers in seeking to have drought seen as a natural disaster or a management problem, and the role of the state in achieving legitimacy and yet promoting continued accumulation in agriculture.

## **ii) Drought and rural identity**

In Share's *Communication and Culture in Rural Areas*, CQU academics Warwick Mules, Tony Schirato and Bert Wigman (1995) present their findings from a study of the Rockhampton-based daily, *The Morning Bulletin*, during its coverage of drought for a three month period to May 1993. All articles, letters, cartoons and editorials which dealt with drought were examined, and these were supplemented with other materials from the paper through to 1994. In attempting to analyse the newspaper entries the authors employ the theoretical framework of Bourdieu and Lefort. Both consider that cultural symbols are not simple reflections of some underlying reality. It is argued that notions of 'community' and 'identity' are produced and reproduced within the symbolic

order, so it is the task of the researcher to understand drought in terms of its place within that order. Thus:

through an analysis of print media texts ... ideologies are distributed throughout the communication process in terms of a polarisation between abstract and concrete values. (There is a need to examine) how these polarities constitute various kinds of movement of both meanings and people in strategic attempts to reposition identity within a field of competing interests (Mules, *et al.*, 1995: 255).

In relation to drought discourses, the authors suggest that rural identity becomes a central issue. In the competing world of the symbols and ideologies evoked by farmers, government officials, and other social actors, it is *whose* rural identity can be viewed as having legitimacy which will, in part, determine their continued survival within the symbolic order. The creation of meaning in relation to drought is not a simple 'objective' matter, but rather one in which complex symbolic relations lead to certain forms of discourse having prominence in the construction and reproduction of (rural) identity. In relation to drought the authors argue that:

- the media are crucial in representing, circulating and reproducing regional identity (240)
- to understand a phenomenon like drought it is necessary to examine media flows (241)
- the drought discourse in a newspaper such as *The Morning Bulletin* involves the 'positioning of meanings' about rural production and the place of the producer in society (243)
- producers and their organisations realise they 'can only survive through access to the media' (244)
- they will attempt to mobilise politicians, business leaders, academics and others to help support their identities through media exposure. (244)
- 'nature' is constructed such that it is linked to 'highly charged' images of people's struggle with the elements. If drought is an uncontrollable natural phenomenon it cannot be expected to be 'managed'. Indeed, the producers seek to present their plight as 'rural community in crisis', thereby placing themselves as 'victims'. Those who are apparently unsympathetic to the plight of farmers and rural communities (particularly politicians) are constructed by the media as uncaring, distant and un-Australian (247)
- the aim of producers in helping to create a text of this sort has a practical end:

The symbolic capital that farmers accumulate through their capacity to invoke authenticity can be exchanged for monetary capital in the form of government grants and relief from bank foreclosure (Mules, *et al.*, 1995: 248)

- The polarisation between the producers and the government is viewed as informing virtually all the news stories of drought analysed by the authors (249). The potential breakdown of community is highlighted in the 'overdetermining notions of family' (252). The social imaginary based on Family, Tradition and Land has been a key element in the perpetuation of an ideology which allows the symbolic capital of the producers to receive prominence in media reporting. The authors conclude that, in the face of 'competition' from other social groups and the emergence of new ideologies, the place of the rural community as *the* authentic voice of Central Queensland, may not be completely assured (255). Drought might serve to bring to the surface alternative 'meanings' for rural regions, limiting attempts by producer groups to capture the wider cultural terrain for their own benefit.

There are some obvious advantages with this approach - it avoids many of the functionalist (over)generalisations and totalising notions about the social order; it seeks to identify 'interests' and how groups with different interests can mobilise to articulate competing themes and claims; it is based upon the view - and largely undermines counter claims - that drought is some objective reality readily understood and appreciated by all; and it shows the strategic political advantage of producers who can present themselves as 'victims' and who, through the evocation of deeply entrenched myths about the bush, can elicit assistance in a way other groups would find extremely difficult.

The approach also contains problems. We have identified four of the most important, below:

- While it is one thing to suggest that the media are important in the construction and perpetuation of particular views, it is quite another to suggest some direct link between the ideas of groups and their faithful reporting by those media. Intentionality is the issue here. The assumption appears to be being made that different producer groups (and others) know precisely the message they wish to convey, know *how* to convey this in an unambiguous manner to the media, and that the media, in turn, carry out their duty of framing the message in the way desired by those groups. Message 'mediation' is overlooked as are the contradictions in the messages received. It is an excellent start to recognise that groups compete for space within the symbolic order. But it is not satisfactory to 'collapse' various views into a 'producer vs government' scenario, particularly where the voice of government is not at all defined. If there are competing discourses their 'form' should be examined in detail. Furthermore, although it is argued that producers somehow know their survival depends on access to the media, this assertion is not at all unproblematic. And, it could be easily suggested that the media realise that *their* survival is linked to the local economy (of which rural production is a major part). In the latter case the media might be seen to be the active partner in discovering,

constructing and reporting stories about the drought - not in the interests of farmers, but in the interests of the media.

- In relation to the above point, there are concerns as to what constitutes evidence and how that evidence might be mobilised to support the contentions of the authors. It was suggested that some 275 items were analysed from the Rockhampton daily newspaper. These were not classified in any way and there were few quotes. Generalisations were, however, many. It was difficult for the reader to understand how some of the wider comments about rural identity, farming ideology and community were derived from the data gathered in the study. How was it possible to establish from the newspaper text, for example, that 'city life is shallow, decadent, removed from nature, and parasitic upon the country ...'? The study provided a fairly 'loose' example of content analysis: it can be criticised for not having a well defined and 'reliable' methodology.
- The assertion is made that, in promulgating a 'producer as victim' approach to the drought, the intention of producers is to soften the view of governments as a means of obtaining public funding. While there is truth in this, what is overlooked is the wider context in which drought policy has been framed. Many producers, as well as the peak producer group the National Farmers' Federation (see NFF, 1996), accept that drought is a normal occurrence and should be planned for. This organisation in agreement with government that people 'suffer' drought because of poor preparedness - a failure to plan. By 'reading' one locally-based text what the authors appear to ignore is the wider social context of decision making, the farm industry view of drought, and the degree to which the producer and government views have converged in relation to drought. The media provide some opportunities to understand producer views. But so do interviews, focus groups and ethnographies. Some triangulation of method might have revealed the extent to which CQ producers actually situated themselves as 'victims' and believed in some form of government assistance.<sup>3</sup> If some (which?) CQ producers have broken ranks with the larger farm body in seeking new forms of drought support this would, itself, be an interesting finding. But we do not know if this is at all the case.
- By dwelling upon, or privileging, the symbolic order an uncomfortable relationship emerges between drought as an idea and drought as a 'real world' occurrence. Much of the argument is that drought is a social construction with the aim therefore not to understand it as something 'real' which is experienced, but to see it in the context of self representation 'within the flows of meaning that circulate through the contexts of everyday life' (Mules, *et al.*, 1995: 255). At other times, however, there are statements such as the 'social imaginary doubtlessly has an economic base' (254), and politicians have been 'exposed physically to the drought' moving

from the 'inauthentic to the authentic', together with two paragraphs which focus on the agricultural and mining activities associated with Central Queensland. It would have been helpful to seek to tie ideologies to class (or some other) structural positions as a basis for understanding why producers might seek to advance some ideas about the drought (and the need for relief) over others. The analysis remains somewhat truncated with ideas not being linked to any concrete social experiences, or to the social positions, of those in drought.

### **iii) Drought as lived experience**

The earlier approaches are based on the collection and analysis of secondary data (newspaper reports and so forth) to provide an understanding of the 'meaning' of drought. Research being conducted by CQU researchers (in the Central Queensland region) and by CSU researchers (in the Riverina region) is designed to assess the lived experience of drought according to producers whose properties are in drought declared (or formerly drought declared) areas. The overall aim of the research is to explore producer-based understandings of the meaning of drought, its impact upon their lives, how they cope, what strategies they adopt, and what resource use (and other) implications arise from the actions they take during drought. It will also assess their views on drought policy and on resource management options.

The research - which began in late 1995 and will continue until the end of 1997 - consists of five interrelated parts:

- focus group research with producers, government officials, community members, drought support workers, and others involved in implementing drought policy
- face to face interviews with some 30 males and 30 females from each of the identified farm households in the two regions (a total of 120 interviews)
- case studies of the recent drought on three properties in each of the two regions
- analysis of selected government reports, newspaper articles and other sources which 'construct' drought
- an examination of government policy documents which deal with drought.

Producers are to be selected through a snowball sampling method (which sounds, unfortunately, the furthest thing from drought) and those from government agencies and the community will be selected according to their level of involvement in drought-related issues in regional areas. There are several assumptions upon which this research is based. First, that drought is socially constructed and therefore, different interests might be expected to construct the drought in different ways; second, while drought is socially constructed it is useful to understand its 'meaning' according to those who are

experiencing its effects directly; third, that drought has 'real world' effects which social actors must interpret and (usually) act upon; fourth, that such interpretations and actions have both ideological and 'real world' consequences - relating to how producers view themselves and their fellow producers and, as well, to on-farm production decisions (the use of resources); and fifth, that by knowing more about their own views and actions producers might come to understand (and improve) their practices, just as governments might be better able to target their drought policies.

Following focus group research during which a number of issues were canvassed and the contours of the drought experience were explored by the researchers, a two-hour semi-structured interview schedule has been developed. It will allow both qualitative and quantitative analyses to be undertaken from the responses gained. Materials have been gathered on drought policy as a basis for comparing the views of producers with the intentions of, and direct assistance offered by, governments. The next step in the research will be to compare and contrast the responses of producers, allowing us to see whether there are differences in the 'construction' and experience of drought between (and within) regions, between different producers, between males and females, and between the views of producers and those of drought counsellors, government officials and non-farm community representatives.

What is being adopted here is really a combination of approaches, not designed to produce some supposed sociological 'truth', but to explore views and attitudes of social actors within 'multiple, interpretive communities' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 15). The interpretive design is embedded firmly within a constructivist approach to the understanding of social phenomena. It is one which allows for what Guba and Lincoln (1989: 84) have described as a 'dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration (and) reanalysis'. The largely qualitative approach has the advantages of flexibility (in the eliciting of responses) and 'actor-centredness'. In incorporating an active understanding of notions of empowerment (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) such research seeks to ensure that findings are made available to those who have given their time to the study (Stehlik, *et al.*, 1996).

We also recognise that our research will have limitations:

- What we are told in the interviews may not be an accurate assessment (true representation) of what the producers feel/understand, or what they actually do on their farms. We may be 'fed' information which they want us to hear, which may not represent - as we might have hoped - an underling 'reality' of experience, attitudes and behaviour.
- Snowball sampling contains the potential for bias. We will face difficulty establishing whether or not the experiences we report are typical ones or ones of a 'self selecting' group which may not represent the range of experience of producers within the industry. (We do have some means of comparing our sample with industry figures to see if representativeness was achieved.)



- There is limited opportunity for corroboration. For ethical (and other) reasons we will not be asking Department of Agriculture or other non-farm personnel to comment on the accuracy or otherwise of the information provided by particular producers.
- We are interviewing those who have remained on their properties through the drought and will not know whether their views and attitudes are different from those who have been forced to abandon their properties. We will not have a direct understanding of why some producers fail and others survive (and how those who have failed 'construct' drought).
- The sample is largely beef producers (CQ) and wheat/sheep producers (Riverina). It will not be possible to generalise about the 'drought experience' outside these industries.
- A 'one-off' survey provides cross sectional data. It may be difficult to establish the 'lived experiences' of drought-affected producers as they have occurred over time. The case studies are expected to assist us in this regard. (For reasons of time and finance, an ethnographic approach was not deemed appropriate for this research.)
- What has occurred in the drought policy formation process (in which the views of various groups would have been somewhat transparent) is not part of this study. The limitation here is that it may be difficult to establish how drought policy has moved from its 'natural disaster/act of god' status to its 'drought as normal risk' status. Yet this change represents a major shift in policy, one which will impact upon producers and their practices. The questions to producers on current drought policy will help to overcome this perceived concern.

While the methods employed contain a number of shortcomings it is believed that they will provide an excellent basis for understanding the ways producers have interpreted and reacted to periods of severe rainfall deficiency.

## **Conclusion**

There have been very few sociological research studies of drought undertaken in Australia. The Durkheimian-based and cultural studies approaches summarised above are welcome contributions to an overwhelmingly 'bio-climatic' literature. They can help to move the basis of analysis away from clouds and claypans to ideologies and images. They can provide complementary knowledge to a more thorough-going sociological approach. This is not to say, though, that in their existing forms, they do not suffer considerable limitations. For example, both have employed secondary sources of information and neither has attempted to examine drought directly from the perspective of producers. While the Durkheimian approach has the advantage of establishing the preeminence of drought in national discourse, it fails to show exactly how drought acts within the 'collective conscience' of the nation. From our viewpoint, claims that drought represents a symbolic threat to the Australian community is a broad

assertion, not something established through rigorous sociological research. The cultural studies view has the advantage of identifying 'interests' which compete for symbolic capital, but its major difficulty is that, once having done so, it fails properly to articulate the nature of these interests and the structural underpinnings of each. It is not appropriate to argue that producers want to be seen as victims of drought when, in wider fora, their own organisations argued that drought is tied up with 'preparedness' and risk management. More in-depth work among producers would be one way to 'test' the appropriateness of the generalisations which have arisen from the analysis of newspaper reports.

We believe there is another, potentially more helpful, means of studying drought from a sociological perspective. In examining the drought experience from *the point of view of growers*, it will be possible to see how producers interpret and then act upon a phenomenon such as drought. The research conducted by CQU and CSU will be the first of its type in Australia. It will provide us with a knowledge of how producers construct/interpret drought, how they act upon those interpretations, and how such actions influence not only farm family behaviour and on-farm production activities, but also the environment. We expect to be able to comment upon ideologies within farming systems, the varying ways the social construction of drought is linked to particular sorts of producers, and the broader issues of the appropriateness of current policy to bring about change in farming practice during 'droughts'. We have the advantage, in this larger study, of combining a number of methods to allow a composite picture of drought to emerge. The outcome will be, we believe, a much better understanding of the ways drought is 'framed' by social actors and how these interpretations impact in 'real world' situations.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Notes**

1 Because of the planet's shape and tilt, the sun heats the earth's surface differentially. Air rising over warm areas (the equator) creates a trough of low pressure, matched in sub tropical regions by ridges of high pressure. Air moves to 'even' the pressure gradient. For the Pacific, the flow of air creates the south-easterly trade winds which help to create rains. Trade winds also influence the water currents, and there is also energy and moisture 'exchange' between the atmosphere and the oceans. The amount of rain that falls in summer is

dependent upon the warmth of the ocean and the strength of the trade winds. The development of the El Niño - Southern Oscillation (ENSO) can be described as occurring as follows:

The south Pacific ocean circulates in an anti-clockwise direction. Cold water from Antarctica sweeps up the South American coast and flows westward at the tropics, assisted by trade winds. It becomes warmer as it moves westward and sea-surface temperatures and sea levels become higher in the west Pacific than in the east Pacific...With warm water around northern Australia a low pressure system develops as warm, moist air expands and rises dropping rain over northern Australia. With cold air near the tropics off South America, the air above contracts, becomes more dense producing a high pressure system and dry conditions in the east Pacific. Air circulates between the two pressure systems in what is known as the Walker Circulation...At regular intervals of 5 to 9 years, a tongue of warm water from the north penetrates the cold water in the east Pacific off the Peruvian coast. If this is large enough to warm that water, a low-pressure system develops in the east Pacific with a corresponding high pressure system in the west Pacific. This weakens the trade winds and causes a reversal in the circulation system. (Daly, 1994: 27-28).

At this time along the Peruvian coast the normally cold waters which bring food to schools of anchovy is not present: the fishing industry fails. The locals have called the event 'El Niño' (Boy Child) because it normally occurs around Christmas time. Meteorologists have put the terms El Niño and Southern Oscillation (the movement back and forth of air pressure between the east and west South Pacific) to form the anagram ENSO. The ENSO period is one in which seas off the north of Australia remain cooler than usual. Cooler waters and a high pressure system produce generally clear skies and very little rain. If such conditions persist, Australia is said to be experiencing 'drought' conditions.

2 The authors quote the *Courier Mail* in its story of Mick Brennan who, in the middle of drought, was overjoyed when devastated by floods. 'You beauty!' Mr Brennan, 50, said he felt 'bloody good' because 'the five year drought is over'. This, with other quotes are used to suggest that while droughts are never 'good', floods and cyclones may be so. Information collected during our on-going research suggests that many irrigation farmers in the Central Queensland region consider that the 1990's drought has been a great boon to cotton production. They could, in drought conditions, apply water in a calculated manner, the lack of clouds in summer helped the crop to grow more quickly, the lack of summer precipitation reduced insect and fungal pests, machinery did not become bogged, soil loss was controlled, and the whole cotton growing operation occurred in a more efficient and predictable fashion. Such counter

evidence points to the need for a much more detailed - and sociologically informed - understanding of resource management in times of drought.

3 The authors do not deny this is desirable. They argue that their study was a small one, undertaken with limited resources and over a relatively short period of time.

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## Chapter 8

# Preserving agricultural land in times of urbanisation: Impacts on a regional culture in Pennsylvania

*Lisa Bourke*

### Introduction

The state of Pennsylvania, in the north-eastern United States, has the largest rural population of any US state. Pennsylvania is also largely agricultural with 8 million acres or one-third of its land in farms. Its 45 000 farm families contributed more than 3.5 billion dollars worth of crops and livestock in 1992 (Census of Agriculture, 1992). Besides its obvious economic benefits, agriculture in Pennsylvania is generally a deeply held symbol of heritage and rural way of life (Jacob and Luloff, 1995; Lembeck *et al.*, 1991; Willits and Luloff 1995; also Dalecki and Coughenour, 1992).

However, farming as a valued way of life, is under serious threat in Pennsylvania as pressures for residential, commercial, and industrial development have heightened. Over the past two decades, the amount of agricultural land throughout the state has declined. Many farms were subdivided into housing lots, dramatically increasing the value of the remaining farm land (for both farming and development uses). As a result, residential developments and commercial centres are found scattered throughout agricultural areas, threatening its future in Pennsylvania.

Of particular concern is the loss of the state's most productive soils. Southeastern Pennsylvania has the most fertile soils in the state and generates over 40 percent of the state's total agricultural income (Fuller and Smith, 1990; Governor's Office of State Planning and Development, 1976). However, over the past twelve years, more than 4 400 acres of this land were lost from agriculture. Such losses have had negative impacts on regional economies, rural identities, and social interactions throughout Pennsylvania. In several regions of the state (south-east Pennsylvania being one of them), these impacts have been felt by the Old Order Amish and Mennonite cultures.

The Old Order Amish and Mennonites, known as 'Plain Folk', are distinct Anabaptist sects present in America since 1717 (Hostetler, 1993; Redekop, 1989). The Plain Folk are descended from Swiss emigrants who sought escape

from severe persecution and oppression for their pacifist beliefs, suspicion of state authority, and closed communities (Hostetler, 1993).

Initial Plain Folk settlements were in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where they continue today. One of their more distinguishing characteristics is their reliance on traditional agricultural methods and a clear preference for agricultural occupations (Hostetler, 1993; Redekop, 1989). However, even the Plain Folk have not been immune to land use pressures. Today, Amish and Mennonite residents have been forced to enter non-agricultural industries as farm size gets smaller and land for farming decreases. Indeed, those wanting to continue farming, in the traditional manner, often relocate to other areas in Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the nation.

As a result of dramatic losses of agricultural land, the state of Pennsylvania implemented a right to farm law. It consisted of two programs: (1) the Agricultural Security Areas Program (ASAs) which identifies farming areas and promotes agricultural zoning; and (2) the Purchase of Conservation Easements Program (PACEs) used to purchase conservation easements thereby preventing any non-agricultural uses on the land (Meeks, 1990).

An ASA is an area of at least 500 acres where farming is promoted by protecting both owners from nuisance suits (such as noise and odour complaints) and land from forced acquisition and the siting of hazardous waste facilities. By design, it is initiated voluntarily by landowner(s) who submit a petition to the local government of each municipality included in the ASA. The local government, on the basis of the recommendations of an advisory committee, recommends that the proposal be accepted, modified, or rejected. After a public hearing, the local government makes the final decision. Every seven years or when more than 10 percent of the land within the ASA changes to non-agricultural use, the local government must review the need to continue the ASA. Landowners in an ASA are entitled to sell their conservation easement (the right to prevent development). Many view this last section of the law as its strength, since the selling of conservation easements protects farm land from non-agricultural uses indefinitely. The sale of conservation easements enables state and local governments as well as private trusts to purchase the right to prevent development for purposes other than agriculture (Lembeck, 1989). Selling easements prohibits development of the land from which it is purchased (Lembeck, 1989). In Pennsylvania, all easements have been purchased in perpetuity. In 1987, over 70 percent of Pennsylvania's voters supported a referendum for the issuance of 100 million dollars to fund agricultural preservation (Lembeck *et al.*, 1991). This money has been used for the purchase of conservation easements; one half available as grants to participating counties and the remainder as matching funds.

In 1993, 2.3 million of Pennsylvania's 8 million acres of farm land were in ASAs which included 21 676 (42 percent) of the state's farms. Of these, 431 farms (accounting for 54 089 acres) had sold their conservation easements. The state has spent 96 million dollars and counties have contributed a further 18 million to purchasing these easements (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1994a).

Despite statewide support of agricultural preservation, significant use of the programs and favourable review by managers, opposition has emerged to

specific strategies of agricultural preservation in several townships across the state. In many communities debates over the efficacy of zoning have occurred, while others have rejected ASAs and some counties have refused to purchase easements. Generally, it has been assumed that support of the 100 million dollar referendum indicated support of the ASA and easement programs. To date, little research has been conducted on local community response (beyond farmers) to the use of these policies. This is a major oversight considering that all residents in the vicinity of agricultural production are impacted by these land use policies. Impacts include the use of local tax dollars, changes in the aesthetic value of farm land, impact to agricultural lifestyles, communities and regional cultures, and economic repercussions from restriction on growth and development. Analysis of the response at the local level might provide insight into potential problems and/or impacts resulting from these programs.

## **Methods**

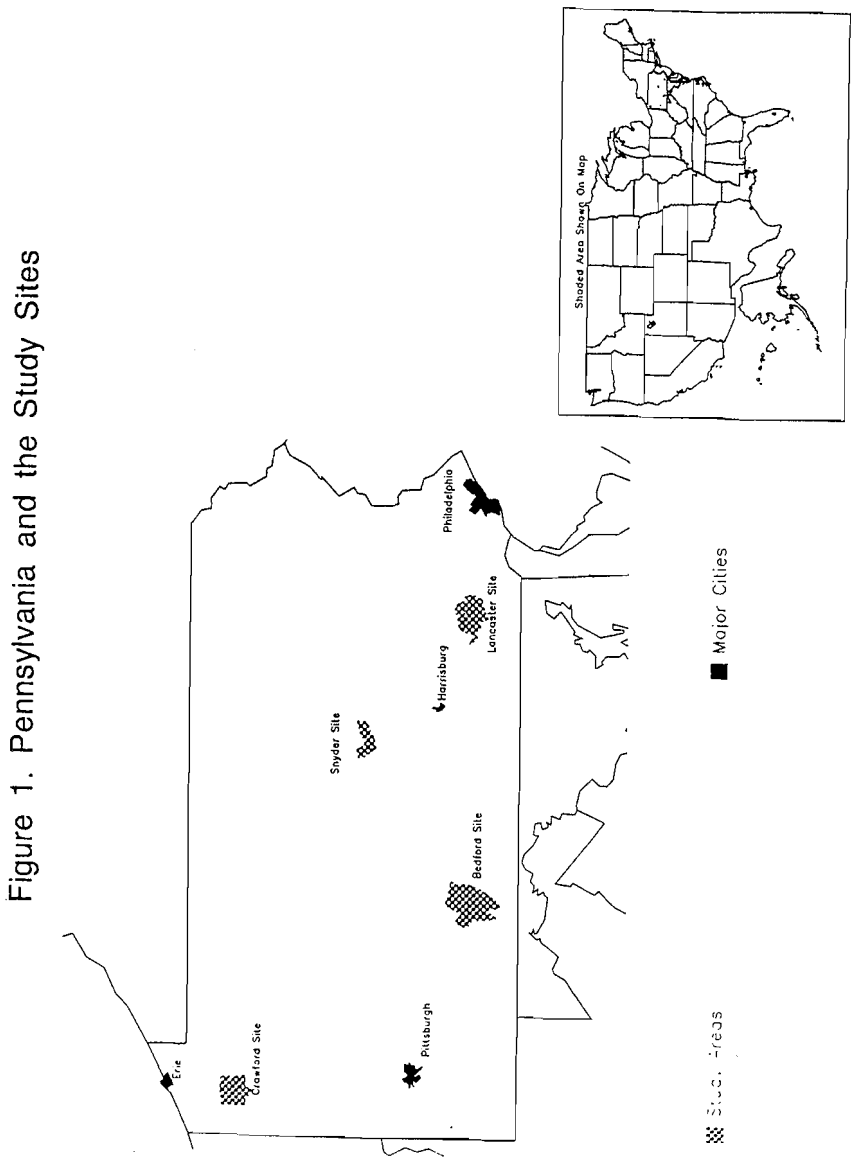
The data employed for this analysis were collected as part of a larger study addressing land use pressures at the rural-urban interface. In order to compare sites with differing levels of urban pressure, three sites were selected to represent a typology of three increasing levels of urban presence and pressure in agricultural areas: farm presence with no urban presence or pressure; farm presence with urban presence but no urban pressure; and farm presence with both urban presence and urban pressure. To select a site to represent each type, every minor civil division in the state was ranked by a set of seven criteria. These included population size, population growth (1980-1990), migration rate (1980-1990), percent of housing unit change (1980-1990), percent of land in agriculture, percent urban, and agricultural occupations. From the statistical rankings, one site typical of each level in the typology was chosen. Despite the sites being only small portions of each county, they are referred to by county name for ease of presentation. When the county is referred to, the word 'County' follow the site's name.

An agricultural area with no urban presence or pressure was represented by an isolated, agricultural valley in western Snyder County (see Figure 1). This area had a stable economy and population, was located in the middle of the state, and served as a mid-point between the other sites. It included five municipalities, one of which was the county seat. Sites with urban presence but not pressure were less common. A section of Crawford County in north-west Pennsylvania appeared most appropriate due to the presence of agricultural land on the fringes of an important regional city. The site consists of seven municipalities and the City of Meadville. This area suffered a significant population decline in the 1980s due to loss of several manufacturers. While some growth has occurred, the economy remains poor. Lancaster County perfectly reflected an area with urban presence and pressure. Located in south-east Pennsylvania, the region has experienced rapid population growth and urban sprawl into some of the best agricultural land in the nation. The study area included eight townships located east of the City of Lancaster. This is a largely agricultural area with significant



Old Order Amish and Mennonite populations and marked by a strong economy based on agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and residential growth.

Figure 1: Pennsylvania and the study sites



A variety of data was collected for analysis. First, secondary data (US Census, 1990; Census of Agriculture, 1992) were compiled and analysed. Second, interviews with leaders and active residents were conducted to provide perspective on local issues. They also facilitated in-depth discussions about community and cultural issues at the rural-urban interface. Between 26 and 37 interviews were conducted in each site in October-November 1993. General information was gained by identifying a set of leaders who held official positions, directed local agencies or were individuals referred as 'knowing a lot about this place'. County Commissioners, County Planners, Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, employees in the Soil Conservation Service, County Extension Agents, local government officials, newspaper editors, local historians and representatives from local agricultural, development, environmental and community groups in each site were included. Specific information was acquired by identifying persons knowing details about a specific action or issue and asking questions about their involvement. The first set of respondents was identified as key informants while the latter set was called action informants (Bourke and Luloff, 1995).

The third type of data were collected via a self-completion questionnaire distributed to a random sample of the population in each site. The goal was to obtain 400 questionnaires in each site. In Crawford and Snyder, 800 randomly selected individuals were mailed an introductory letter about the study, a questionnaire, and a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope. Using the Total Design Method (reminder postcard and two follow-up questionnaires; see Dillman, 1978), response rates of approximately 52 percent were obtained, resulting in 369 completed questionnaires from Snyder and 385 from Crawford.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the larger population of Old Order Amish and Mennonites in Lancaster, face-to-face contact was likely to yield a higher response rate.<sup>2</sup> Four fieldworkers visited 566 randomly selected households in Lancaster and used a drop-off/pick-up procedure. At each house, the resident of the house, 18 or older, who had had the most recent birthday was asked, in person, to complete the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were collected the following day. Using this method, a response rate of 72 percent was achieved resulting in 393 questionnaires for analysis.<sup>3</sup> Field observations estimated that 12 percent of the sample were Old Order Amish and 5 percent were Old Order Mennonite which is typical of this region's population.<sup>4</sup> All 1 147 questionnaires were coded and the data were computer entered, verified, and analysed.

Included in the survey were questions about development and agricultural preservation. Respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of 14 possible problems in the local community on a four-point scale. Another question read: 'Recently, a state referendum approved \$100 million to aid in the preservation of farm land in Pennsylvania. Do you think that amount is: (1) too much, (2) about right, (3) too little.' A set of likert items was also included where respondents were asked to rate a set of statements using a five-point agree/disagree scale. The statements were:

- 1 There is too much residential development in my community
- 2 More agricultural land should be preserved
- 3 Agricultural security areas are a good idea

- 4 It is a poor use of county funds to purchase conservation easements
- 5 The best way to preserve agricultural land is through zoning.

Responses to all these questions were compared across the three sites and analysis of variance was employed to test for significant differences in opinions across these regions of Pennsylvania differing in levels of urban presence and pressure.

## **Results**

### *Background on the study sites*

The three sites are rural, agricultural, have a history of natural resource dependence, and more recently have experienced varying levels of economic restructuring. Located in an agricultural valley, the study site in Snyder County is marked by its stable but relatively weak economy. A large percentage of its labor force commute to the eastern part of the county for manufacturing jobs or south towards the state capital's (Harrisburg) metropolitan area for employment. Locally, the major sources of employment were agriculture, county services, and a limited number of manufacturing companies. General services were found to be somewhat limited but there were four elementary schools, two high schools, two grocery stores, two car dealerships, and several sandwich shops and bars within the study site. Residents generally travel in excess of 25 miles to a department store, better restaurants, and cinema or to enjoy other entertainment venues. Of the many community groups, the primary groups were the volunteer fire departments, churches, Lions, Rotary, and the fair committee which holds an annual fair with a strong agricultural theme every August. The major issues in the area included maintaining quality water supplies, consolidation of the two high schools, creating job opportunities for youth, nutrient management, and planning. Several of the municipalities are dry (the sale of alcohol is illegal), which is an issue that is debated from time to time.

The Crawford site is an agricultural area surrounding an industrial city. Due to poor soils, farming was reported to be difficult and the agricultural community declining. In addition, three large manufacturing plants located in Meadville closed or relocated between 1975 and 1980. After experiencing dramatic economic decline during the 1970s and 1980s, the local economy has begun a slow recovery, largely due to an increase in services and expansion of the tool-and-die industry. Currently, over one hundred small tool-and-die shops call the area home, giving rise to Meadville's reputation as 'The Tool-and-Die Capital of the World'. The economy remains poor and the residents are eager for economic growth. There have been many efforts to revitalise and diversify the regional economy, including the formation of a local economic and industrial development board with around 60 employees. The city, also the county seat, as well as the shopping mall and restaurants in a neighbouring township provide most of the services utilised by residents in the study area. Meadville also houses a very small and private university. Throughout the study area, there is an array

of community groups but the primary ones were said to be the local fire departments and churches.

The third site, in Lancaster County, is an agricultural region with a strong tourism and manufacturing base. Prime soils have resulted in this agricultural area being one of the most productive non-irrigated counties in the country. The large population of Old Order Amish and Mennonite farmers have kept the farming industry active and attracted tourists from across the nation and beyond. Many ex-urbanites have moved to the region or retired to this picturesque, rural setting proximate to several large metropolitan centres. Such growth has contributed significantly to development pressure and the losses of agricultural land. Tourism, agriculture, and residential growth, in conjunction with the industries located in the city of Lancaster, have provided a strong local economy. Shopping and tourist services (restaurants, hotels, gas stations) are plentiful all over the region and Lancaster City provides most of these services as well as others offered by a county seat. While there are numerous local organisations, churches (Amish, Mennonite or otherwise) and land use organisations constitute the primary community groups.

While more common in Lancaster, all three sites had some Old Order Amish and/or Old Order Mennonite residents. The Old Order Amish reject technology and particularly avoid anything vain. This is reflected in their 'plain' dress, sparsely furnished houses, use of horse-and-buggy, separate schools, and lack of electricity.

The Amish have numerous churches (both tradition and 'house' style) and their social norms are based around them. Farming practices remain traditional with the exception of generators on dairy farms which are used to chill milk so as to conform to dairy industry regulations (Hostetler, 1993). However, the large families have resulted in extensive subdivision of land for each of their sons. This has decreased farm size and increased the intensity of farming practices which has resulted in environmental degradation (to soil and water).

Many Amish in south-east Pennsylvania have been forced from farming but have successfully established furniture manufacturing, construction and/or craft businesses (Hostetler, 1993). The Old Order Mennonites have similar religious practices but will drive automobiles and use tractors and limited machinery (Redekop, 1989). These residents also have a 'plain' dress but of different colours and styles. A significant number of Old Order Mennonites from Lancaster County have re-located to other areas of the state and elsewhere in the US. However, the largest concentration of Old Order Amish and Mennonites remains in the Lancaster region, with many scattered throughout the state (Hostetler, 1993; Redekop, 1989).

The three sites differ in population size, area, and population density with Snyder the smallest and Lancaster the largest (see Table 1). Unlike the stable population size of Pennsylvania, Lancaster experienced dramatic population growth (15 percent) while Snyder's grew 5 percent, and Crawford's declined by 7 percent.

Economic indicators, including median household income and employment rates, suggest that Lancaster had the strongest economy. Crawford's economy was poorer than Snyder's but, unlike Lancaster, these two sites have income and employment levels below state averages. Lancaster has more of its workforce

employed in farming than the other two and Snyder's proportion is well above the state average.

A large proportion of Crawford's workforce was employed in the service industry while Snyder has a large proportion of manufacturing workers. Other indicators revealed similarities in age, family size, and the proportion of women employed in the workforce across the three sites.

**Table 1: Demographic and economic characteristics of the three study sites**

Characteristic	Snyder	Crawford	Lancaster
Population 1990	6 548	34 318	54 318
Percent population change 1980-90	5.3	-6.7	15.1
Area in square miles	85.9	163.8	183.3
Persons per square mile	76.2	208.0	296.3
Median age	34.0	35.1	31.1
Percent female	51.5	52.6	50.3
Percent non-white	0.3	3.6	2.2
Average family size	3.5	3.9	3.8
Percent of families with female head	9.4	15.8	7.9
Percent over 25, high school graduate	64.2	77.3	57.1
Median household income	\$24 049	\$23 317	\$32 641
Percent of families in poverty	7.8	11.1	6.4
Percent unemployed	5.0	7.8	1.7
Percent employed in farming, fishing or forestry	5.1	1.8	9.0
Percent employed in manufacturing	41.6	24.5	25.8
Percent employed in service	39.2	60.4	46.1

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

The farms in Lancaster County averaged only 86 acres while farms in Snyder County averaged 131 acres and Crawford County average farm was 188 acres. Despite farms being significantly smaller, the average value of an acre of farm land in Lancaster County (\$4 943) was more than double that in Snyder (\$1 939) and more than five times the value of an acre of farm land in Crawford (\$892). The Lancaster values reflect both its agricultural productivity and potential for residential and commercial development.

#### *Response to farmland preservation*

Residents of all three sites had recently acted to preserve some local farm land (see Luloff *et al.*, 1995). In Snyder, an ASA had been established protecting over 6 500 acres which included 42 farmers (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1994a, 1994b). There had been no conflicts over the initiation of an ASA and local residents viewed it as an issue belonging to the farmers. Many interviewees claimed that the region was agricultural and an ASA would ensure the future of agriculture. The majority also opposed zoning ordinances due to previous disagreements between local governments and the county planning office and believed ASAs were a means of protecting agriculture without implementing zoning. Respondents did not view the local Amish or Mennonite residents as

being different from other farmers but believed that agriculture in general should be protected.

In Crawford, no ASAs had been established or easements purchased in the entire county (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1994a). Farmers in one township in this site proposed that an ASA be established but this proposal was rejected by the local council. In accordance with the formal procedure, an advisory committee was formed to review the application and it recommended that an ASA be implemented. However, one member of the committee submitted a minority opinion which claimed that an ASA would restrict local development. On the basis of this appeal for local economic growth, the council rejected the proposal for an ASA. A conflict developed and the issue became important in the next local election. Some felt that agriculture was important to the identity of the region and/or that it had been a stable industry in periods of economic decline. Many others felt that an ASA would restrict economic development and/or that zoning was a better strategy of preserving agricultural land since it kept land use regulation in the hands of local residents. While agriculture was debated at length, little concern was expressed about the farming traditions and culture of local Amish residents. In the ensuing election, supporters of the ASA were voted into local government positions.

Lancaster was clearly the leader in efforts to pursue agricultural preservation; the state had provided more than \$17.5 million for preservation throughout the county (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1994a). In the study site, three ASAs had been formed which protected almost 16 000 acres and involved 218 (including some Amish and Mennonite) farmers (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1994b). Despite successful use of these programs, there had been substantial conflict in this region between those who favoured economic growth and development and those wanting agriculture preserved. The concerns of the former were based on economic reasons while the latter group was concerned about the aesthetic value of agriculture as well as its cultural importance. Like the other farmers, the Old Order Amish and Mennonites had an array of opinions about the best means of preserving farm land. Unlike Crawford, the conflict in Lancaster had led to the establishment of numerous groups, agencies, committees, and private trusts<sup>5</sup> who were all involved in efforts to preserve farmland or oppose specific strategies of agricultural preservation. As a result, the conflict was less personal than in Crawford and disagreements occurred through more formal channels.

Responses differed across the three sites when the survey respondents were asked about the seriousness of local problems. In Snyder, high taxes were reported to be the most serious problem while the need for economic growth, health care, and quality of education were also identified to be serious problems by at least 6 of every 10 respondents. In Crawford, more than 90 percent of respondents stated that the need for economic growth was the most serious problem locally. High taxes, poverty, health care, and quality of education were also reported to be serious problems by more than 60 percent of respondents. In Lancaster, high rates of taxation were identified as the most serious problem while too much residential and commercial development and crime were also perceived as serious problems by 6 of every 10 respondents.

Response to attitudes towards farm land preservation yielded different reactions from local residents. In response to the question about the referendum, \$100 million to aid farm land preservation, around half of the respondents from each area believed this was 'about the right amount' (see Table 2). In Snyder and Lancaster, approximately one quarter suggested this was 'too much' while slightly more respondents from Crawford (35 percent) reported the same. Again, while one quarter indicated that this was 'too little' in Snyder and Lancaster, only 16 percent in Crawford expressed this opinion. However, the difference was not statistically significant across the three sites.

**Table 2: Response to funding agricultural preservation in Pennsylvania**

\$100 million for ag preservation is:	Snyder	Crawford	Lancaster
Too Much	25.5	35.1	27.9
About Right	52.1	48.8	48.5
Too Little	22.3	16.1	23.6

While 60 percent of Lancaster residents believed there was too much development locally, only 30 percent of Snyder respondents and 14 percent of Crawford respondents felt the same (see Table 3). In Snyder and Lancaster, around 8 of every 10 respondents agreed (agreed or strongly agreed on a 5 point scale) that more agricultural land should be preserved, while only 6 of every 10 in Crawford agreed. Regardless of the region, at least 68 percent of respondents agreed that ASAs were a good idea. However, conservation easements were less popular. Only about 16 percent of respondents from each site indicated that these were not a waste of county funds, while 47 percent of Snyder and Lancaster respondents believed that conservation easements were a poor use of county funds and 37 percent of Crawford respondents agreed. Zoning, as a means of agricultural preservation, was favoured more in Lancaster and Crawford than in Snyder. In Lancaster and Crawford, 64 and 61 percent, respectively, agreed this was the best method of preservation while 49 percent of Snyder respondents agreed.

**Table 3: Attitudes toward development and agricultural preservation in Pennsylvania: Frequencies (in percentages) of survey respondents who agreed with each statement**

	Snyder	Crawford	Lancaster
*There is too much development locally.	29.7	14.3	60.7
*More agricultural land should be preserved.	79.6	61.3	81.1
ASAs are a good idea.	70.5	67.7	75.3
*Conservation easements are a poor use of funds.	47.0	37.1	46.6
Best way to preserve ag. land is through zoning.	48.6	60.5	64.4

\* An analysis of variance revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the means of the three sites where  $p < 0.01$ .

## **Discussion**

All data collected suggested that respondents from the three sites were concerned about different issues. While land use issues as well as economic, cultural and environmental concerns dominated in Lancaster, residents of Snyder and particularly Crawford were most concerned about economic development and job creation. Respondents in Lancaster and Snyder identified their region as agricultural while Crawford respondents believed their area was rural but not necessarily agricultural.

Findings also revealed that agricultural preservation was supported by the majority of respondents in each site with support strongest in Lancaster and more favourable in Snyder than Crawford. Attitudes toward preserving farm land were not related to the typology of urban presence and pressure which suggested that development pressures are not the only factors influencing attitudes towards farm land preservation. Perhaps the most common factor among those who favoured preservation was a recognition that agriculture was a significant contributor to either the local economy or identity of the region.

Respondents from the three sites varied in their attitudes about specific methods of agricultural preservation. In Snyder, the ASA and PACE programs were preferred to zoning. The residents of both Lancaster and Crawford disagreed about who should regulate land use - the local or state governments. In the sites where easements had been purchased, significantly more respondents viewed this form of agricultural preservation as a waste of local funds. Such lack of support for the PACE program raises serious questions about the use of 114 million dollars of public funds on purchasing these easements.

Findings suggested that changes in the use of farm land have important social and cultural consequences. Just one example was that the lack of available farm land in Lancaster had forced many Amish into non-agricultural enterprises and forced Mennonites from the region. This study also found that while land use change affects culture, at the same time local issues and cultural practices seem to influence attitudes towards agricultural preservation. For example, the recent economic decline experienced in Crawford resulted in many residents being hesitant to restrict land use since such actions might limit economic development. In Snyder, negative attitudes toward zoning resulted in support of state agricultural preservation programs. In Lancaster, concern about the Amish culture and rural identity of the region made farm land preservation a high priority for many residents. Consequently, state policies impact upon regional cultures differently while at the same time, regional differences influence response to land use programs. This calls for further analysis on the relationship between culture and agricultural land uses.

It can be concluded that land use planning and farm land preservation programs have dramatic consequences for local residents. Changes in land use impact upon the local economy, local culture, and identity of rural areas. Such impacts have contributed to economic restructuring of many rural communities as well as significant changes in population growth. In addition, these changes have resulted in a transition in Plain Folk culture from being solely agriculturally based to expanding to manufacturing and service industries. Consequently,



impacts from land-use change are community wide and can no longer be considered as only a government or agricultural issue.

## Notes

- 1 This accounts for inaccuracies in the sampling frames.
- 2 On the advice of scholars of Amish culture, the Old Amish Order and Mennonites were expected to respond to personal contact significantly more than a mail survey.
- 3 No statistically-significant differences in socio-demographic characteristics were identified between the Lancaster sample and the samples from Snyder and Crawford.
- 4 In 1990, 4 percent of the population of Lancaster County were Old Order Amish (Bridger, 1996) but fieldworkers also estimated that this study site has more Amish than other portions of Lancaster County.
- 5 Private trusts were formed to purchase conservation easements from the Amish farmers because they were reluctant to involve themselves in 'English' forms of government. While a few Amish farmers had sold their land to developers, the majority of Amish and Mennonite farmers favoured farm land preservation. While some supported zoning, others sold their conservation easements while still others believed it was their own responsibility to keep their land in farming.

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## Chapter 9

# Farming discourses: From baa-lambs to bar-codes

*Len Palmer and Helen Quinn*

### Introduction

Contemporary farming in Australia is in a very confused state and experiencing powerful pressures to change, among them: globalisation of markets; cyclical crises in returns from production; crises in traditional production-marketing links mediated by peak marketing bodies and associated price maintenance schemes (for example, Wool and Wheat Boards); the introduction of new production and marketing methods, including technologisation of hitherto personalised and labour-intensive production and marketing processes; environmental degradation, including fertility crises such as spiralling chemical use, salination, acidification, algal river poisoning, soil erosion and loss; economic pressures on costs of production including costs of machinery, chemicals and fuels. Farmers are under increasing pressure to adapt to these developments. This includes changing their understanding of what they do as their core activity, which might have once been understood as 'stopping at the farm gate'. Some responses have come from within traditional farming, farmers and farming organisations, such as; conservation farming, organic farming, bio-dynamic farming, landcare, and 'sustainable farming' rhetorics.

Other responses have come from outside traditional farming, for example, from the environment movement, from other theories of agriculture, and movements toward self-sufficiency, sustainability, and land improvement drawing from experience and theories from other countries and cultures.

Along with these pressures and changes, it may be hypothesised that there are changes and challenges to traditional ways of talking about farming, to grasp new situations and responses, including new ways of speaking, thinking and feeling about farming. We might call these new discourses and discursive practices (Foucault, 1972).

If it is correct that such new discourses are emerging, they (along with older discourses) should be able to be traced in media forms addressing the farm sector. A cluster of discourses bearing on an aspect of social life has been called

a discursive field (Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1991). Discourses are usually defined as having an institutional setting, base or origin (Thwaites *et al.*, 1994; Abercrombie *et al.*, 1994), and the institutional context of the media is reported here. We treat discourses as social or cultural 'facts' in the sense of their existence outside of individuals, but helping to constitute that world. The discourses constructed here are similar to Weber's ideal type (Weber, 1947: 89, 92), in that they are constructed as if they were relatively coherent, bounded ways of speaking, thinking and feeling about farming. Their appearance 'in real life', and in the media examined is much more fragmentary, contradictory and messy than they appear here.

This paper reports on contemporary discourses found in selected Australian rural print media. The focus is on the discourses constructed from selected media rather than on the media itself. The method here is discursive construction and reconstruction, and not media content analysis, media effects nor audience reception or readings. Our claim is not that these discourses are equally in circulation or currency, nor that they have equal or similar impacts on farmers and farming media readers. These audience and interpretive questions are the grounds for a different paper than this one. The media examined were: Australian Farm Journal; The Land; Alternate Farmer; Grass Roots; Permaculture International Journal; Earth Garden.

Although there is a general historical framework underlying this work, the present work is not intended to examine the periodicity or socio-historical phases of the emergence of new discourses; rather a contemporary view of several discourses is constructed.

The theoretical groundwork for this research comes from a reading of the work of Appadurai, who analyses shifts in discourses, technology and cultural values with the incursion of western economic pressures in Western India (Appadurai, 1990). Appadurai defines these pressures as aspects of an agronomic discourse, indicated by the following features: measurement, individualism, time and capital consciousness.

To elaborate on these briefly, Appadurai firstly shows the historical process whereby measurement shifted over 150 years from rough and ready, work or production-based measures (e.g. the amount of onion seed needed to farm a field, is a both intuitive and skill-based assessment), to precise, universal and objective western units (e.g. kilograms/hectare) used to calculate inputs vs outputs (Appadurai, 1990: 196).

Secondly, Appadurai approached the analysis of changes of discourse and related farming practices of the village he studied through its core value of sociality. Crucial changes in farming undermined the centripetal nature of social relations towards sociality. The individualism of agronomic pressures produced centrifugal pressures which eroded prior farming (and many other) relations, converting sharing and cooperative activities from core to strategic ventures, and increasing risk for farmers (1990: 197).

Thirdly, the nature and meaning of time began to change from farming governed by various ritual, lunar, religious, and seasonal periodicities, to farming governed almost solely by market needs (Appadurai, 1990: 197).

A fourth aspect of this agronomic discourse concerned the deepening absorption of all aspects of farming in a consciousness of capital, capital investment, cost-consciousness, time, machinery, seed, and fertiliser application, forcing capital calculation to the forefront of strategic thinking (Appadurai, 1990: 197).

In addition to this outline of the most significant features of the agronomic discourse Appadurai traced in his study, he also noted the following consequences of the discourse and its related cultural practices; knowledge loss, shifts in ways of knowing, and changes in the conception of time and of the rhythms of agricultural life (Appadurai, 1990: 204-214).

The longer term focus of this research is on technology, its forms and meanings, and is connected to this paper in the following ways. MacKenzie and Wajcman suggest that technology should be defined in three ways: as dumb machines, arrangements of materials, metal, glass and wires; as ways of doing things, both as practical skills, dexterities, and habits, as well as social relations between people, divisions of labour; and as forms of knowledge, both general knowledge and specific kinds of know-how, perspectives and principles, which are socially acquired (1985: 3-4).

What is significant for present purposes, is that all of these aspects of technology require social interaction and learning, of both a general (education, family, media) and specific nature (apprenticeships, traineeships, degrees) in both formal and informal contexts, public and private, institutional and non-institutional settings. This is to say that such learning, as aspects of acculturation, is *discursive*. Various forms of the mass media carry discourses about technology defined in this very broad way. In this paper, technology is categorised as but one way of constructing these discourses.

The main discourses that impressed us in the rural print media examined are: self-sufficiency; permaculture; traditional farming; and agronomics. In addition, several other discourses are evident, these are: conservation farming, organic farming, bio-dynamic farming, landcare. It is not entirely clear from this research whether these are distinct discourses or sub-divisions of the ones mentioned above, for example it seems likely that minimum-till or no-till cropping or conservation farming is a sub-set of traditional farming, and landcare or organic farming might be practised without change to traditional farming approaches. These last discourses or discursive fragments are not examined separately in this paper.

In the research process, a number of features seemed to provide a description of each discourse, and relate to those discussed by Appadurai. The categories that are used below to report on the four discourses constructed here are not meant to be exhaustive, and may not prove to be comprehensive, although the interaction between the categories appears to cover the discourses quite well.

## **1 Traditional farming**

In an important sense, what we here call traditional farming is under siege from the many problems that beset it. From the perspective of this study, it is read as the 'other' of the discourses we found, and in a special sense, needing construction from the points of view of the other discourses. So, for example, the agronomic discourse suggests both the way to conduct farming and the way not to conduct it. The latter is then the space occupying traditional farming as we see it. It is primarily a discourse under change.

### *Values*

There is widespread use of the terms profit, efficiency, cost-containment and its corollaries (cost-minimisation etc.). These appear to have the status as ends-in-themselves, and assumed priority status. There seems to be an ethic which might be called 'looking after the land', which might be the predecessor of Landcare. Another value appears to be summed up by allusions to 'family farming', with related issues around the possibilities, and difficulties of inheritance. A value that seems strong is that of self-reliance or individualism, especially in the context of 'working off the farm'. Cooperation then appears to be strategic in Appadurai's terms, as a means to survival and not an end in itself. There still seems to be an ethos of 'pride in production' albeit somewhat besieged, and a relatively strong nationalist ethic.

### *Technology*

Ways of talking about technology cover a preference for practical equipment, with proven and reputable practices implied. There seems to be a slightly anti-tech bias about technology, perhaps most in relation to computers. Both labour intensive (e.g. fencing) and capital intensive (e.g. tractors, cropping machinery) technological forms are assumed as necessary.

### *Environmental stance*

The sense of a discourse under change is strong here, with the basic exploitation of natural resources like land and water taken for granted, but also a questioning of degradation and its 'invisible' manifestations, soil loss, acidification, salinity, treelessness and water pollution. Some uncertainty and diversity of responses towards forms of conservation is evident. There are clear signs of responses like Landcare, which do not appear to call for a major rethinking of traditional farming and can be seen to be an accessory to it. There are environmental concerns in the organic farming movement, although it is also treated sometimes as a kind of boutique farming activity. Minimum or no-till crop-farming is called conservation farming, but appears to fit in within

traditional farming, and has financial benefits promoted as much as soil conservation. Bio-dynamic farming appears to be in left-field, appearing as a marginal activity with dubious bases and grudging acceptance of benefits, usually shown as economic.

Nature has a figurative form in traditional farming, certainly as threatening, often chaotic, and probably feminine (mother earth, nature as other, unpredictable, hard, unforgiving etc.). The line between the farm and nature is an interesting site of discourse. In permaculture, the line between areas of activity is called the edge and seen as the productive interaction between different systems. In traditional farming the edge is the site of neglect (declining fences, encroaching bush, fauna) and perhaps fear.

#### *Economic stance*

Farming is clearly a business, although mostly a family business relatively different from other family businesses. The ideas we found seem to reflect cost-consciousness, and an income orientation rather than profit, but often (in the current climate) cost-cutting or minimisation. The farmer is often figured as a victim of hostile economic forces. The big challenge to farmers seems to be to get them to think of production integrated with marketing, i.e. 'beyond the farm gate'. Similar to the discourses described by Appadurai for India, there seems to be limited capital consciousness, not talking about the sense of capital as ubiquitous to farming (which implies for example stock, machinery, seed, fertiliser, soil moisture, mineral profile etc.).

#### *Influences and origins*

Australian farming appears to be heavily drawn from British and European agricultural ideas and practices, consistent with both the colonial and migrant histories we all share. While cities might be influenced by Anglo-Irish culture and is widely referred to, perhaps the farming countryside is influenced by Anglo-Scottish culture.

#### *Relationship to science*

Traditional farming is clearly influenced by science, both agricultural science and general science in relation to physics and biology, as well as botany and engineering. But there are signs of an uneasy relationship in the preference for 'the practical', and for generational knowledge (my Dad did this), and the trial and error nature of some farming knowledge. The media seem to figure the farmer as resistant to a certain degree of rational planning and strategic thinking. There are signs of a changing relation to agricultural science and agricultural education.

*Gender, sexuality, and ethnicity*

This category emerged out of the strikingly gendered nature of farming presented in the media studied. Traditional farming is of course heavily associated with masculinity, but is changing under a number of pressures, not the least economic with the downturn in several key farming activities. A conventional division of gendered labour is usually assumed, i.e. masculinised fieldwork and feminised housework, but 'women as farmers' is part of the current picture. There is no mention of gay people or lifestyles, and monogamous heterosexuality is the norm when family life is implied or discussed. While names may reflect non-Anglo heritages, the ethnicity of traditional farming is predominantly Anglo-cultural. Despite the likelihood of migrant absorption into farming, including Italian tobacco-growers etc., the rich character of ethnic diversity in Australian rural society appears absent or suppressed.

## **2 Self-sufficiency**

This discourse is most likely a reaction to traditional farming along with a reaction to urban life, partly by embracing the bush myth important in Australian culture at least since the 1890s. This myth is still important today, if frequently challenged, and partly sustains traditional farming and permaculture as well.

*Values*

A key value is expressed in the terms of making do, using cheap or materials at hand, and preferring home-made to bought goods, equipment and materials. There is a strong sense of making a virtue of necessity which clearly blurs into many practices in traditional farming. Likewise, experimentation, resourcefulness, invention and innovation are highly valued. These values flow from the paddock and the shed into the vegetable garden, the orchard and kitchen, where home-grown is best as well as cheapest. There seems to be an ethic of sharing, of knowledge, equipment and labour, often with an old-world sense of fun and celebration. In some tension with this sharing there is also a value placed on owning your own which seems to stand for some kind of individualism. Overall, these values seem to be mainly centripetal in Appadurai's terms, although clearly without the wider context that he identified in Western India.

*Technology*

Self-sufficiency implies low-tech solutions, partly because of relative cheapness and partly, we suspect, because of romantic images of traditional methods. The



media seem to prefer tried and true methods, mechanics and folk ways. This also stresses practical know-how over formal knowledge, and labour intensive methods and machines. Clever practices, joined with creative solutions, for example in recycling nearly everything are applauded. Less than efficient, or low efficiency, equipment and practices are tolerable because of the other pay-offs (freedom from debt, cheapness, health, tradition).

#### *Environmental stance*

Conservation or preservation stances represent the self-sufficiency discourse, framed by a romantic view of farming, and basically a small-holding, perhaps petit-bourgeois, escape from the city. Many articles are written by readers in *Earth Garden* and *Grass Roots*, including from those in the city practising composting, water conservation and home-production. City and country recycling and waste reduction are key aspects of environmental awareness. The 'edge' is not an aspect of self-sufficiency *per se*, although permaculture articles do appear in its media. Romantic edges like hedgerows and ponds are more notable for their evocative qualities, perhaps than for any site of productive function.

#### *Economic stance*

Often a strong explicit, and other times implicit, anti-capitalist ethos is expressed in this discourse. This is also expressed in participation in barter and payment-in-kind schemes, and direct selling and buying through producer-markets, fairs and street-stalls. Other aspects of economic activity, including labour and machinery, are sought to be exchanged, again similar to some aspects of traditional farming.

#### *Influences and origins*

This discourse appears expressive of a romantic English and/or European peasant smallholding nostalgia put into effect, or desired. An influence from the American homesteader movement is evident too. There also seems to be something of the bush culture which emerged or was shaped by the 1930s Great Depression in Australia. There is an almost puritanical stoicism and spartanism not widely evident in Australia in this discourse. This might have its origins in post-war soldier-settlement farmer culture but is almost certainly related to nationalist bush myths.

#### *Relationship to science*

A curious ambivalence appears evident in this part of the discourse. There is a general anti-science and perhaps anti-modern feel to the discourse, but also a

pleasure in basic physics, electrics, hydraulics and mechanics. There is some antipathy to high tech solutions, and assumed love of steam engines. There is a clear preference for rules of thumb over precise measurement, and the assumption that knowledge is contextual rather than objective. Mystical and anti-rational explanations are common.

#### *Gender, sexuality and ethnicity*

While there is a feminine presence in self-sufficiency, it tends to be often, if not exclusively, strongly separated from masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity (Connell 1987) is loosely apt. Between-the-lines aspects of stories occasionally suggest the existence non-heterosexual relationships. The ethnicity appears to be dominant Anglo-Irish, but the names of contributors sometimes suggest cultural difference.

### **3 Permaculture**

This discourse appears most clearly in Permaculture International Journal, but is clearly an influence in Grassroots, Earth Garden and makes an occasional appearance in other journals/magazines e.g. Alternate Farmer. It has been developed in Australia drawing on and applied to many agriculture settings, cultures and countries. It takes its status very seriously as an alternative to contemporary mainstream farming, including traditional farming outlined above, and the agronomic discourse that follows, with a broad environmental and ethical focus.

#### *Values*

Permaculture explicitly espouses ethical values covering all aspects of life, in production and consumption, summed up in the slogan 'right living'. Permaculture is not just a farming discourse but an approach to a harmonious integration of landscape, people, food and shelter, including cities. It emphasises personal responsibility with social orientations toward cooperation rather than competition. A key ethic is care of the earth, its people, and limits to population, consumption and growth. A high value is placed on multifunctional design in all aspects of life, e.g. deciduous fruit trees are chosen for a site for more than one reason such as summer shade and food.

#### *Technology*

Technology within the permaculture framework is framed by a wide analysis of inputs and outputs, that is, much wider than traditional farming would assume, to include social/communal issues, as well as wider energy considerations. The kind of technology forms preferred are inexpensive, 'clever' options, especially

those based on renewable resources such as solar, wind, and mini-hydro systems. This includes both high and low-tech forms, according to broadly defined efficiency and renewability criteria, e.g. gravity-fed water, and computerised solar electricity.

#### *Environmental stance*

Permaculture is strongly environmentalist, with urgent agendas to renew and improve rural and metropolitan ecosystems within a sustainable primary production framework. It sets out explicitly to reduce waste and pollution, and to replace lost and degraded minerals in rural land. Permaculture also advocates a kind of energy accounting, assessing the gains and losses of production systems as energy systems. There should be, from a permaculture view, long-term assessment of bio-social effects of communities, and plans to eliminate or buffer destructive environmental effects. The 'edge' is a key environmental concept in permaculture. Edges are where different systems co-exist and offer opportunities for increased production. Edges between environmental zones can exploit the main functions of both zones and longer edges caused by circular and meandering boundaries are more productive than straight ones. For example, integrated food (fruits, nuts), forest, windbreak, and frost-control trees, rather than separated orchards, paddocks, woodlots etc.

#### *Economic stance*

Permaculture advocates investment only in ethically supportable activities, and a focus on regional communities as economic entities. Household production (orchard, garden) on a sustainable basis is primarily for use by the family or group and only secondarily for profit or surplus. This surplus is used for various kinds of exchange, barter, direct exchange (payment in kind), LETS (Local Employment Trading Systems, direct market systems (market stalls), and green dollars as well as ordinary dollars (federal units!). Non-household production for income (both field and orchard) is marked by firm opposition to monoculture (large single crops) and cash-cropping to the exclusion of household production or sustenance. These economic concerns seem inseparable from production values in permaculture, with organic (non-chemical), intensive rather than extensive systems, multiple crops (polyculture), and low energy inputs which increases the sum of yields as it is weighed against the energy costs.

#### *Influences and origins*

Several influences have been claimed by permaculture. Some of them come from practical and theoretical agriculture, such as Yeomans' Keyline Farming, biology, botany and ecoscience. A key founder, Bill Mollison, worked in

Tasmania's Parks and Wildlife service as a scientific officer. Some influences are international, and perhaps signs of anti-development theory similar to that of Susan George (for example 1976). To the degree there are an anti-profit, anti-capital and anti-state dimensions to permaculture, the flavour seems to us to be generally socialist, and probably anarchist, although this is not explicit in the permaculture literature we reviewed.

*Relationships to science*

Permaculture is heavily influenced by scientific methods and procedures, and rational measurement, analysis, planning and calculation. However, the permaculture framework into which this science is developed is formative, for example, demonstrating the interplay between animal systems and other food systems. Mollison suggests too many snails in a garden means too few ducks, namely, look for other beneficial systems rather than poisoning to reduce pest crop losses. This interplay also demonstrates awareness in permaculture of the complexity of cause and effect, rather than simple relations. A version of systems theory is an important part of permaculture.

*Gender, sexuality and ethnicity*

Permaculture is notable for its access by women at senior levels, although the authors of the founding books, Mollison and Holmgren, are men. There are many women practitioners and publicists, including permaculture's links with communal living developments. Like traditional farming, there are no explicit acknowledgment of gay lifestyles or issues, and heterosexual images predominate or are assumed. Permaculture moved very quickly from its Australian start to many countries and its ethnicity is clearly internationalist, cultural pluralist and ethnically diverse.

#### **4 Agronomic discourse**

The agronomic discourse appears to be a combination of economic rationalism, scientific agriculture and a trend toward market-driven primary production.

*Values*

The clear focus of agronomic values are economic, and profit and capital conscious. Profit, capital investment and growth are either assumed or explicit priorities in agronomics. In addition, efficiency, cost-cutting and productivity are key goals in this discourse. There is as a result an ambivalent recognition of the role and rights of agricultural labour; some versions argue for the enlightened view that win-win outcomes are possible in achieving labour

efficiency and productivity, while other versions appear to see labour inefficiencies as requiring strong measures.

### *Technology*

Agronomic approaches to technology seem to assume capital intensive technologies. This often involves huge agricultural machinery with hi-tech computer controls governing seed, fertiliser or pesticide application rates calculated from rationally derived (economic) input/output aims. The kind of technology is mostly that used in chemical-dependent monoculture (pesticides and huge single crops). Increasing computerisation of market technology and market-driven incursions into production technology are a feature of this discourse, one example is the use of bar-coded sheep-tags to record and retrieve production records so as to better target production profiles like wool length, strength and diameter to meet wool-processor requirements.

### *Environmental stance*

The environmental orientation of agronomics is framed powerfully by its economic values, and can be simply described as exploitative, akin to quarrying. Unlike the permaculture discourse, environmental values are largely not part of the inputs and outputs calculation of agronomic efficiency, except sometimes as diseconomies. Environmental losses appear to be strategic risk calculations in this discourse. The edge appears to be an economic one, drawn around economic calculations of yields per hectare, wherein broadacre farming demands may obliterate other edge considerations, such as fertility (see permaculture discourse) wildlife corridors, hedgerows, streambank ecology and particular flora and/or fauna habitats.

### *Economic stance*

The dominance of economic awareness or consciousness, is central to this discourse, and frames all other considerations. This is highly recognisable as the process that Appadurai describes (outlined earlier). So, not only are machines, sheds, stock, fences, seed and land seen as capital, but also good-will, ground-moisture, weather, soil-types, climate, family and neighbour aid etc. Part of this is a clear global consciousness that marries with hostility to the state, and (selectively) state regulation, often seen as barriers to direct relations between producers and markets around the world. Celebration stories about agribusiness companies, with vertical integration seen as 'smart' or ideal, position these enterprises as representative, or future-to-become. Value-adding of products on-farm, in Australia, or before final product sale is assumed to be necessary or desirable. This is part of a widespread call for production being shaped by marketing or purchaser requirements in the media examined, with many

examples of market criteria 'entering the farm gate' and shaping production plans, timing schedules, growing decisions, fertiliser, seed, moisture, chemical and/or harvesting decisions. Sometimes these changes from traditional farming are forced by one-sided contracts with agribusinesses selling seed, fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, and paying for the resultant crop.

### *Influences and origins*

Without reducing complex poly-causal relationships and the lag between identifying complex developments and their prior occurrence, the agronomic discourse is clearly a child of global capitalism. It also takes up key discourses from at least the nineteenth century, such as entrepreneurialism, market rationality, free-trade thinking, *laissez-faire* small government and the liberal-pluralism of the rational individual. The role of the Uruguay round of GATT (General Agreements on Trades and Tariffs) and its formalised successor the World Trade Organisation, is frequently mentioned with structural status.

### *Relationship to science*

Science, scientific methods, rational calculation of inputs and outputs, and Western methods of precise, decontextualised measurement are all deeply enmeshed in the agronomic discourse. Precise recording of data and detailed and aggregated analysis is also promoted. This seems to be a clear case of science harnessed to capital.

### *Gender, sexuality and ethnicity*

Like the traditional farming and to a lesser degree the self-sufficiency and permaculture discourses, the actor in the agronomic space and time is masculine, but rather disembodied, as if without partner, family (or sex). Homosexuality is never mentioned and is therefore part of the wider discourse of invisibility. The dominant image is a cold, objective, competitive masculinity, whose ethnicity, in these media at any rate, appears to be western, white, globally-aware and cosmopolitan, at least in the sense of keen to participate in markets anywhere.

## **Discussion**

We have presented in this paper the four main discourses constructed from our readings of the media indicated. Initially, we thought we saw a similar invasion or spread of what Appadurai calls an agronomic discourse, but did not have ideas of the number and content of other discourses about farming. Some comments are appropriate about the discursive field we have reconstructed here.

What the ideal-type and categorial presentation of this discursive field above, does not display is the mixed, messy, interleaved and discordant nature of their appearance in the media reported. In several cases opposition to what we have here called 'the agronomic discourse' is expressed from the heartland of farming in Letters to the Editor, notably in *The Land*. While some letters support aspects (and often all) of the agronomic discourse, there are many voices that oppose it, its underlying values and future implications for the practices and culture of farming.

The categories by which we describe the discourses we outline here arose out of the process of thinking discursively about farming, but no doubt, from our own sociological ways of thinking. Some other categorisations occurred to us, such as class, but are left out here in the interests of brevity, and because the material left this issue more uncertain than the categories used. We feel descriptive coverage here is good without repetition and undue speculation.

We have also excluded a category in each discourse discussing forms of regulation, bureaucracy and the state. This is a very important aspect of farming practice, and a crucial institutional context for the discursive field as a whole. It is also very difficult to make sense of from media sources, and beyond our capacities in this paper. It will reward specific attention.

Our general understanding of these discourses are that the agronomic is a dominant and rising media discourse in the media examined, but that traditional farming is hegemonic in the Gramscian sense (1971), that is, in the sense of being both dominant and having widespread consensus or acceptance. This means that agronomics has traditional farming under attack and that a discursive struggle is under way. Proponents of the agronomic discourse come from within and outside traditional farming, which underlines the importance of focussing on the discursive field and its constituent discourses, rather than particular actors, positions or media.

This also means that the self-sufficiency and permaculture discourses are minority and oppositional discourses respectively. Permaculture professes for itself both the scientific basis and ethical framework needed to provide answers to fundamental problems in farming and cities. Its international focus and practical program approach gives a perspective which is both theoretical and practical without being pragmatic. It seems to be able to provide a wide range of insights into problems endemic to contemporary societies like Australia.

This discursive scenario seems to suggest that agronomics and permaculture are set to struggle over the ideological and discursive heartland which we here have called traditional farming. Self-sufficiency seems likely to sit on the edge as a bit player.

## **Conclusion**

In the Introduction we foreshadowed some comments on knowledge loss, shifts in ways of knowing, and changes in the conception of time, and of the rhythms of agricultural life. With regard to knowledge loss, it seems to us that the emergence and incursion of the agronomic discourse into traditional farming is the most important relationship uncovered by the research. In a curious way, agronomics requires a huge knowledge increase; about marketing, its circuits and institutions, about computers and hi-tech technology complicating old machinery and introducing new ones, and the call to develop financial expertise, to start with. Whether these changes also introduce areas of redundancy in prior farming knowledge we can guess at, but requires research with farmers to establish this with any degree of certainty.

In a sense the self-sufficiency discourse is an attempt to recover, or reconstruct knowledge lost through modernisation and monetisation and other pressures, to recover what might be called rural folk-lore. Perhaps the key aspect of its romanticism is the sense of acting to recover lost knowledges ranging from wire and rope-knots, to wine and food recipes. It represents in a certain way the failure of a way-of-knowing, but an attempt re-circulate and build older ways-of-knowing.

On the other hand, permaculture is also about knowledge gain. The need for broad environmental awareness, the systems approach to planning and decision-making, permaculture's relationships with science, and permaculture's broad explicit ethical framework, imply a critique of traditional farming and agronomics. Its own relationship to aspects of farming theory such as the Yeomans' keyline water approach both connects and expands on traditional farming. Because of its explicit attempt to deal with ethics, environment, investment and city and country energy systems, permaculture seems to be a direct attempt to develop the primary ways-of-knowing.

With regard to changes in the conception of time, the kinds of ritual time in Western culture are weak in comparison to cultures such as that studied by Appadurai. Christmas, Easter and the 'Sabbath', and other nominal celebrations are perhaps already under attack in traditional farming in Australia. Spring is still the time of new growth, but temperature, moisture etc. can be modified with specialised shelters, sheds, heating and humidifiers. Overall, the tenor of Appadurai's account of time speeding up, and being increasingly subject to market needs appears to hold in agronomics (already the case to a degree in traditional farming under the push from agronomics) but these apparent trends are resisted or ignored in permaculture and self-sufficiency.

The rhythm of agricultural life is celebrated in the self-sufficiency discourse, and perhaps seen best as a rearguard call for its recognition and renewal. Such rhythms are still present in traditional farming as far as we can see, although under pressure. The primary rhythms of season, planting and harvest are still evident in permaculture, but replaced by the rhythms of money, capital, global markets, and capital opportunities in the agronomic discourse.



Our title 'from baa-lambs to barcodes' sketches, with a sheepish metaphor, the nostalgia of baby lambs in nursery rhymes and romantic portrayals of the country and farming appropriate to the self-sufficiency discourse, through to the super-rational production methods of tagging sheep with bar-coded tags, from which computerised production data can be retrieved, analysed and acted upon, representative of the agronomic discourse. The survival of the first metaphor in the face of the second attests to the significance of the discursive struggle underway. The outcomes of this struggle may take some time to be decided, but it should be clear that these outcomes will change the way we all think and feel about farming, the country and the environment.

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## Chapter 10

# ‘A Bunch of Weakies?’ Region and the making of the trade union movement in Rockhampton to the 1950s

*Barbara Webster*

The Rockhampton Branch of the AMIE Union claims that its 1951 annual picnic, held yesterday at Emu Park, was the largest industrial picnic ever held in Australia. Five packed trains and many cars transported the large crowd to the seaside. It was variously estimated that between 4 000 to 5 000 people attended (*The Morning Bulletin*: 7)

Such a turnout for the annual meatworkers’ picnic is not surprising in a city with the largest export meatworks in Australia at that time and, as some proudly recall, the largest in the southern hemisphere. The Australian Railways Union also attracted several thousand picnickers to its celebratory day at the seaside. Each year on Labour Day these unions, accompanied by banners, brass bands and industrial displays, marched with the Waterside Workers, Amalgamated Engineers, Boilermakers, Engine Drivers and Firemen, Transport Workers, Storemen and Packers, Carpenters and Joiners, several smaller unions, Labor politicians and ALP branches from Trades Hall to Victoria Park for a combined labour movement picnic and sports carnival. As early as the 1912 General Strike, four to five thousand workers, about one third of the population at the time and drawn from some twenty unions, had massed in Market Square in defence of unionism (*Daily Record*: 3). Moreover, from the ranks of Rockhampton’s trade union movement came several prominent state union officials and Labor politicians.

Despite plentiful evidence of the size of the union movement in Rockhampton in the first half of the twentieth century, discussion of trade unionism in the region is curiously absent from the literature. This omission creates a marked gap in the map of Queensland labour historiography which is all the more puzzling for a location which, to the 1950s, was the state’s leading provincial city by population (*Census*, 1911: 1774) and a major railway and

meatworks centre. In explaining this paradox, I believe that the nature of the union movement in Rockhampton cannot be comfortably accommodated within labour history's traditional approach, particularly its dominant paradigm of conflict. A lower incidence of industrial discord in Rockhampton and more reserved attitude to striking has been erroneously interpreted as weakness not only by the historians who have ignored it but also by fellow unionists outside the area. Secondly, over time, the peculiarities of each geographical region have shaped distinctive local union organisations, some more prone to industrial strife and others, as in the case of Rockhampton, less prone.

Union histories are part of the 'traditional focus' of Australian labour scholarship (Patmore, 1993: 33). Within these narrow confines lie common themes of institutional origins and political affiliations. As a result, the Queensland map is amply illustrated in the west where legend holds that the pastoral unions founded the Labor Party in the 1890s. It is also particularly well explored in North Queensland where mining, sugar and pastoral workers struggled for the success of a state Labor government in 1915 (Fitzgerald and Thornton, 1989: 9). These are the heroic rural unions of Labor's hallowed past, those which dominate classic works like Murphy, Joyce and Hughes' (1970) *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885-1915*. Denis Murphy (1970: xviii) admitted that younger urban unions like those in Rockhampton were 'hardly mentioned' at all in labour histories and it is mainly those in Townsville and Brisbane which historians have since highlighted.

The dominant characteristic of Queensland union historiography, though, is its preoccupation with conflict between unions and employers or governments. The foremost academic work in this vein is Murphy's (1983) *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889-1965*. None of the disputes discussed therein began in Rockhampton. In fact, the book makes almost no reference to the city at all. There is brief mention of two incidents at Lakes Creek Meatworks which contributed to the heated atmosphere prior to the 1946 Meatworkers' Strike (Blackmur, 1983a: 219, 220, 225) and a passing comment that local workers were 'weakened' and in favour of settlement in the 1948 Railway Strike (Blackmur, 1983b: 248). In Iremonger, Merritt and Osborne's (1973) text, Margaret Cribb (1973: 246) notes a similar 'weakening' and a comparative lack of militancy in Central Queensland unionists' stance in the railway dispute. In reflecting recently upon the past union movement in Rockhampton, former leaders, Frank Campbell, Jack Egerton, Jack Treacy and Les Yewdale, all agreed that trade unions in this district were certainly conservative in comparison with those in Townsville. When asked which were the militant unions in Rockhampton, Treacy replied:

I don't know that there really was any. If you asked the blokes in Brisbane, they'd say there was none. They thought we were a bunch of weakies.

Indeed, one newly-arrived unionist corresponding with Rockhampton-born ARU State Secretary, Frank Nolan, just prior to the 1948 Railway Strike wrote:

This place is to me as a trade-unionist horrifying and irrespective of what you hear, the response to the 24-hour stoppage was bad ... scabby motions were thick and fast. A repetition of Tuesday's stoppage would see at least 60 percent of ARU members at work (ARU, 1947).

This portrait of conservative or non-militant unionism, if we define militancy in terms of frequent strikes and stoppages, contradicts the fundamental assumption of traditional Marxist-inspired labour historiography that conflict is essential in both class and industrial relations. There was no place for, nor any interest in, the case of Rockhampton during the high point of this genre in Queensland from the mid - 1960s to mid - 1980s. As well, overt conflict leaves more tangible evidence for the historian and perhaps makes for more exciting research. No doubt because of these reasons historians have devoted considerable attention to Townsville and North Queensland which played a prominent role in many of the major strikes. Various union minutes, organisers' reports, industry periodicals and newspaper articles also indicate a far higher incidence of industrial disputation in the North, the most notable of these disruptions being the infamous 1919 Meatworkers' Strike of 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday' fame (Cutler, 1973). From his perspective as former Lakes Creek Meatworks manager, Mark Hinchliff (1995) recalls that the export abattoirs in Townsville were plagued with many more contentious issues than was his works in Rockhampton.

Nevertheless, local unionists were far from weak as historians and other unionists assume. Perusal of union records reveals that when industrial problems did arise here, strikes and stoppages certainly occurred from time to time. Many outside disputes drew moral and generous financial support from local unionists even though few sympathy strikes occurred. And when directed out as part of a state-wide campaign, Rockhampton unionists followed in an orderly manner.

As Jack Egerton says:

Rockhampton unions were staunch but conservative - wedded to the rule book and the constitution of the union, not asking for excessive wages and conditions but demanding the awards and various acts be observed in their entirety. ... They were always strong unionists. ... There was no argument if the delegate said this or that (Interview, 1996).

Former AMIEU secretary Colin Maxwell (1996) is more succinct in his assessment of the character of the local meat union - 'Rocky obeyed its union. Townsville didn't.' However, he also adds that the rank and file rarely attended monthly meetings unless summoned, despite the incentive of an occasional free keg.

The comparative power and militancy of leadership and rank and file is the source of recent debate amongst labour historians (Zeitlin, 1989; Price, 1989; Cronin, 1989). In Rockhampton, relatively conservative, even apathetic, members (Treacy, 1995; Maxwell, 1996) tended to submit to the authority of similarly conservative leadership, particularly to several long-standing full-time secretaries who maintained firm control over members through a system of fines and expulsions. But these men also maintained their positions through skilful oratory and the ability to 'deliver' to members and to defuse many problems at a local level by negotiation with employers. If unsuccessful, official union intervention at state level would be sought. Most prominent among these leaders were E.B. Purnell of the Waterside Workers' Federation, Frank Conlon of the Transport Workers' Union and Len Haigh of the AMIEU, each of whom served as branch secretary for over 30 years and were also instrumental in the formation and operation of peak union bodies in the city. It was largely through the work of Haigh that mutual agreements to vary the export award were struck with management at Lakes Creek Meatworks, were lodged with the Arbitration Court and became the benchmarks for claims by northern and southern meatworkers (Maxwell, 1996).

Rockhampton unions also tended to work within the principle of labourism, wherein government legislation and the arbitration system determined workers' conditions in exchange for union support. While this model dominated Queensland political and industrial history for most of the period from 1915 to 1957 (Guille, 1989: 173, 180, 184), local unions made particular use of labourism to achieve their objectives. Through affiliation with the ALP and active support for former union officials-cum-political representatives like Frank Forde, state member from 1917 to 1922 and then federal member to 1946, and Jimmy Larcombe who served almost continuously from 1912 to 1956 in state Labor governments (Waterson, 1972: 61, 105) unions supported industrial and social legislative change and lobbied for regional and local development projects to stimulate employment. Purnell, Conlon, Haigh, Frank Campbell (ARU), Tom Maxwell (WWF) and son Colin Maxwell (AMIEU), to name but a few, actively participated in the Labor Party; contested and sometimes won aldermanic elections, organised political campaigns and held government appointments to statutory authorities. Local unions also operated, for the most, within the arbitration system, using the Court to achieve improved wages and conditions and the local industrial inspector to police awards. Len Haigh's dictum written in his scrapbook, 'All reasonable means to achieve settlement short of striking must be tried first' (AMIEU, 1941), succinctly captures the approach to industrial action in Rockhampton up to the 1950s. In view of their effective use of negotiation, official union mechanisms and political and legislative channels, local unionists should really be seen as quiet achievers and not as 'weakies'. In the North, however, Doug Hunt (1974: 207) argues that worker disillusionment with Labor's policy of moderate reform and arbitration stimulated a preference for direct industrial action by unions. This attitude, he believes, arose from 'a tradition of left-wing radicalism' in the North.

The apparent difference between Rockhampton and Townsville raises some important historical questions about the forces which moulded their respective union movements. Connell and Irving (1992: 8-10) acknowledge the significance of region in influencing the character of social classes and their institutions. They cite geographical variations in industrial composition, ethnic diversity and political tradition as some relevant determining factors. Yet the impact of region is largely overlooked in most union histories (Murphy, 1970: xx) and unions have been studied 'only spasmodically' in a specific geographical context (Lavery, 1995: 103). Brian Kennedy (1980: 74) demonstrates the effect of location on the union movement in outback Broken Hill where, he argues, physical isolation in a harsh environment gave rise to militancy. In a Queensland context, Doug Hunt (1974: 207) also attributes the militancy he identifies in the North to environmental and seasonal factors while Geoffrey Bolton (1972: 324) considers that a combination of isolation, tropical climate, seasonal work, fluctuating commodity prices and an ethnically-heterogeneous workforce created a 'lively tradition of strike' in the North.

While regional factors are considered in the creation of militancy in Townsville and North Queensland, it is just as historically important to consider how, in adapting Margaret Cribb's (1983: 4) thesis, the characteristics of the particular region might predispose workers to *less* rather than *more* militancy. We should see class formation, interests and organisations such as unions as the sum total of all experience - national, regional and local - rather than subscribe to the 'universalizing assumption' that the making of the working class was uniform (Cronin, 1993: 63). From differing experiences, there were many and varied outcomes. In Rockhampton, the economic, demographic, political, social and cultural characteristics of the region produced a union movement with particular needs and forged a particular outlook in both leaders and rank and file which influenced their industrial policies and actions.

Undoubtedly the nature of the Central Queensland regional economy facilitated stability and industrial quietude amongst ordinary unionists in Rockhampton, providing a contrasting backdrop to that portrayed by Hunt (1974, 1979) and Bolton (1972) in North Queensland. A wider variety of exports from the Central Queensland hinterland and west, including frozen and canned beef and mutton, tallow, hides, wool, grain sorghum, cotton and mining products, gave Rockhampton better cushioning against unemployment from drought, seasonality and low prices than did the beef, sugar and mining exports from Townsville. Most significant was the absence of the seasonal work which characterised the North, where a large population of itinerant males moved throughout the region according to the meat, cane, mango and tomato seasons and varying with the cycle of drought and flood. As well as the meatworks and wharves, railway workshops employing over 1 200 men (Cole, 1995), several light engineering and manufacturing businesses and a wholesale distribution network radiating throughout the region created reasonably reliable employment in the city. In breaking free of seasonal constraints, the Vestey Organisation at Lakes Creek was instrumental. From 1934, the company

introduced a policy of keeping the meatworks operational for most of the year to accommodate the new British chilled beef trade. This encouraged regional cattlemen to introduce cross-breeds and pasture grasses which lengthened the killing season to ten months and, with cannery and freezers, provided almost year-round employment for the city's 1 500 meatworkers (CQME, 1971: 7). According to Mark Hinchliff (1995), the Rockhampton meat union did not have to push hard for maximum wages and conditions in the short four-to-five-month season which the Townsville branch experienced until the 1960s and this, he believes, reduced militancy in local AMIEU leaders and rank and file. In the short slack, some meatworkers went south in search of employment but most remained here fishing, working on local farms or gaining temporary jobs at Mt Morgan mine (Hagstrom, 1996, Underdown, 1996).

The regional economy also influenced the composition of the union movement in Rockhampton. Industrial unions such as the AMIEU and ARU were the largest bodies and, at least by local standards, were regarded as the most militant. They gained strength from unity of numbers in one work site as did the Waterside Workers' Federation. Other unions like the Transport Workers and Storemen and Packers, whose members were dispersed throughout the city in various warehouses, had greater difficulty in organising and counteracting loyalty to employers as union minutes verify (ARTWU, 1910-1957). Craft unionism, traditionally exclusive and introspective, flourished amongst tradesmen. The Amalgamated Engineering Union, with some 800 members in two branches (AEU, 1949: 12) wielded considerable power both in its own right and upon the Trades Hall Board and played a leading role in the 1948 Railway Strike. Margaret Cribb (1973: 264) attributes the 'weakening' of the strikers in Rockhampton to the dominance of AEU, a belief shared by former ARU secretary, Frank Campbell (1995). Of particular importance was the low profile of the Australian Workers' Union by 1920. The city's obvious concentration on secondary industry, diligent organising by other unions and a rejection of the One-Big-Union principle left little ground on which the rurally-based AWU could build and maintain a strong force. In Rockhampton, its membership was generally confined to dispersed, unskilled men and to women in hotels, cafes and in domestic service (AWU, 1916-1956) unlike its domination of the cane industry in the North and in other coastal towns. Fitzgerald and Thornton (1989: 40, 47) attribute communist-backed militancy in the North to the failure of conservative AWU leadership to deal with rank-and-file problems there. This provided a point of entry for communists into union affairs where none existed in Rockhampton.

Yet economic activity alone cannot adequately explain the complexion of the union movement in Rockhampton. Like Hunt (1974, 1979) and Bolton (1972), Terrence Cutler (1973: 82) argues that geographical isolation bred parochialism and self-reliance which brought industrial rebelliousness in the North. Rockhampton also keenly felt a sense of isolation and aspired to political separation on several occasions (McDonald, 1981: 539), but its situation was more one of social and cultural insularity rather than physical remoteness. This,

I would argue, gave Rockhampton a narrow worldview and contributed markedly to its non-militant industrial outlook.

Radical political ideologies which might have encouraged militancy did not penetrate the area to any great extent. The comparatively small amount of overseas shipping as opposed to coastal trade (increasingly transacted through distant Port Alma) minimised contact with foreign seamen who instilled some militancy into the wharves in the North (Yewdale, 1995). As well, little inflow - or outflow - of men in search of seasonal work further reduced the exposure to political and industrial radicalism. When outside ideas did reach local unionists through interchange of workers, they were not avidly received. As former WWF secretary and politician, Les Yewdale (1995), says of the few Sydney 'militants' who did come to Rockhampton during the peak of the meat loading and 'tried to stir things up, ... we just told them, "Listen, you're not in your own back yard now".' Unionists could also read articles in journals but, according to Jack Treacy (1995), most union publications lay about the office unread by the rank and file. During the 1950s, a 'Left' bookshop operated in William Street although its association with the Communist Party made it a risky place to frequent (Pastourel, 1996). Generally, those unionists who espoused militancy and particularly those who aspired to higher office satisfied their ambitions by moving south or north rather than remaining in a quiet spot like Rockhampton, thereby further strengthening the position and power of more temperate, by-the-book union officials like Haigh, Conlon and Purnell (Egerton, 1996; Maxwell, 1996).

Some of the conservatism amongst unionists was undoubtedly derived from the ethnic homogeneity which characterised Rockhampton to the 1950s. According to the 1901 census, approximately 94 percent of the population was born in either Australian or Britain, compared with 88 percent for Townsville (*Census*, 1901: 127). A small but significant group of 'God-fearing, law-abiding' Scandinavians and Germans established small farms in fringe rural areas (Egerton, 1996) while some Chinese market-gardened and ran corner shops. A small population of Pacific Islanders grew fruit, vegetables and small crops and sold firewood from their settlements in 'Kanaka Town' and on the coast near Keppel Sands (Gistitin, 1995: 42). None of these ethnic minority groups provided competition with white labour - the sugar plantations on which many Islanders were previously employed having proved unprofitable. In Townsville, by contrast, there were significant numbers of Japanese and a much higher Chinese and Islander population which competed with white labourers in the sugar industry and thereby created racial tension and union agitation (Bolton, 1972: 203).

By 1947 Rockhampton was even more uniformly 'British' (98.6 percent), with the post-war scheme bringing more immigrants from Britain. There was also a small group of Greeks (*Census*, 1947: 240-241) who mainly set up cafes and greengrocer shops. Townsville, on the other hand, attracted more Greeks and also many Italians and Maltese who rapidly entered the cane industry in competition with Anglo-Australians. In the surrounding sugar areas, the proportion of Southern Europeans was even higher. It was in this group and



among Eastern European migrants that prior negative experience with fascism stimulated support for communism in the North (Menghetti, 1982: 62-73). Whereas communist officials were common in the Townsville movement, former unionists in Rockhampton cannot recall more than one local leader who belonged to the party.

This predominantly British component of the local population brought with it and subsequently nurtured uniform and conservative cultural baggage as embodied in its values, traditions and behaviours. Freemasonry flourished in the city, particularly among tradesmen and some leading union figures, as did friendly societies. In both these organisations, obedience to authority and conformity tempered their members' attitudes and actions, at the same time providing communities of interest which cut across class lines. Irish Catholicism was also strong amongst the large working-class population and during the post-war years, Labor Industrial Groups drew support from both Catholics and masons in their battle against supposed communist infiltration (Treacy, 1995). Douglas Blackmur (1983: 248) attributes the success of government anti-communist propaganda in Rockhampton to both these forces during the 1948 Railway Strike. Yet by the Labor split in 1957, most politically-active unionists had seen 'the truth' behind the Groupers and stayed 'good Labor men' rather than defect with 'the traitor' Gair to the DLP (Treacy, 1995, Maxwell, 1996).

Over the years, Rockhampton experienced only gradual economic and population growth, with no booms or busts to attract a large inflow of new workers or drive away the locals in search of better prospects. By 1960, Rockhampton had lost its ranking as Queensland's leading provincial city by population, being overtaken by a more progressive Townsville in what was to become the trend in later decades. Many locally-born workers married, raised families and died here. In this settled population, strong family networks developed, particularly in the railway, the meatworks and on the wharves, as marriage registers and electoral rolls attest. These links extended to surrounding rural areas, binding the population into a close community whose experience and worldview was increasingly closed and parochial. Many workers could not afford, nor desired, more than the odd trip to Brisbane; most never travelled interstate. The seaside was the horizon for the majority of the local working class. Social conservatism and reluctance to change what was essentially a quiet, contented existence affected more than just the working class however. It permeated much of the town, engulfing bosses, white-collar workers, union leaders and industrial rank and file alike (McDonald, 1996). This torpor was sustained by a stratified social order in which most people knew and accepted their place, content to improve rather than radically change their lives (Webster, 1993: 102-103).

I believe it was this close and closed environment, with its broader-based economy, settled and ethnically-homogeneous population bearing conservative social and cultural heritage that, over the decades, gradually moulded a distinctive union movement in the city. Whereas other historians see a militant, rebellious 'tradition' developing amongst workers in the North (Bolton, 1972:

324; Hunt, 1974: 207), one could propose that in Rockhampton a corresponding *non-militant*, conservative ‘tradition’ emerged. This legacy created self-perceptions of moderation and conformity which in turn reinforced both union official and rank-and-file attitudes and behaviours. Through strong and effective leadership, negotiating with employers and working through the legislative and political systems, local unions achieved more than did their counterparts in Townsville. As Colin Maxwell (1996) proudly contends, ‘Rocky was the real hub of all the activity. All the conditions of the union were won at Lakes Creek’. Rockhampton unionists, then, may not have been militant but neither were they ‘a bunch of weakies’. They were in reality successful and productive, tempered by their regional experience and deserving of being put on the map of Queensland labour history.

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# Chapter 11

## Commodity life of arts

*Jen Webb*

### **Introduction**

Culture is a stake which, like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it ... The value of culture, the supreme fetish, is generated in the initial investment implied by the mere fact of entering the game, joining in the collective belief in the value of the game which makes the game and endlessly remakes the competition for the stakes (Bourdieu, 1979: 250).

I would like to examine the social character of the arts, and the social life with which artists and their works are endowed, and to do so with reference to the analytical perspectives developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Arjun Appadurai, and by drawing on discussions I held with professional artists in the Central Queensland region during 1995. I will approach this, initially, by engaging with what Bourdieu terms 'field'.

Field, for Bourdieu, refers to a relatively autonomous social system, and its structures, discourses, internal logic and rules of behaviour (Bourdieu, 1993: 62). It can be described through the analogy of a game, by referring to the players, the designated positions from which they operate, the range of authorised moves, the rules of the particular game, and the prizes offered for winning. The more powerful social fields, such as the government, or the economy, are typically part of the public sphere. The field of arts is concerned with the private sphere through its connection to pleasure and personal expression, and to this extent is in a relatively dominated position. However, it also has a stake in the public sphere, and this is my concern in this paper - to discuss the relations between arts and the dominant social fields, how artistic objects achieve a social form and a social character, and how they circulate in the community.

The field of arts is embedded within, and partially regulated by, the field of power. This means that its internal logic is not fully autonomous with regard to

the more dominant field; for instance, although artistic products are not produced primarily for sale, they still function as commodities, and the field is managed and regulated by government policy statements, ministries and theoretical disciplines. This is, arguably, because arts products are symbolic objects and hence, as Janet Wolff states, 'the repositories of social value and social meaning' (1981: 14). Their symbolic, rather than utilitarian nature, allows the wide circulation of a discourse of distance from economic necessity, and a disavowal of commercial interest. William Blake offered an eighteenth-century perspective on the relation between art and money - 'Where any view of money exists, art cannot be carried on' (Hughes, 1987: 388) a view that remains dominant. The focus group participants, for instance, stated that production is 'largely for the artist's personal development,' and 'not constrained by what the general public demands'. Arts, then, 'should be' incommensurable with economics. Certainly, artistic works are not produced for a pre-established market, and the primary object of arts is not economic return, but the accumulation of symbolic capital - or prestige (Bourdieu, 1993: 75). In consequence, works that are produced for an established market, such as seascapes for sale in the tourist market, are not considered 'real art' by 'real artists', or by those literate in the arts field. The focus group participants, for instance, stated that, 'categorising as professional only those artists who make their living from art is a bad distinction, because it brings an economic factor into the production of art'; that is, art 'should be' disinterested. Under this reversal of economic logic, commercial success is often regarded as artistic failure.

Despite this, however, arts cannot maintain a complete independence from the laws of the economic and political fields: since it is embedded within these more powerful fields, at some point arts objects must take on a commodity status. Bourdieu argues that this results in a polarisation of logic and practice within the field of arts. One 'pole' is the site for art produced according to a logic which is heteronomous with respect to the logic of economic profit - that is, art produced for commercial success - and which is discredited by the dominant logic of arts. At the other pole is work which is autonomous with respect to the economic field - the consecrated, or 'art for arts sake' approach - in which it is symbolic capital, or prestige, which is valued, and in which success is determined by the approval of other autonomous producers (Bourdieu, 1993: 39).

In practice, artists and their works are situated somewhere on a continuum between the two poles. This is exemplified by the (commercially successful) Australian youth band, Silverchair, who stated: 'We hope it [their new album] doesn't go to number one in the mainstream charts ... It's not that we don't want success. We just don't want to get established as a mainstream teen band' (Jinman, 1996: 14). Being 'established' or 'mainstream' is discredited in terms of the logic of arts which values the innovative, the avant garde, and the oppositional. It is not possible to hold a pure position, though - there is no suggestion in the interview with Silverchair that they spurn their arts-generated

wealth - but the discourse pertinent to the position they are taking up as autonomous artists demands a distancing from the intent to sell.

Artists position themselves on this autonomous/heteronomous continuum according to their own literacies, tastes, levels of expertise, and their own dispositions to particular forms of practice. This taking up of positions can be explained through Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus'; that is, the sets of dispositions which are durably installed in us on the basis of the experiences and contexts through which we have moved, and which have served to constitute us as subjects (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). This concept provides a critique of, and a point of articulation between, the received (charismatic) definition of artists as solitary intuitive genius, or the objectivist definition of the artist as a 'trained and efficient economic unit' (Burn, 1991: 156). Habitus rejects these as discrete positions, and instead posits artists as subjects who are produced by their social contexts, and simultaneously shape their social reality through their dispositions to particular forms of practice, and through their possession of the 'practical sense' which allows them to enter the game of art.

This concept is also applied to the community as a whole. That is, a community of subjects will share a habitus in that they will have shared sets of values and shared understandings of 'appropriate' social relations. Similarly, they will have shared understandings of what constitutes art; because artistic products represent social meaning, even those who lack literacy in the field will share a sense that art is valuable for the community generally. An Australia Council survey, for instance, found that even people with no connection to the arts community considered that Australian arts are 'a source of national pride' and 'contribute importantly to national understanding and social evaluation' (Australia Council, 1989: 54). Consequently, what constitutes art is not inherent, nor does the ability to identify art depend on a natural aesthetic sensibility. Rather, 'art' is a field of representation, whose status and identification depends on local criteria and local systems of value.

This means that there must be some common ground for establishing what constitutes art. There is general recognition within the field that art works must circulate as economic commodities to affirm their public status since, as Žižek argues, until an object has exchange value, it does not exist socially (1994: 296). However, artistic production is not readily reduced to economic logic, which problematises its connection to the economic field. Its products are not produced primarily for an economic return; are not easily translated into commodity value, since they are freely available in the public domain (for example, radio programmes, art galleries and public libraries); and, unlike most commodities, do not automatically offer the promise of exclusive possession of the object. Art's exchange value, then, is not based on a logical relation of supply and demand, or on the material or economic context of its production. Rather, it depends on a general belief that an object is an art work, and that it has value in terms of the logic of that field. Arts products, then, are fetishes, constituted through 'the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art' (Bourdieu, 1993: 35). Their disavowal of practical use is part of what

constitutes them as art for those literate in this field; as Bourdieu, again, states, 'It is barbarism to ask what culture is for' (1979: 250).

Increasingly, however, it is the 'barbarians' - those outside the field of artistic production, such as investors or policy makers - who determine what constitutes art, and how it should be valued, and this intrudes upon the disinterest of the autonomous pole of artistic production. Purely autonomous art, for instance, has no established market, and consequently relies on government support. This means that at some level artists must produce work that will meet funding criteria, and hence produce work for a pre-existent market and demand. Art, then, must be both autonomous and heteronomous in relation to the field of economics, and meet the rules of the economic game in various contexts.

Since artists and artistic products function as incarnated sign systems and privileged forms of expression only to the extent that they are so identified, they must produce themselves as such in order to affirm a social character. This typically takes the form of assuming a commodity status for themselves and their products, and I would like to move now to discuss this with reference to Arjun Appadurai's analysis of the social nature of commodities.

Appadurai defines a commodity as any social thing intended for exchange (1986: 9); this means that anything, or anybody, can be a commodity at that point where the significant feature of the object is its exchangeability. As noted earlier, 'real' art is not produced principally for economic exchange. However, at some level it is always produced for an audience, and hence is designed to be exchangeable for money, respect, social advancement or other forms of capital. Ian Burn, in fact, argues that 'Not only do works of art end up as commodities, but there is also an overwhelming sense in which works of art *start off* as commodities' (1991: 152) - and hence that the field of arts is structured fundamentally in terms of economic logic. Nonetheless, the logic of pricing in this field must be negotiated differently from that of objects with an obvious use since as Bourdieu shows, 'Cultural production ... must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object' (1993: 164). Consequently, the value of arts depends on the orchestration of demand, and this is predicated upon belief in its value - that is, on its status as fetish. The production of this belief is augmented by the context in which the object or practice is located: artists, art products, and arts audiences are situated, and consequently, art is often identified as such merely because of its context. For instance, Marcel Duchamp's urinal is an art object because it is disconnected from its utility, associated with other art objects by being placed in a gallery, associated with a known artist, and named (labelled) as an art object *Fountain* 1917.

The social character of artists, and the conditions for the production and reception of their works, similarly depend on context, and particularly on the discourses - or fantasies - of communities and the stories that circulate locally as truths. In Central Queensland, for instance, art is not a privileged form, and does not function as a fetish with high exchange value. Consequently, artists across the region have complained that their works attract a substantially lower price at home than in metropolitan centres. Their statements are supported by



local officials, who have publicly expressed surprise and dismay that '\$50 worth of paint and frame can be priced at \$500' - it is not 'obviously' worth that much, according to the logic of rural economics. This rejection of art's value can be negotiated, for instance by representing art as productive in order to credentialise the work and the artist in terms of local structures of logic and value. However, since art does not accord readily with notions of productivity or economic logic, arts practitioners must discursively produce the field, and its players and products as having an intrinsic worth, one based on an abstract (decontextualised) value (Zizek, 1994: 299). This depends on a process of disavowal, since it is only possible to posit the existence of decontextualised value if other knowledges are forgotten. For instance, the knowledge that exchange value is based on social context rather than inherent value, or the knowledge that money, the medium of convertability, has no 'real' value itself and so cannot 'really' accord value to an object. The disavowal works, in that we know very well that there is no 'real' connection between the object and value, or between money and value, but we behave as though a connection exists, and as though exchange on this basis were feasible. Through this misrecognition, we construct a social reality in which it, in fact, becomes possible, and while we recognise the social reality, we disavow the illusion that constructs it (318).

This fetishistic disavowal is particularly evident in the arts market, since artistic discourse depends on disinterestedness - 'artists are not supposed to slaver after success' (Burke, 1990: 20) - but the arts world is as marked as other public fields by ambition and self-aggrandising. The focus group participants state that art is 'a solitary journey with one's own artform'; however, they simultaneously acknowledge that works are instituted as art by being sold. Consequently, while artists may scorn 'merely commercial' success, winning grants or selling works to powerful institutions constitutes symbolic as well as economic capital, and therefore artists must commodify their work and develop market literacies while simultaneously masking this interest in order to affirm the character of the 'true artist'. Nor is it possible, even for fully autonomous artists, to pursue their 'solitary journey' in a way that is not inflected by current artistic norms. Artists and their works depend on, and are produced out of, the contexts in which they are made or found (Chadwick, 1990: 9) and have meaning and value attached to them by cultural agents and discourses, and to this extent they are never free. As Ian Burn complains:

I am obviously faced with functionally different circumstances from those of the early 1950s. In that period, in order to create a privileged art, it was necessary to produce something markedly different from what Europe was producing ... To create a successful (that is, privileged) art [now], I must now affirm and perpetuate at least one of the dominant styles (Burn, 1991: 158-159).

That is, whether artists consider themselves 'pure' or commercial, they and their styles are produced out of various discourses, norms and belief systems, as well as the market structures.

The susceptibility of arts practices to external forces is more visible in regional than in urban areas, since regional communities are usually marked by the absence of an arts infrastructure. Consequently, the pricing and selling of art, which is conventionally the task of gallery directors and dealers, must be undertaken by the artists themselves, which exposes them to the rifts in the logic of artistic disinterest. Central Queensland, for instance, is a particularly difficult site for marketing arts, and artists must visibly negotiate this. Difficulties for artists include the relatively impoverished status of the area, the absence of wealthy tourists, and the absence of a culture which values art. It is also difficult for local artists to break into the urban market, since they have found that city dealer monopolies tend to neglect regional artists in favour of urban art. These difficulties are typically responded to by practice that pertains to the heteronomous pole - the artists produce for established markets, offering representational scenes of local interest to the local market, and expressive or avant garde work for the city.

The pricing and selling of art, then, constitutes that uncomfortable point where the 'repository of social meaning' is transformed into a 'mere' commodity, and hence is an insertion of the vulgar real into the pure life of the transcendent thing. This can be negotiated, however, and the work retrieved from its commodity phase and reinscribed into the field of pure art, by being associated with consecrated agents. The focus group participants state that their work is particularly consecrated 'if it is purchased by a recognised market such as the university, or a city dealer, or wins an award or other certification', and that targeting such markets redeems their practice from the 'merely' commercial, or the fully heteronomous.

Art products, then, are instituted as art by being sold as art. They are also instituted by being made by consecrated practitioners, as is evident in the transformation of urinal to artistic work by its association with Marcel Duchamp. Locally, objects are instituted as art because they are produced by practitioners who are known to be 'good artists', and who are identified as such because they have been credentialised by external forces, as above, or because other 'good artists' recognise them as peers. That is, it depends upon a fetishising of the artist, and hence on a logic of belief. It is not the decontextualised work in itself, but the association of that work with a recognised artist, that lends it value and a social identity. Its value depends not on itself, but on that sleight of hand by which a (consecrated) name can transform a product from the ordinary into the artistic, and hence from an object worth only the cost of its inputs, into something whose value is detached from the purely material (Bourdieu, 1993: 81).

This means that there must be processes by which local artists are consecrated as such. In Central Queensland, this is generally through their association with external consecrating agents operating within the wider field of power. For instance, a remarkably high percentage of the local artists who

participated in my research project have tertiary qualifications and are employed as artists by the University, City Council or TAFE. That is, they are consecrated by professional employment and by official credentials, rather than being affirmed by the field of arts.

Local artists in Rockhampton and the Capricorn Coast are also consecrated as artists because of their difference from the norm. The participants argued that artists think of themselves, and are viewed by the general community, as 'having a different mind-set' which is in opposition to 'local redneckery'. They dress, think and behave differently from their neighbours, and consequently they and their lifestyles are different from, and interesting to, the general community. That is, they are identified and consecrated according to a certain authorised exoticism which is produced in terms of the logic of arts, and through reference to a notion of distinction. This production of the exotic relies on the received definition of the artist as alienated, as intrinsically different, and as able to transcend the banality of the everyday; and in terms of a binary logic, means that it is simultaneously part of, and dependent upon, the everyday. The magic of the sign of the artist, then, depends not on the logic of the field of arts, but on a wider set of structures and relations in which it is constituted.

Consequently, there is no such thing as an abstract or decontextualised artist or art object. While art theory and history can present a concrete map of the field and its structures, the field is marked by incommensurable discourses and practices, by structures whose form is inflected by external fields and agents, and by a series of misperformances. The map, then, is continually reshaped by complex patterns of performance based on various forms of interest. Further, though the discourse of pure art has material effects in that it shapes the field and the range, and value, of positions available to practitioners, it does not 'really' exist, since the field of arts is never fully autonomous from the social fields in which it is embedded. Rather, all autonomous production is 'contaminated' by economic logic. Simultaneously, all heteronomous production takes its form by virtue of its association with the space of pure art. Consequently, the heteronomous and the autonomous 'poles' exist only with reference to, and by continually spilling into and reshaping, each other. Consecrated (autonomous) artists and art works exist as such because they have been able to assume a commodity form according to the logic of the heteronomous pole. Similarly, heteronomous artists and art works attract commodity value because of the reflected logic of the autonomous pole, and this constitutes a point at which the discourse of the disinterested and alienated artist, or the transcendent art work, can be problematised.

Finally then, artists articulate the autonomous and the heteronomous principles through the working of another kind of Zizekian fetishistic disavowal. They know very well that their art must be published in order to exist, and so at some level it is produced for a specific market; yet they behave as though it were transcendent and disinterested. In this way the local artists manage to negotiate the exigencies of arts practice outside the support structures that exist in metropolitan centres, realise their identity as producers of

consecrated art, and thereby accumulate the symbolic capital that accrues in their part of the field.

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## Chapter 12

# ‘Heritage’ as representation of regional culture: An exploratory study from Queensland

*Gene Dayton*

### Introduction

This paper will explore the notion that what we define as ‘heritage’ is a reflection of our culture. Accordingly, by examining what has been identified as ‘heritage’ in various locales we can to some degree classify different areas into ‘cultural regions’ based on their heritage identity. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to try to identify some cultural regions in the state of Queensland using ‘heritage sites’, attributes of those sites, and associated features of the areas as a basis for regional classification.

The paper will firstly identify the data sources which form the basis for the subsequent analysis. It will then attempt to discuss spatial patterns in heritage representation in Queensland. Explanations which may (in part) account for those patterns will be suggested.

The significance of research such as this is that ultimately it may help to counteract the stereotyped notions of the nature of Australia as a nation and Australians as a people that have rapidly become enshrined, particularly in rural and provincial areas, as the ‘true’ manifestations of what constitutes the ‘real Australia’. The relationship that will be revealed between heritage conservation and patterns of economic growth and decline may lead us to question whether what we are trying to protect as ‘heritage’ is genuinely the ‘things we want to keep’ or merely the artefacts of the market system in yet one more arena for the commodification of anything from which we might potentially realise an ‘economic return’.

## **Data sources**

Although the Australian Heritage Commission has established a list of 'places of national significance' and has recorded these on the *Register of the National Estate* since 1975 (A.H.C.,1990) the Queensland Government did not pass legislation protecting the 'built environment' (historic buildings and places, generally known as 'sites') until 1992 (Duncan, 1993: 174). The Queensland legislation provides for listing places of historic significance on the *Queensland Heritage Register* (QHR). The QHR used for this study is dated 19 December 1994, at which point in time some 976 sites (some of which were 'precincts' with more than one distinct building or structure) were listed (Q.D.E.H., 1994). Since that time there have been additions to (and probably some deletions from) the QHR. According to staff involved in compiling the QHR, the listed sites largely reflect the activities of local historical societies and the Queensland National Trust, from which most nominations to the QHR have been received (Gardner, 1995). National Trust personnel in turn acknowledge that recommendations from local historical groups and individuals are often highly idiosyncratic (Lillie, 1995). No state-wide attempt at a systematic review and coordination of historic sites has yet been accomplished (Gardner, 1995). It must be kept in mind, therefore, that in using the sites listed in the QHR as an indicator of heritage representation (and therefore of culture), we are dealing with a dynamic entity that is still actively evolving.

As QHR sites are recorded by the local authority (LGA) in which they are located, LGA's have been used as the basis for mapping the distribution of QHR sites and for analysis of spatial patterns. Figures 8 and 9 in the Appendix give the names and locations of the 134 LGA's as used in this study (ABS, 1995a). One name change to note is that Whitsunday Shire (Figure 8) is called 'Proserpine' in Table 2 (Appendix) which is the LGA list used for the study. Also note that several amalgamations of LGA's which occurred in 1995 have been ignored in this study (the current state government may split some of these up again), and the 'LGA's' of 'Weipa' and 'Unincorporated Area' (Table 2) do not have true LGA status and are not used in this study.

Data for the population of LGA's and the percentage growth (or decline) over the period 1988-93 (as referred to later) come from the A.B.S. (1995b). These are intercensal estimates.

## **'Heritage' as cultural indicator**

Numerous studies have highlighted the ways in which heritage places (historic buildings, other structures and their environs) play significant roles in helping us to define 'where we come from' and therefore, 'who we are'. Notable Australian studies in this regard include Atkinson, 1988; Davison, 1991; Seddon, 1994; Taylor and Winston-Gregson, 1992, and Townsend, 1993. Indeed, the role of 'heritage' as prescriptive constructs of local, regional and

national identity is increasingly recognised, if criticised, in works such as Curthoys and Hamilton, 1992; Huf, 1995; Kapferer, 1995; and Trotter, 1992.

Studies to document the spatial patterns of Queensland's historic heritage sites have been initiated by Dayton (1992, 1995) and Head (1991), although these have focussed on the Central Queensland region. The present study attempts to extend the work of Dayton (1995) to the state-wide level in Queensland.

### **Spatial patterns in the QHR**

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of QHR sites by LGA's. Note that 33 of the 134 LGA's (25 percent) had (as of 19 December 1994) no registered historic sites. Seventy-two LGA's (54 percent) had 1-4 sites; 30 (22 percent) had 5-60 sites; while one (Brisbane City) had 320. Although the average (arithmetic mean) number of sites was 7.3 per LGA, the influence of Brisbane and a few other LGA's pulls this 'average' up considerably. More typical is the modal number of 1-4 sites per LGA, with the median number also being four.

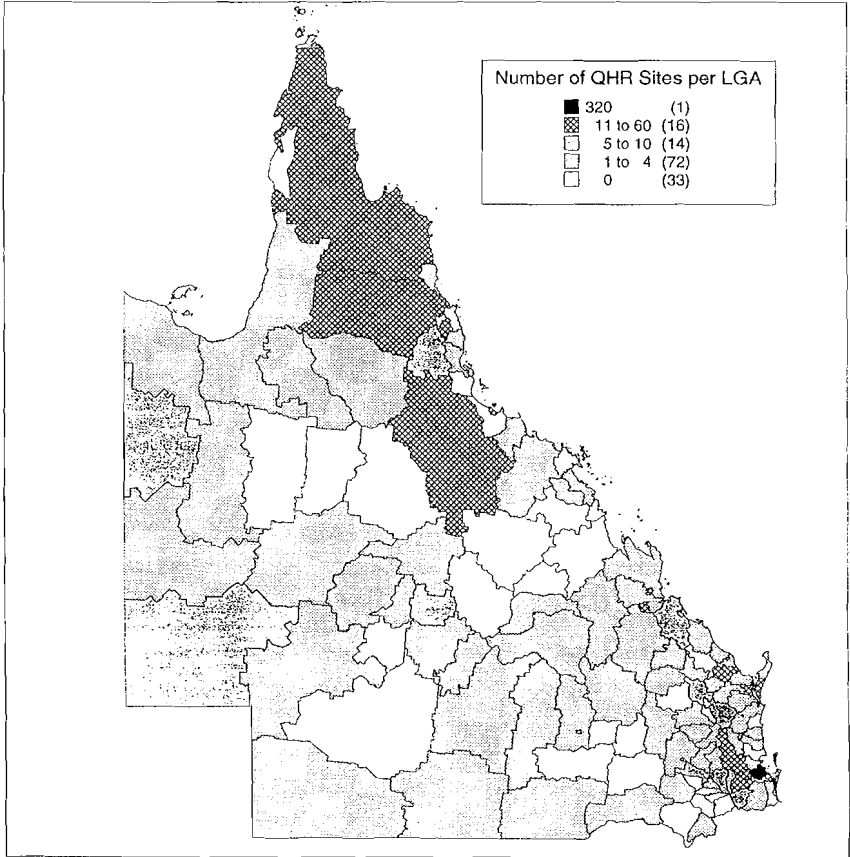
On its own Figure 1 does not seem to offer any meaningful pattern to the distribution of QHR sites. However, if the number of QHR sites per LGA are expressed in terms of the number of persons per site for each LGA (see Figure 2), a pattern begins to emerge. Now, although there are exceptions and the pattern is by no means consistent, there is a general tendency for LGA's in the inland regions to have far fewer persons per site than is typical in many coastal areas. Indeed, the variation is extreme, with (rounded to the nearest 10 persons) as few as 50 persons per site in Diamantina Shire in far western Central Queensland (where 5 sites occur) to as many as 72 380 persons per site in Logan City (where only two sites occur). Table 2 (Appendix) shows this data for all LGA's (note in LGA's where no sites occur a notional '0' has been placed in the 'Persons-per-Site' column). The state average is about 3 000 persons per site.

To someone familiar with the patterns of population growth and decline in Queensland, Figure 2 resembles a map of population change, which has been provided for the period 1988-93 in Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows that 31 percent of Queensland's LGA's - mostly in inland locations - have a declining population, while another 19 percent have stagnant rates of growth (0 percent to 0.9 percent over the five-year period). Only 11 percent have rapid rates of growth (5.1 percent to 8.9 percent over 1988-93, equivalent to 1 percent or more per annum). Thus despite Queensland's overall moderate-to-rapid rate of population growth, that growth is highly centralised in a few favored locations, principally in the southeastern corner adjoining Brisbane.

The possibility arises that there could be a causal relationship between population change (itself a powerful indicator of economic growth) and the distribution of QHR sites when expressed on a 'persons per site' basis. Figure 4 tests this relationship using standard correlation analysis. (The 'log value' of

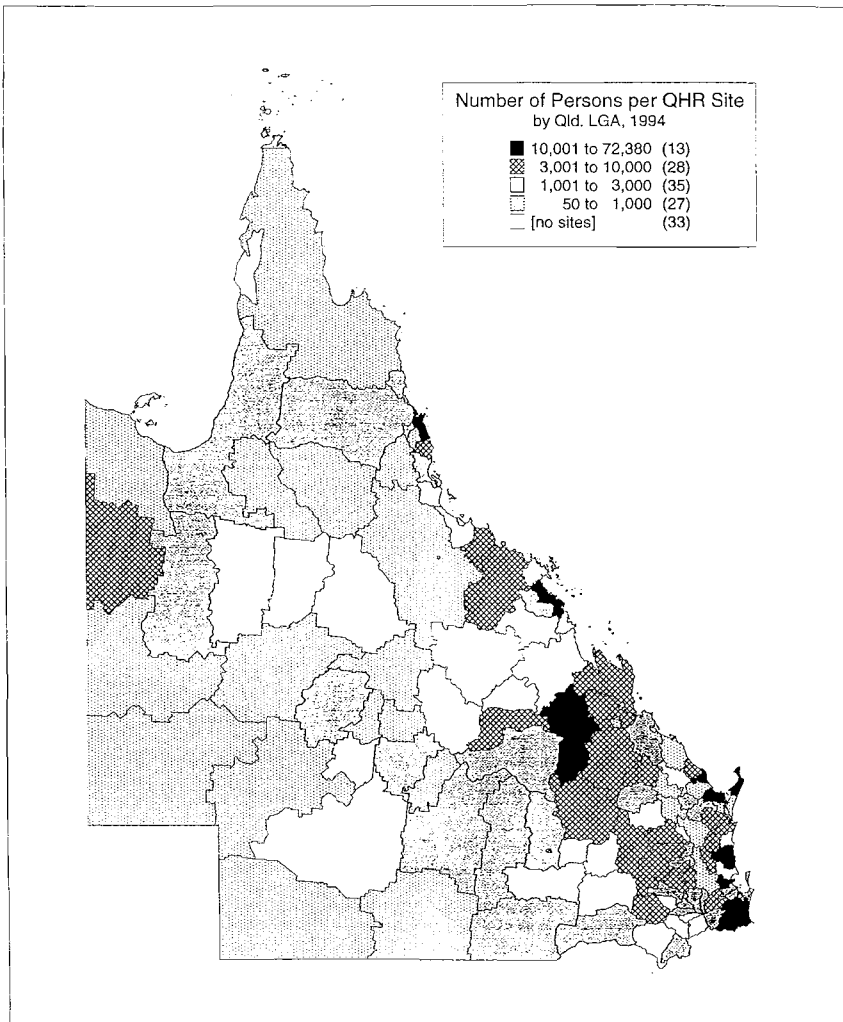
Figure 1



Data from: Queensland Heritage Register, 1994.



**Figure 2**



Based on data from: QDEH, 1994 and A.B.S., 1995.

persons per site was used to compensate for the strong positive skew in the distribution of that data set.) The result yields a statistically significant 'r-value' of +.51, indicating a 'moderate' degree of relationship between population change and the number of persons per QHR site in each LGA. However, as the regression line shows, there is only a 'moderate' degree-of-fit to the regression line and numerous LGA's have comparatively large residual values. Nonetheless this relationship can provide a basis for classifying LGA's into 'cultural regions' based on their QHR site and population/economic growth characteristics.

### **'Heritage' regions**

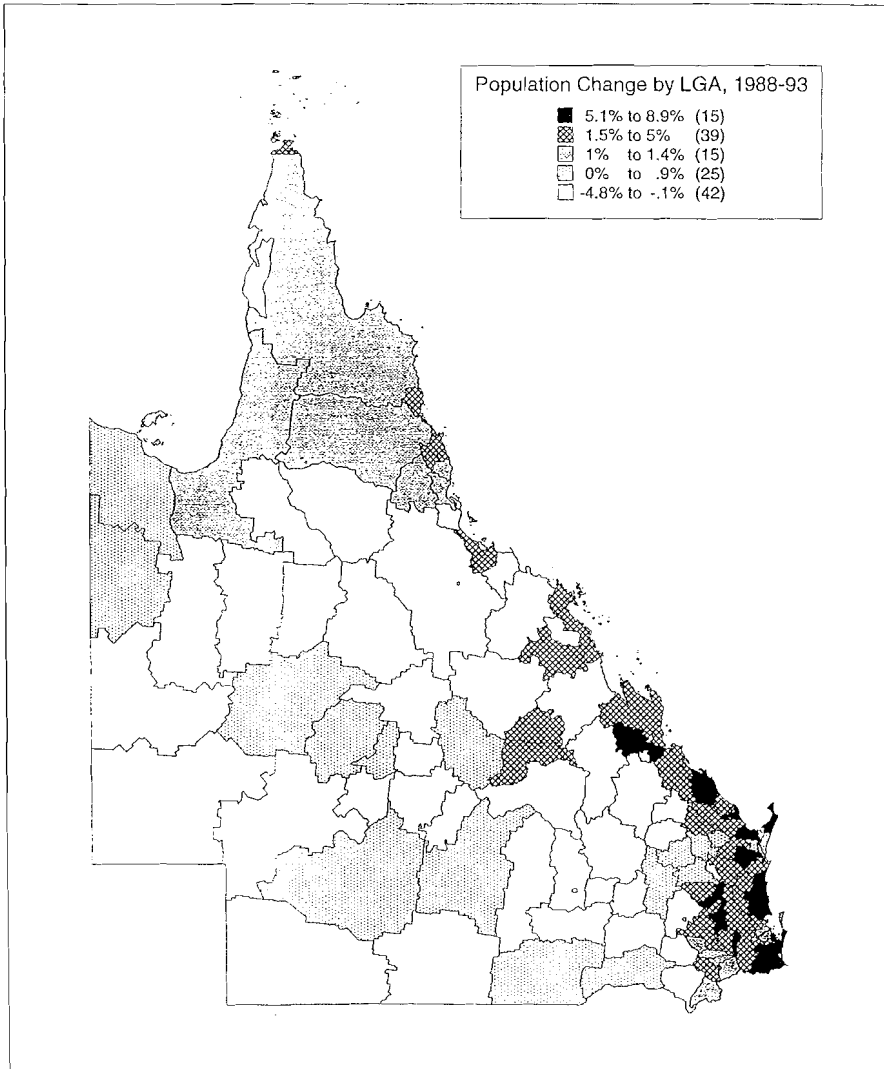
Figure 5 shows 29 shaded LGA's where the number of persons per QHR site is less than 1 500 (for example, less than half the state average) while the rate of population growth in those same LGA's is less than 1.5 percent over the five-year period 1988-93 (significantly less than the state average of 2.6 percent). These are, in effect, areas that are 'heritage-rich' (in terms of persons per site) and at the same time are experiencing near stagnant population growth, if not actual decline. In fact 16 of the 29 LGA's in this group are experiencing a loss of population. Those 29 LGA's (see Table 3 in the Appendix for a list of the LGA names) are mostly in 'inland' locations, and occupy more than half (56 percent) of the state's land area. However, it is possible to distinguish two different sets of locales in the 'heritage' region.

Firstly, there are the 'inland' LGA's (including those in the far north). Almost all of these have declining populations, yet very low numbers of persons per QHR site: as few as 50 in Diamantina Shire, 60 in Croydon Shire, with most of the others in the 300-600 persons per site range. The second group is mostly coastal or near-coastal cities or towns where population growth (within the LGA boundary) is stagnant. These LGA's include Ipswich (with 57 QHR sites), Maryborough (34), Mt Morgan (11), Rockhampton (45), and Townsville (58) - five 'urban' LGA's with 205 QHR sites among them. This represents 21 percent of the state's total, a figure second only to that of Brisbane (with 320, or 33 percent of the total).

### **'A-Historic' regions**

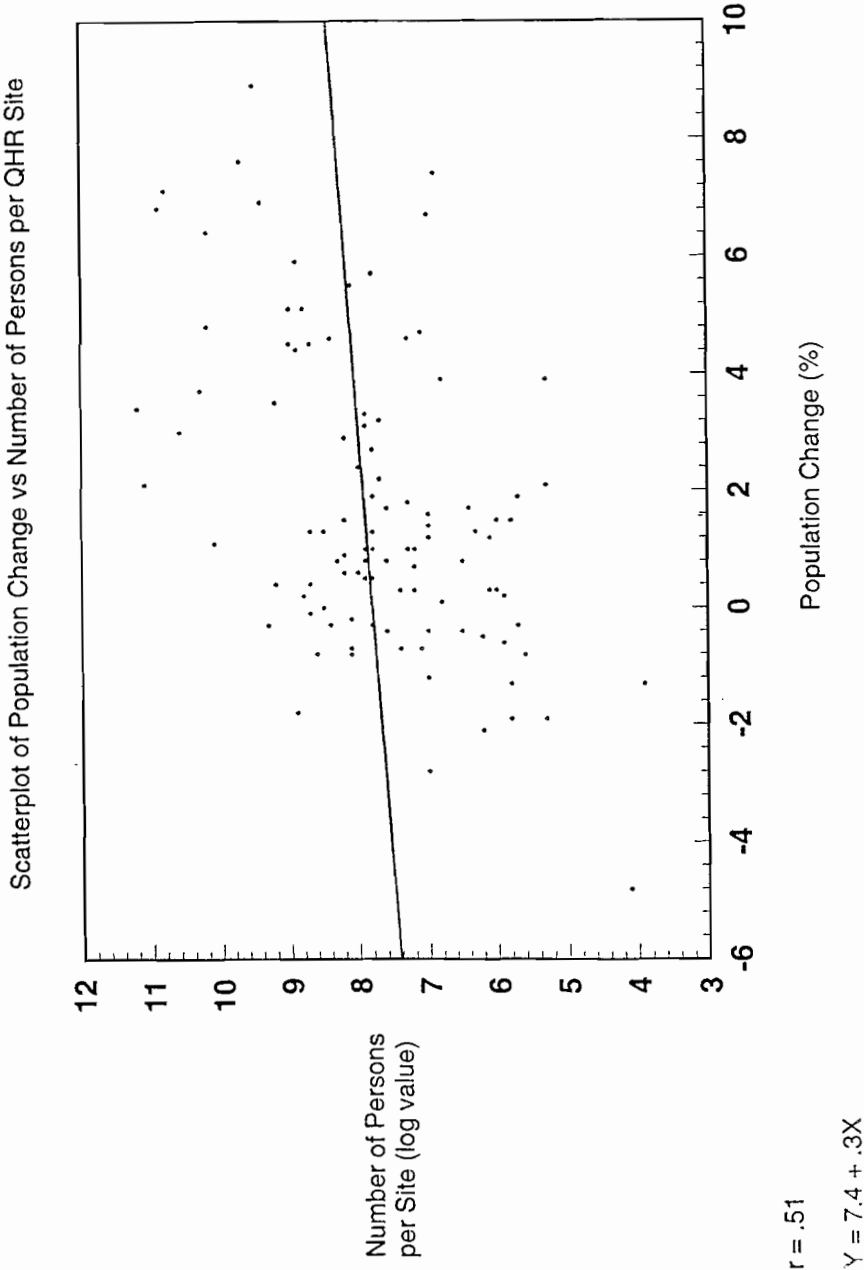
Figure 6 shows 18 shaded LGA's which have been categorised as 'a-historic' areas. These are LGA's with large numbers of persons per QHR site (7 170 to 72 380) which also have rapid rates of population (and economic) growth (see Table 4 in the Appendix for the LGA list). With the sole exception of Redland Shire (11 QHR sites), all the others have no more than three sites, seven of the 18 having only one QHR site. Geographically, these areas are almost entirely coastal, and are generally in the expanding urbanised regions adjacent to established, but slower growing cities such as Cairns (only 1.3 percent increase

**Figure 3**

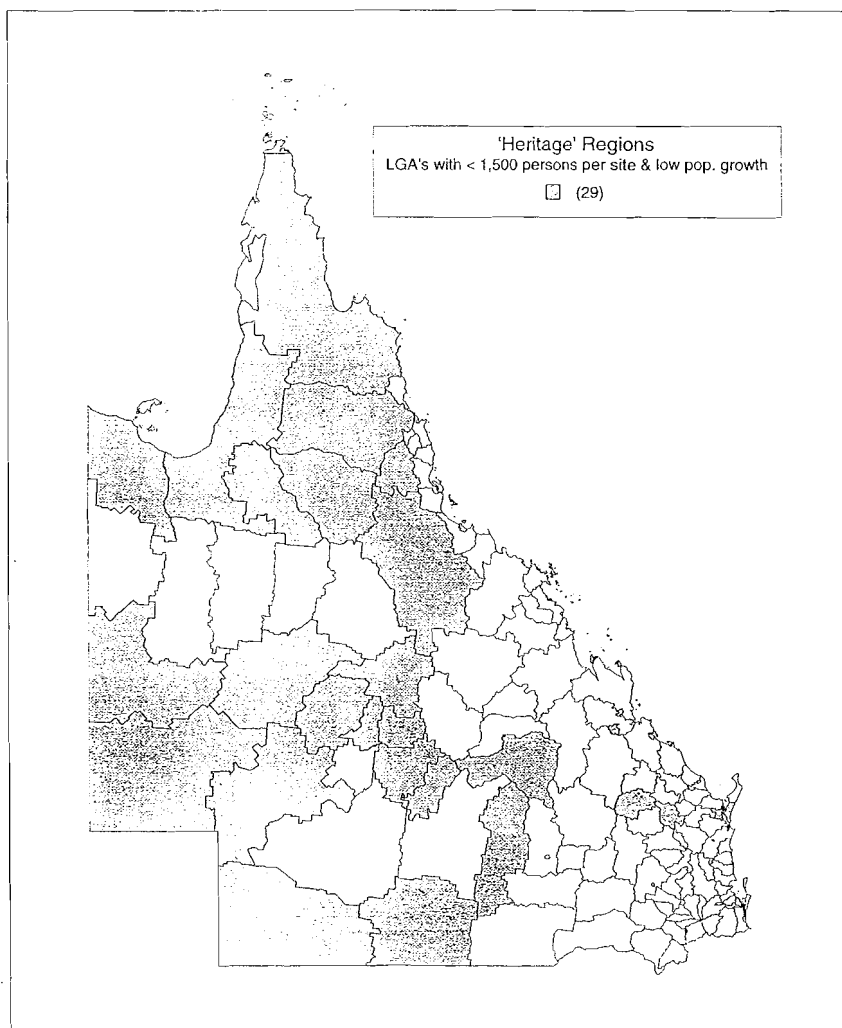


Data from: A.B.S., 1995.

Figure 4



**Figure 5**



in population within its LGA boundaries, 1988-93), Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Maryborough, Gympie and Brisbane.

### **Unclassified LGA's (with QHR sites)**

Figure 7 shows 56 shaded LGA's which have QHR sites, but which don't fit into the criteria for either the 'heritage' regions or the 'a-historic' regions. (Table 5 in the Appendix lists these.) Geographically most of these areas are in south-eastern Queensland, including Brisbane and much of its inland hinterland. With minor changes to the classification criteria used above, some would readily fit into one or the other two categories; e.g., Warwick, Brisbane, Cloncurry, Goondiwindi and Murweh come close to being 'heritage' regions on both criteria. Johnstone, Moreton, and Redcliffe are close to falling into the 'a-historic' group. Each of these seven LGA's just named conform well to the geographic pattern for the 'heritage' or 'a-historic' groups respectively.

### **Explaining the spatial patterns**

The basic parameter that seems well-correlated with the geographic distributions of both the 'heritage' and the 'a-historic' regions is economic growth. In the 'heritage' regions, economic growth (as indicated by population stagnation or decline) is limited. It is suggested that in both types of areas in this group - the outback regions *and* the cities - that 'heritage' has been identified as an alternative approach to generating economic growth: in effect, the 'economic development strategy of last resort'. When all else fails, 'go for history'. Nomination of heritage sites is accepted, indeed welcomed, by the local community as there are few competing pressures on land use; hence protection of 'historic sites' carries no economic penalties.

By contrast, in the 'a-historic' regions, vibrant economic growth discourages nomination of heritage sites: to do so would put constraints on the ability of the property market to demolish or even alter existing structures, and hence is seen as creating potential obstacles to further economic development. Nor should it be assumed that these 'a-historic' regions lack either sites or 'history'. Most have white settlement histories comparable to those of the 'heritage' regions, and offer many buildings and other structures that are by any criteria equivalent in 'heritage value' to similar sites which are on the QHR in other locations. For example the Mackay district (Mackay LGA and adjacent areas) has only nine QHR sites, but Butler (1994) identified 592 potential historic/heritage sites in the Mackay, Pioneer and Mirani LGA's alone!

A review of some of the tourist literature available from tourism promotion bureaus further illustrates the nexus between 'heritage' and economic development. To cite just a few examples from Central Queensland:

**Figure 6**

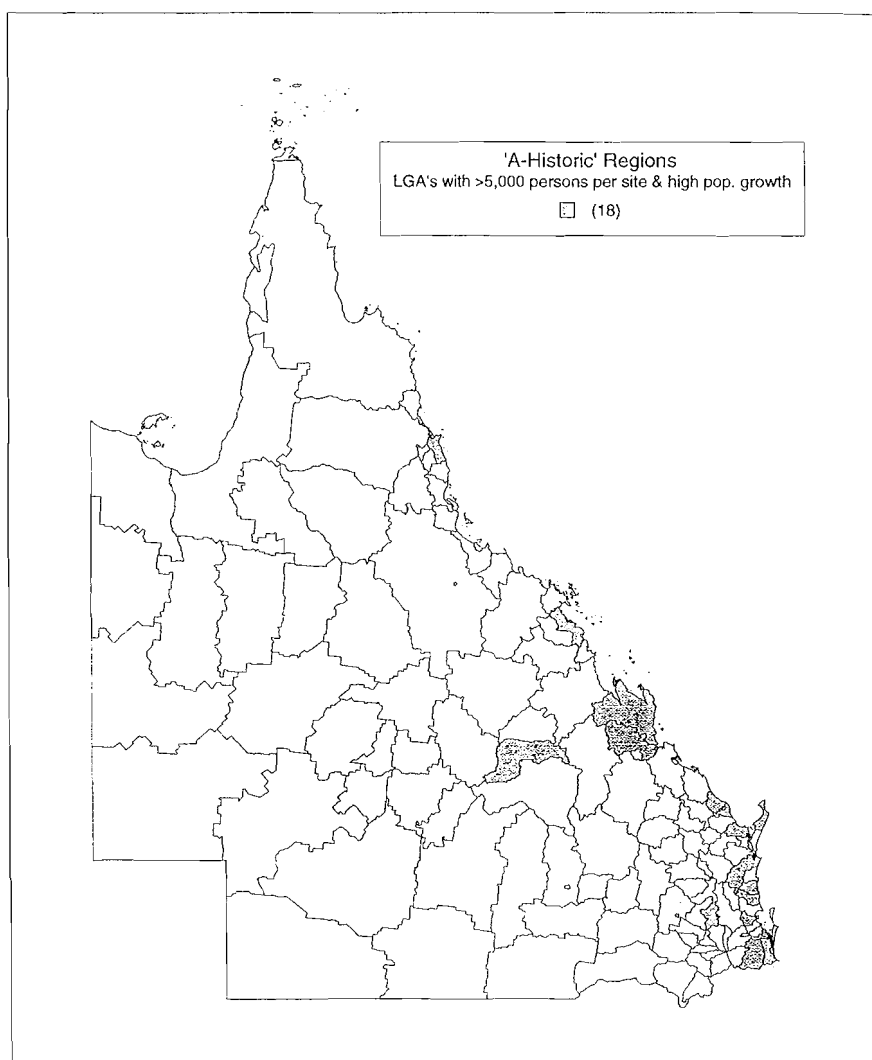
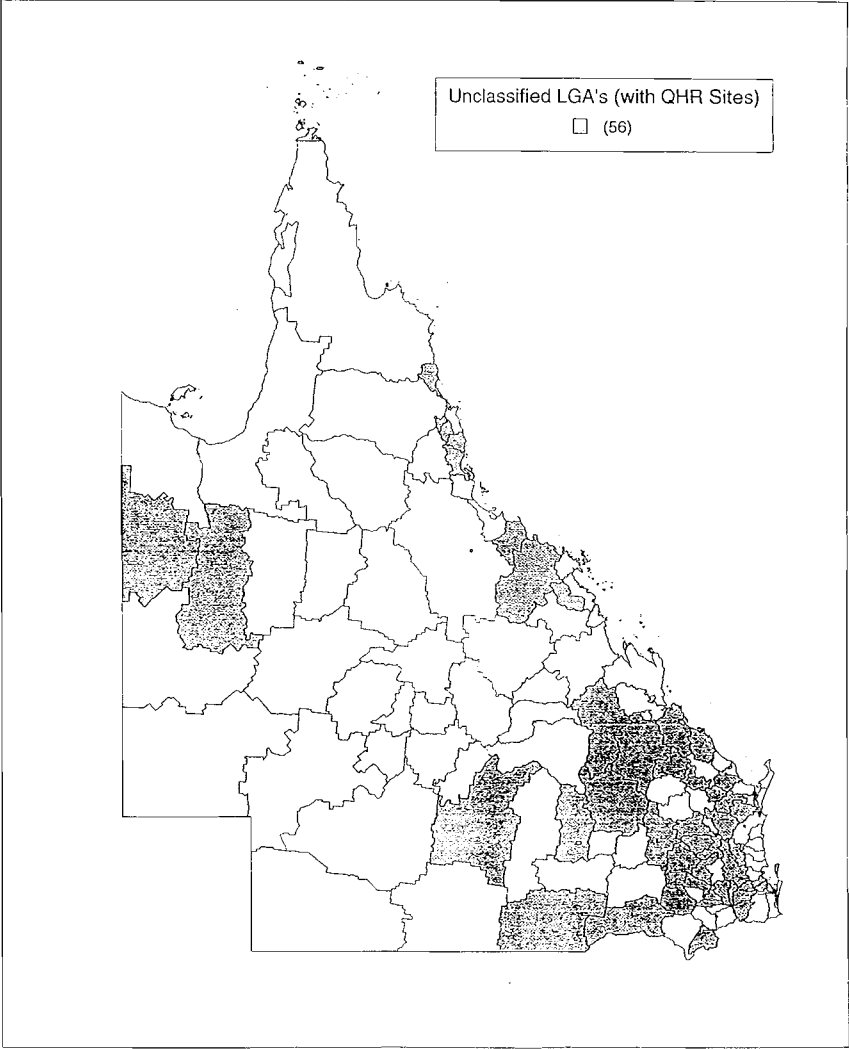


Figure 7





- 'Things to See and Do in Mackay' (Tourism Mackay, Inc. n.d.) lists 85 'attractions' in the city and its environs - but only five of these are related to 'heritage/history'.
- 'Gladstone Visitors Guide' (*The Observer*, 1995: 18) lists 'thirty ways to enjoy Gladstone'; only two of these are history/heritage-related.

#### **In slow growth/declining areas**

- 'In and Around Longreach' (Longreach Tourist Promotion Assoc., Inc., 1994-95), 18 heritage-oriented attractions are listed, more than twice the number of other types combined.
- Mt Morgan's Shire Council (1994) listed 20 of its 22 'attractions' as heritage/history-oriented.

The author has dozens of similar examples of tourist literature from around Queensland which replicate the situations illustrated above. The overall pattern is fairly clear-cut: in regions where economic/population growth is strong 'heritage' is of little interest to the commercial sector. In regions with declining or stagnant economic/population conditions 'heritage' often plays (or tries to play) a major economic role in the local community. The 'heritage' regions portrayed here are in effect areas where the cultural landscape has been commodified for the purposes of promoting economic growth. In the 'a-historic' regions market forces inhibit the identification and protection of heritage sites as these are not seen to offer significant economic returns compared with the alternative land use options which are available. In *both* sets of areas the regional cultures are commodified; it is only in how they *value* their heritage commodities that the two types of regions differ.

What about the 'unclassified' areas (Figure 7)? The author proposes that over time most of those LGA's will tend toward either the 'heritage' region model or the 'a-historic' region model. Holmes (1994: 167) characterised Queensland as a 'society and economy ... spatially dichotomised' between 'coast versus inland'. Most of the 'unclassified' LGA's belong to the latter category - even some (in the 'interstices' between the Bundaberg - Rockhampton - Mackay - Townsville - Cairns 'urban-archipelago', such as Calliope and Bowen Shires) of the coastal LGA's in this group have 'inland' socio-economic characteristics. To the degree that these remain 'inland' LGA's, they are likely to become 'heritage'-oriented; but if they take on the growth characteristics of most other coastal LGA's, then 'a-historic' cultures are likely to prevail.

#### **The nature of heritage in 'Heritage' regions**

In an attempt to characterise the nature of the QHR sites in each LGA the author classified each of the 976 QHR sites into one of the fifteen categories

which he adapted from the 27 categories used by the Australian Heritage Commission for classifying 'Historic Environment' places on the *Register of the National Estate* (A.H.C., 1994). Table 1 gives the overall pattern for Queensland.

**Table 1**

**Types of historic sites, QHR, 1994**

Percent of Sites in Category

CATEGORY *	QUEENSLAND
Residential	21
Commercial	26
Government	14
Recreation	3
Transport/communication	8
Primary industry	1
Towns, precincts	0.2
Industrial	0.2
Mining/processing	1.9
Religious	10
Educational	3.6
Monuments/memorials	8
Cemeteries/graves	1.1
Parks/gardens	1.2
Miscellaneous	1.1

\* simplified to fifteen types by author

Categories from: A.H.C., 1994, p. 89; data from: Q.D.E.H., 1994.

Note that at least one example of each of the fifteen categories occurs in the QHR. However, when the sites in each separate LGA are classified a persistent pattern appears: urban LGA's have a much greater diversity of site types; in outback and rural LGA's in general, the diversity of categories present is remarkably reduced, and remarkably homogeneous, despite the lack of any centralised direction in the site nomination and listing process. Numbers of categories present in some representative LGA's are shown here:

URBAN LGA's

Brisbane - 13 (of 15 categories)  
Ipswich - 11  
Rockhampton - 9  
Townsville - 9  
Charters Towers - 9  
Mt Morgan - 8

RURAL LGA's

Croydon - 3  
Aramac - 2  
Barcaldine - 2  
Barcoo - 2  
Paroo - 2  
Ilfracombe - 1

Thus there is a significant reduction in the variety of places which are QHR listed in rural areas in general as compared with urban centres - a reduction which is **not** due to there being less variety of potential sites available in rural areas. Rather, there seems to be a 'consensus of opinion' in rural areas that only certain, restricted types of sites can 'properly' constitute those areas 'heritage'. The most common site types in those areas are 'grand' residences (of the wealthier elites), hotels and banks (in the commercial category), police stations, courts, and customs offices (in the governmental group), churches, and monuments/memorials (especially to servicemen and -women). At the risk of seeming cynical, the pattern could be described as the imposing residences of the great land stealers (the grazing squattocracy) and mining and business magnates, the banks and customs houses to control finance and trade, hotels for travellers and to provide the 'amber opiate' for the working men, police and courts to maintain 'law and order', churches to provide solace for the women, and memorials for the honored heroes who died to protect the English Empire! The pattern is without question one of a colonial heritage. Head (1991: 97-98) noted that of the 97 historic sites covered in his survey, the average date of construction was 1888, the last being in 1922. The sites are also largely associated with men or male-dominated activities. As Huf (1995: 2) noted in her study of Central Queensland (CQ) monuments and icons, every one of the human statues in the western CQ area is of a man. And of course ethnic diversity is virtually non-existent in the sites.

Thus rural 'heritage regions' highly constrain the definition of heritage. Kapferer (1995: 13) has argued that rural heritage sites represent a form of "patriotic" or nationalist tourism, where the instructional roles of 'heritage' are 'crucially important in the inculcation of consensual images and understandings of national identity' and in legitimising 'the policies and practices of the Australian State' (3). Trotter (1992: 165) argues that such sites privilege 'heroes from a pastoral elite', who as a class are the 'natural bearers of the national character'. Thus the colonial heritage, enshrined in rural (and to a large degree in urban) 'heritage' regions may be what Davison (1991: 4) called a heritage 'defined largely in terms of what we value or repudiate in the present or fear in the future.' Accordingly, the 'heritage' regions identified in this paper may also be regions espousing a culture of social reaction and a substantial repudiation of not only the 'post-modern' but even the 'modern' culture realms of contemporary Australian society.

## **Further research**

Some avenues for further research along the lines indicated in this paper could include:

- further validation and accounting of the QHR site categories by LGA's in Queensland, and parallel studies in other states and territories in Australia.
- inquiry into the site nomination and listing processes - who are the 'actors' in this endeavour? What values and goals do they espouse?
- identifying what opportunities exist to broaden the concept of heritage, making it more inclusive and representative of our actual histories as opposed to the archetypal mythologies of our history which dominate today.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has tried to identify and map cultural regions in Queensland based on heritage-identity as revealed by sites on the *Queensland Heritage Register*. It has done so by classifying local authorities into two major sets of regions based on persons per QHR site and population growth criteria. One set of areas have been termed 'heritage regions' where it is argued limited economic opportunities have led to the emergence of a heritage industry which commodifies heritage for economic development purposes. A second set of areas has been termed 'a-historic' because alternative economic opportunities mitigate against the effective establishment of a 'heritage market' in those areas where economic growth is comparatively robust.

The paper has also noted that rural 'heritage regions' in particular put narrow constraints on their definitions of 'heritage' and attempt to prescribe a limited version of our national past which privileges certain elites while ignoring broader currents and diversities in our national history. That neither regional-type offers acceptable models of heritage representation for Australia today has been an implicit perspective throughout the paper. The task of achieving appropriate corrections to our heritage identity remains unfulfilled, but one which undoubtedly would contribute to a better understanding of regional cultures as well as a better vision of 'who we were', 'who we are', and what we 'might become'.

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## Appendix

**Figure 8**

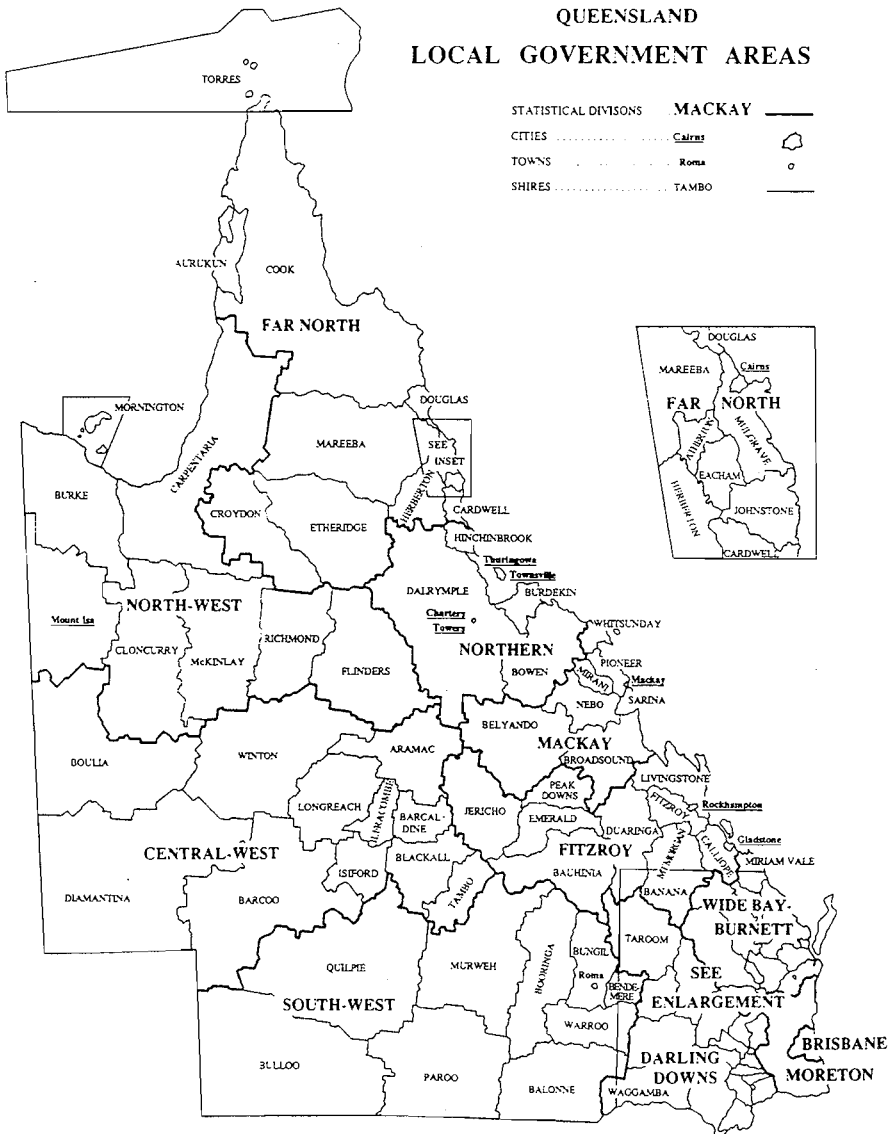


Figure 9



Source: A.B.S., 1995a, p. 20.



**Table 2**

LGA_NAME	Pop_Change_1988_93	QHR_Sites	Persons_per_Site
Albert (S)	7.1	3	48400
Allora (S)	1.2	0	0
Aramac (S)	-2.1	2	470
Atherton (S)	1.9	4	2330
Aurukun (S)	-1.0	0	0
Balonne (S)	0.8	2	2670
Banana (S)	-1.8	2	7500
Barcaldine (S)	-0.6	5	350
Barcoo (S)	-0.5	1	500
Bauhini (S)	-0.7	2	1180
Beaudesert (S)	6.9	3	12100
Belyando (S)	-0.5	0	0
Bendemere (S)	-0.8	0	0
Biggenden (S)	0.3	1	1640
Blackall (S)	-0.4	2	1070
Boonah (S)	1.6	6	1110
Booringa (S)	-1.2	2	1080
Boulia (S)	-0.8	2	280
Bowen (S)	-0.3	3	4500
Brisbane (C)	1.0	320	2380
Broadsound (S)	-0.1	0	0
Bulloo (S)	-0.3	2	300
Bundaberg (C)	0.9	9	3740
Bungil (S)	-0.4	1	2090
Burdekin (S)	-0.1	3	6160
Burke (S)	0.3	3	460
Caboolture (S)	6.4	0	0
Cairns (C)	1.3	8	5160
Calliope (S)	3.2	5	2230
Cambooya (S)	4.6	2	1500
Cardwell (S)	1.0	3	2780
Carpentaria (S)	1.2	3	1130
Charters Towers (C)	1.7	16	580
Chinchilla (S)	0.4	1	5910
Clifton (S)	0.5	1	2440
Cloncurry (S)	-0.7	2	1580
Cook (S)	1.2	17	440
Crows Nest (S)	5.1	1	6810
Croydon (S)	-4.8	4	60
Dalby (T)	0.4	1	9980
Dalrymple (S)	-1.9	17	200
Diamantina (S)	-1.3	5	50
Douglas (S)	3.3	3	2590
Duaringa (S)	-0.3	1	10550
Eacham (S)	1.9	20	290
Eidsvold (S)	-2.8	1	1050
Emerald (S)	3.5	1	9840
Esk (S)	3.9	13	870
Etheridge (S)	-1.3	3	350
Fitzroy (S)	5.1	1	8280
Flinders (S)	-1.6	0	0
Gatton (S)	2.7	6	2360
Gayndah (S)	0.3	7	420
Gladstone (C)	1.7	0	0
Glenella (S)	1.2	0	0
Gold Coast (C)	2.1	2	68630
Gooburrum (S)	4.4	1	7190
Goondiwindi (T)	1.8	3	1470
Gympie (C)	0.6	4	2880
Herberton (S)	1.3	9	520
Hervey Bay (C)	8.9	2	13890
Hinchinbrook (S)	-0.4	0	0
Iffracombe (S)	0.2	1	360
Inglewood (S)	-0.4	0	0
Ipswich (C)	0.7	57	1320
Isis (S)	3.9	24	200
Isisford (S)	-2.0	0	0
Jericho (S)	0.0	0	0
Johnstone (S)	1.3	3	6060
Jondaryan (S)	2.2	5	2150
Kilcoy (S)	2.4	1	3030

Table 2 continued

LGA_NAME	Pop_Change_1988_93	QHR_Sites	Persons_per_Site
Kilkivan (S)	1.5	7	420
Kingaroy (S)	1.5	3	3620
Kolan (S)	4.0	0	0
Laidley (S)	6.7	8	1090
Caloundra (C)	6.8	1	53140
Livingstone (S)	4.5	3	6010
Logan (C)	3.4	2	72380
Longreach (S)	0.3	3	1360
Mackay (C)	0.6	6	3810
McKinlay (S)	-1.8	0	0
Mareeba (S)	1.4	15	1140
Maroochy (S)	6.4	3	27250
Maryborough (C)	0.8	34	690
Millmerran (S)	-0.2	1	3190
Mirani (S)	-0.3	2	2390
Miriam Vale (S)	7.4	3	950
Monto (S)	-0.8	1	3140
Moreton (S)	4.6	11	4350
Mornington (S)	-2.8	0	0
Mount Isa (C)	0.0	5	4890
Mount Morgan (S)	-0.3	11	300
Mulgrave (S)	4.8	2	25650
Mundubbera (S)	0.1	0	0
Murgon (S)	-0.1	0	0
Murilla (S)	-0.8	0	0
Murweh (S)	0.8	3	1950
Nanango (S)	5.7	3	2350
Nebo (S)	1.5	0	0
Noosa (S)	6.9	0	0
Paroo (S)	-0.4	4	670
Peak Downs (S)	4.2	0	0
Perry (S)	2.1	2	190
Pine Rivers (S)	3.7	3	30150
Pioneer (S)	3.0	1	40730
Pittsworth (S)	1.3	0	0
Proserpine (S)	2.7	0	0
Quilpie (S)	0.0	0	0
Redcliffe (C)	1.1	2	24320
Redland (S)	5.9	11	7530
Richmond (S)	-0.7	0	0
Rockhampton (C)	1.0	45	1330
Roma (T)	0.2	1	6750
Rosalie (S)	2.9	2	3790
Rosenthal (S)	4.8	0	0
Sarina (S)	1.6	0	0
Stanthorpe (S)	1.3	4	2540
Tambo (S)	-1.9	2	320
Tara (S)	-0.2	0	0
Taroom (S)	-0.7	1	3220
Thuringowa (C)	4.9	0	0
Tiaro (S)	5.5	1	3330
Toowoomba (C)	1.7	41	2060
Torres (S)	3.1	3	2700
Townsville (C)	1.0	58	1490
Waggamba (S)	0.5	1	2830
Wambo (S)	-0.8	1	5360
Waroo (S)	-0.7	0	0
Warwick (C)	1.5	34	320
Weipa (T)	0.0	0	0
Widgee (S)	4.5	2	8400
Winton (S)	0.1	2	880
Wondai (S)	0.8	1	4060
Woochoo (S)	4.7	3	1150
Woongarra (S)	7.6	1	16600
Unincorporated Area C	0.0	0	0

**Table 3**

LGA_NAME	Pop_Change_1	Persons_per_Si	QHR_Sites
Aramac (S)	-2.1	470	2
Barcaldine (S)	-0.6	350	5
Barcoo (S)	-0.5	500	1
Bauhinia (S)	-0.7	1180	2
Blackall (S)	-0.4	1070	2
Booringa (S)	-1.2	1080	2
Boulia (S)	-0.8	280	2
Bulloo (S)	-0.3	300	2
Burke (S)	0.3	460	3
Carpentaria (S)	1.2	1130	3
Cook (S)	1.2	440	17
Croydon (S)	-4.8	60	4
Dalrymple (S)	-1.9	200	17
Diamantina (S)	-1.3	50	5
Eidsvold (S)	-2.8	1050	1
Etheridge (S)	-1.3	350	3
Gayndah (S)	0.3	420	7
Herberton (S)	1.3	520	9
Ilfracombe (S)	0.2	360	1
Ipswich (C)	0.7	1320	57
Longreach (S)	0.3	1360	3
Mareeba (S)	1.4	1140	15
Maryborough (C)	0.8	690	34
Mount Morgan (S)	-0.3	300	11
Paroo (S)	-0.4	670	4
Rockhampton (C)	1.0	1330	45
Tambo (S)	-1.9	320	2
Townsville (C)	1.0	1490	58
Winton (S)	0.1	880	2

**Table 4**

LGA_NAME	Pop_Change_1	Persons_per_Si	QHR_Sites
Albert (S)	7.1	48400	3
Beauresert (S)	6.9	12100	3
Crows Nest (S)	5.1	6810	1
Emerald (S)	3.5	9840	1
Fitzroy (S)	5.1	8280	1
Gold Coast (C)	2.1	68630	2
Gooburrum (S)	4.4	7190	1
Hervey Bay (C)	8.9	13890	2
Caloundra (C)	6.8	53140	1
Livingstone (S)	4.5	6010	3
Logan (C)	3.4	72380	2
Maroochy (S)	6.4	27250	3
Mulgrave (S)	4.8	25050	2
Pine Rivers (S)	3.7	30150	3
Pioneer (S)	3.0	40730	1
Redland (S)	5.9	7530	11
Widgee (S)	4.5	8400	2
Woongarra (S)	7.6	16600	1

Table 5

LGA_NAME	Pop_Change_1988_93	QHR_Sites	Persons_per_Site
Atherton (S)	1.9	4	2330
Balonne (S)	0.8	2	2670
Banana (S)	-1.8	2	7500
Barcaldine (S)	-0.6	5	350
Biggendun (S)	0.6	4	1110
Boonah (S)	1.6	6	1110
Bowen (S)	-0.3	3	4500
Brisbane (C)	1.0	320	2380
Bundaberg (C)	0.9	9	3740
Bungil (S)	-0.4	1	2090
Burdekin (S)	-0.1	3	6160
Burke (S)	0.3	3	460
Cairns (C)	1.3	8	5160
Calliope (S)	3.2	5	2230
Cambooya (S)	4.6	2	1500
Cardwell (S)	1.0	3	2780
Charters Towers (C)	1.7	16	580
Chinchilla (S)	0.4	1	5910
Clifton (S)	0.5	1	2440
Cloncurry (S)	-0.7	2	1580
Dalby (T)	0.4	1	9980
Douglas (S)	3.3	3	2590
Duaringa (S)	-0.3	1	10550
Eacham (S)	1.9	20	290
Esk (S)	3.9	13	870
Gatton (S)	2.7	6	2360
Goondiwindi (T)	1.8	3	1470
Gympie (C)	0.6	4	2880
Isis (S)	3.9	24	200
Johnstone (S)	1.3	3	6060
Jondaryan (S)	2.2	5	2150
Kilcoy (S)	2.4	1	3030
Kilkivan (S)	1.5	7	420
Kingaroy (S)	1.5	3	3620
Laidley (S)	6.7	8	1090
Mackay (C)	0.6	6	3810
Millmerran (S)	-0.2	1	3190
Mirani (S)	-0.3	2	2390
Miriam Vale (S)	7.4	3	950
Monto (S)	-0.8	1	3140
Moreton (S)	4.6	11	4350
Mount Isa (C)	0.0	5	4890
Murweh (S)	0.8	3	1950
Nanango (S)	5.7	3	2350
Perry (S)	2.1	2	190
Redcliffe (C)	1.1	2	24320
Roma (T)	0.2	1	6750
Rosalie (S)	2.9	2	3790
Stanthorpe (S)	1.3	4	2540
Taroom (S)	-0.7	1	3220
Tiaro (S)	5.5	1	3330
Toowoomba (C)	1.7	41	2060
Torres (S)	3.1	3	2700
Waggamba (S)	0.5	1	2830
Wambo (S)	-0.8	1	5360
Warwick (C)	1.5	34	320
Wondai (S)	0.8	1	4060
Woocoo (S)	4.7	3	1150

## Chapter 13

# Regionalism, isolation, the Australian artist

*Andrea Ash*

I propose that the understanding of regionalism in recent Australian art has been obscured by two related but contentious assumptions:

- 1 the assumption that regional art is isolated from national or international vanguard art, and
- 2 the assumption that the regional style is necessarily derivative or an 'inflection' of metropolitan style.

For the purpose of this paper a distinction is made here between a metropolis and a region, for example:

A metropolis creates a cosmopolitan urban situation by drawing upon many other centres and regions for its own growing population and creates a cultural dynamic from the urban environment .... That dynamic depends less and less for the creation of its art and its standards upon other centres .... In its maturity the styles and the standards of the metropolis are admired and imitated by the cultural provinces that have become dependent upon it. (Smith, 1971: 334)

Metropolitan elites striving for hegemony appropriate regional art as signs of nation and as national achievement. Some art works may be accorded such value because they are seen to contribute to the formation of national identity; others may be appropriated as more generalised manifestations of 'national culture', that is, something 'all Australians can be proud of', even if the work itself is not at all concerned with 'national character' (Fry and Willis, 1989: 225). One example is the Sydney Biennale (since 1988, the Australian Biennale), a biennial survey of contemporary art in which the 'best' of recent Australian art is displayed alongside the avant-garde art of other nations. Such exhibitions establish a competitive framework within which even the most resistant works can be read as incorporated by and validating the centre.

An aggressively political usage of regionalism was fashionable throughout the 1970s. In the Whitlam era of the early to mid 1970s in Australia (when multiculturalism, aboriginality and women's liberation were vigorous social movements) leftist artists could be heard demanding 'third world identifications' and leftist critics aggressively identified and combated US cultural imperialism. A number of cultural groups had a simple nationalist enthusiasm for 'buying back Australia' (Colless, 1989: 133). The purchase of *Blue Poles* in 1973 by the Australian National Art Gallery was probably one of the best investments the art world has witnessed; it received an accolade nothing else had ever achieved for Australia. The publicity value of *Blue Poles* was phenomenal. By comparison, in 1991 the National Gallery of Australia purchased the surrealist painter Rene Magritte's *The Lovers* which didn't gain such wide media coverage. The point I would like to make here is that the *Blue Poles* controversy was the most visible aspect of the link between the authority of the art historical, critical and curatorial institutions of 'the centre' and the index of value conferred by the international art market. Other developments reinforced this picture of active links between the international *avant-garde* and the local scene. Survey articles and essays on individual Australian artists began to appear in overseas journals (Burn, London, Merewether and Stephen, 1988: 107). Perhaps the most notable of these developments was the patronage of John Kaldor, who in 1969 invited the artist Christo as the first of a series of projects of this kind continuing to the present day. In 1996, Kaldor was instrumental in negotiating the installation of *Puppy* by Jeff Koons in Sydney.

In 1970, the work of the avant-garde Central Street Gallery artists was seen as a provincial branch of an international style having 'to this stage, nothing peculiarly Australian in its make-up' (Terry Smith, 1970, cited by Burn *et al.*, 1988: 107). Australia has generally accepted its role as a client state of European and American cultural imperialism. That is, encouraged to treat style as a signifier of value, it was easier for artists to accept Australian art as a series of footnotes to the history of European and American art (Burn *et al.*, 1988: 105). Thus, our relation to the world of international art culture is inevitably a regionalist one. We cannot claim as our own any major art movements as defined by the international art scene, such as pop art or abstract expressionism.

If, in terms of international art, Australia is in a provincial or regionalist outstation of Europe or America, then Central Queensland is equally regionalist in relation to the Sydney or Melbourne axis. Here, in a condensed version, we can see the same drama played out that directs Australia towards centres like Venice or New York. The art of the cosmopolitan metropolis is considered to be highly informed and sophisticated, where the art of the regions is raw and naive. The metropolitan reaction to regional art is almost invariably one of condescension, or of short lived enthusiasm for its apparent freshness (McDonald, 1988: 48). Complexity and sophistication have become synonymous with progress in Australian artistic work. The most damning adjective that can be applied to a work is 'crude' (Fry and Willis, 1989).

There have been efforts to free Australian art criticism from its reliance on the discourse of so-called margin and centre. Nevertheless, it is still the case that the regional artist is expected to acknowledge the primacy of international contemporary art but forbidden to aspire to it openly (McAuliffe, 1993: 58). The

art critic Robert Hughes (De Groen, 1984: 126) believes Australian art is often based on overseas prototypes but that there is a neurotic insistence here upon establishing artistic originality. Regional Australia's best and most authentic products have to leave the region in order to gain wide recognition, while the traditions within which most of our artists work have been set and refined elsewhere.

Accepting the advice, 'You should take yourself to Sydney or London because you're not going to develop if you keep on here', the artist Jeffrey Smart left Australia in the 1960s because 'Australia seemed to be dull and isolated, and Italy seemed to be thrilling and modern' (De Groen, 1984). The sculptor Clement Meadmore left Australia in the 1970s for New York because '... it seemed to be the centre of the art world ...' (De Groen, 1984: 70). The unfortunate result is that regional artistic output destined for capital city art markets has had limited influence in local communities (Searle, 1991). And regional art communities are deprived and forgotten for their nurturance of artistic product.

A problem for artists in regional areas is one of self-sufficiency. Artists based in regional areas lack access to those support systems that are common in capital cities. Few professional opportunities other than teaching exist for regional artists (Searle, 1991: 50). Webb (1996) found that most members of the arts community in Central Queensland specialise in education as teachers and lecturers. This economic factor is important as there is almost no local market nor distribution outlet for artistic merchandise in regional areas. To earn a living as an artist a person must prove his or her success in major capital cities.

The metropolis, with its museums, private galleries, and art colleges, sets the agenda to which the regional artist must conform. More often than not he or she is portrayed in the media as a rustic character or hick, devoid of the intellectual sophistication which sustains city art. One conspicuous example is the 1986 Archibald Prize winner, Davida Allen. She was portrayed as an eccentric Queensland housewife. In this instance, the media did not pay much attention to the artist's track record, including, participation in the Sydney Biennale and other international exhibitions. This kind of achievement is also illustrated by the fact that the Archibald Prize, a public favourite, has been won in successive years by regional artists (McDonald, 1988).

In the 1980s, most export exhibitions that left Australia were selected to blend seamlessly with recent international art, works that showed a suitable international emphasis. The 1984 *Australian Visions* and the 1987 *Perspecta* exhibitions are two examples. Australian artists and curators were eagerly trying to be current with the rest of the world, and there was an eagerness to show: 'We're not isolated' (Smart in De Groen, 1984: 50). Does this prove the unwitting complicity of a beleaguered artist or curator in some global tide of neo-conservatism? Can we accuse them of the closure, the marginalisation, or the privileging of certain cultural practices? More than likely, these art shows were just professional ambition.

The above-mentioned exhibitions were presented as 'representative' of contemporary Australian art, yet the most obvious conclusion for international audiences to draw was that contemporary Australian art was just the same as European or American art. Burn *et al.*, (1988) believe the methodological formulations of such exhibitions provide only 'partial and misleading accounts'

of that art, which 'obscure', 'mystify', 'reduce', 'devalue' or 'fictionalise' a complex regional identity by casting Australian art as dependent on European and American art for its sources of inspiration and standards of value.

The increasingly repetitive and predictable nature of large, conservatively-selected group exhibitions all over the world created a renewed interest in regional art (McDonald, 1988). The Esperanto art, so favoured by curators in the 1980s, belonged everywhere and nowhere; its only permanent roots lay in the realms of media and marketing. The previously mentioned exhibitions beg the question as to whether there is such a thing as an indigenous Australian art. Is there any kind of original regional vitality here that the rest of Australia and the world can recognise?

Obviously, Aboriginal art is Australia's only long standing original art form. The regionality of Aboriginal art is indisputable in geographical terms. Yet the very demand for Aboriginal art demonstrates the uneasy conscience of the metropolitan centres and their desire for an art of regional authenticity. Two Aboriginal artists, Rover Thomas and Trevor Nickolls represented Australia at the 44th Venice Biennale in 1990. In 1993, *Aratjara-Art of the First Australians*, a blockbuster exhibition of Aboriginal art, opened in London. It has become a necessary component of reputation, a signifier of 'progressiveness' to support contemporary Aboriginal art (Fry and Willis, 1989).

After decades of invisibility and neglect, Aboriginal art has been seized on by guilt-ridden critics as an area to promote and discuss (Fry and Willis, 1989). There is now a clear 'class' of producers of visual imagery (the most visible and successful being the inhabitants of isolated Central and Northern Australian communities such as Papunya, Yuendumu, Ramingining) and another 'class': a burgeoning field of non-Aboriginal experts presenting, mediating, writing commentary upon and thus promoting a new field of commodity production.

Is the only art we have the distinctive subject matter of bush and outback? The figure of landscape has pervaded high and low culture in Australia for nearly a century. The landscape has been seen as a pastoral utopia, a harsh and threatening desert, a scenic or mysterious backdrop to Victorian melodrama, a panorama to be gazed upon, and a limitless space to be imaginatively occupied (Fry and Willis, 1989; Searle, 1991). Many have pointed to the irony of the dominance of landscape imagery in such a highly urbanised nation. The power of myth, however, prevails.

At first, European-trained artists fitted the Australian landscape into ready-made conventions, but in the 1880s and 1890s a later generation of artists threw off these shackles, opened their eyes and began to see and paint Australia 'as it really is'. This fiction has stayed in place in spite of the fact that numerous art historians have pointed out, for example, that local artists remained dependent on imported visual conventions (Fry and Willis, 1989).

The work of Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, and Russell Drysdale which was shown in 1961 in London offered a mythical, idealistic image of Australia as a frontier free from urban development (McDonald, 1988: 50). The 1986 exhibition *Golden Summers: Heidelberg and Beyond* attempted to give a more distanced, art-historical view of the diversity of art in Australia during the 1880s and 1890s. In 1994, Sidney Nolan's *Ned Kelly* works were exhibited at New



York's Metropolitan Museum of Art as once again representative of Australian art.

The artist, Janet Alderson (De Groen, 1984: 5-6), now living in Europe, states, 'We should realise the advantages of a lack of history .... There's freedom in a lack of history, a tremendous advantage when you don't have anything to hold you back'. Searle (1991: 50), a Townsville curator, believes the core artistic problem at least for one regional artist, in pursuing a somewhat lonely course, has been a lack of outside influences and creative stimuli. Describing another artist on Dunk Island, Searle (1991: 47) stated, 'His art, like that of others born out of lonely and isolated circumstances, failed to develop'. These statements highlight the belief that Australia is governed in its social attitudes and artistic history by the fact of its isolation. Hughes, (De Groen, 1984: 153) believes that this isolationism is exaggerated because otherwise Australians find it difficult to rationalise and enjoy their own energies. Like Smith (1976), I criticise any highly questionable statement which paints a false picture of an indigenous Australian art flourishing in 'complete isolation' from the rest of the world. Most of our major artists travel to study overseas. Now, instead of trumpeting our mythical distance from the rest of the world, we pride ourselves on our conformity. However, neither approach gives an accurate picture of Australian art, and both are deeply parochial in their assumptions. Far from encouraging innocent art of naive purity, untainted by too much history and too much thinking, regionalism, in fact, produces highly self-conscious art obsessed with the problem of what identity should be (Smith, 1984).

Up to the 1940s and even later, there was a strong basis for discerning regional expressions within Australian art. At this time the idea of regional characteristics invoked a geographical definition and assumed that art was significantly formed by a response to a particular environment. However, while the regional environment can be a most important influence for contemporary artists, their imagery is not exclusively the product of it (Searle, 1991: 58). Many artists in Australia are identified closely with the subjects they paint, or, in the case of landscape artists, with the environment or terrain of a particular region. Fred Williams, for instance, will always be associated with the arid Australian interior. The inland deserts of Australia have provided a powerful source of imagery. Perhaps 'Nolan's generation experienced the image of the desert powerfully as myth and as a recurrent and intimidating reality' (Smith in Fuller, 1987: xiv).

The concept of art itself has changed considerably since the 1950s while the role of subject matter too has shifted and is no longer a significant vehicle. The experience of place - previously the outcome of artistic processes giving recognisable form to the appearance of one's immediate environment or customs - has become less specific, and in many ways the concept of place is now detached from geography (Searle, 1991). The late 1980s and 1990s have seen the development of the communications revolution, the age of information technology and the collapse of boundaries. One could say that a regionalist art deals with life experiences other than the experience of belonging to the self-perpetuating, hierarchical institution of the so called 'art world'. More recently, regional artists have focused on the environment as a source of more universal imagery (Searle, 1991: 58). It cannot be said that regional art deals solely in first-

order experience when we recognise the extent to which the lives of an ever larger number of people are structured and shaped by the mass media. The globalisation of art formed by mass media blurs social and geographical distinctions but also flattens differences. Indeed, Foss (1988) claims that the art of regionalism is losing ground today, is transient or without fixed address. It could also be said that many trends in art and music are now international. Because of the planetary flow of information, national boundaries dissolve. We are exposed vicariously to a kaleidoscope of cultures and images. The intrusion of the communications industry and the values of consumer capitalism into almost every locale means that first-order experiences, regional art forms, and patterns of behaviour, are being rapidly challenged. An artist's role in the future may be transformed from that of making objects to that of an information processor and disseminator (Stelarc in De Groen, 1984: 117). In the contemporary world, imagery of Australia circulates as a commodity. 'Australianness' appears as a product genre, fashion theme, corporate identity and sign of official endorsement (Fry and Willis, 1989).

Further, it is increasingly difficult to maintain a raw look when, as McDonald says, all the materials of experience arrive precooked and even premasticated (1988: 52). This sense of personal asphyxiation in response to omniscient social norms is what so much regional funk art reacts against with its bright colour, borrowed imagery and satirical concerns. Furthermore, it may be proper for artists of one culture to appropriate the motifs of another to widen and deepen their own aesthetic understanding (Searle, 1991: 58). International art has grown more self-conscious and superficial, while the movement to reassess regional art has taken on a greater sense of urgency (McDonald, 1988: 54). During the 1990s it may be that the issue of regionalism versus internationalism is once again the crucial problem facing contemporary Australian art (McAuliffe, 1993: 56).

The idea of an undisputed centre for Australian national art has become problematic. In the first half of the twentieth century Melbourne was Australia's art centre, then from the late 1950s until the 1980s, Sydney dominated, both through its economic might and by the variety of artistic styles. In the 1990s there are endless debates as to where the centre has gone - is it Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney or even Canberra? Australia must be one of the few countries in the world where the national gallery is located in the rural setting of Canberra. There is also the so-called 'National' Gallery of Victoria. Perhaps it's not even convincing to imagine there can be a single centre any more. When the centre is floating the regions may seem as no longer so fixed in their isolated orbits.

This essay draws its dynamic from a recurrent theme in Australian cultural criticism: the opposition between an assertive localism and an ambivalently conceptualised internationalism. This is an illusionary split; it can only be sustained in a psychological condition of felt geographical marginality (Fry and Willis, 1989). The local is specific and material; the international is an abstraction. However, in a certain sense, once we accept Central Queensland's regional status with regard to national and international art centres, our efforts to compete in the same arena seem rather futile. Since we are a marginalised art community perhaps our best chance is to embrace this identity wholeheartedly. Regional identity can be thought of in two ways - as a designated 'personality' of

a particular region, and as an element in the making of varieties of subjectivities (Willis, 1993: 20). A case in point is that of Ray Crooke, who made northern Queensland his province. In a review of a 1964 exhibition James Gleeson (cited by Searle, 1991: 48) made this telling observation:

Ray Crooke is a provincial artist in the most exact sense of the word. He has concentrated on a limited region and made it his own. Nothing evokes the character of tropical Queensland more immediately than a Ray Crooke painting.

Scott Redford recognises the regionalism that plagues the Australian artist - but rather than seeking to transcend it, he amplifies it. A former resident of the Gold Coast, he argues that he is a marginalised artist within an already marginalised culture (Cripps, 1986: 29). For Redford, this is an empowering condition. His regional status does not result in a preoccupation with nationality and a resistant, parochial iconography; instead, he focuses on his position as a consumer of received ideas. Regionalism then is not merely an art critical preoccupation; it is now a component of this artist's practice (McAuliffe, 1993: 59). From Redford's point of view Australia can be seen as a vacuous sign, an empty centre that sucks in fragments from everywhere. Out of the slow implosion a collaged culture of pastiche is assembled; this is the new orthodoxy of a postmodern national identity.

Uniqueness, then, can be erected out of non-identity. Peter Gunn (1996), a Central Queensland artist, believes he is isolated. Gunn claims that non-identity sustains his artistic integrity and quality, in that, because he is not a commercial success he does not have to supply a constant demand for one type of work. The most striking example of the threat to artistic integrity in Australia is the work of contemporary Aboriginal artists, who are now creating vast quantities of story painting in order to satisfy an ever-increasing demand (McDonald, 1988: 54). While these art works were formerly executed in the sand, rich in sacred and often secret meanings, they are now recorded on canvas with acrylic paint. Contemporary Aboriginal art is rapidly being absorbed as a vital new element of national culture. The region, teeming with life and various forms of art, has become the source for plunder by the metropolitan centre. Regional art in Australia can be exemplified by the farm paintings of Bill Robinson, the driftwood constructions of Tom Risley, or the semi-naïve paintings of Bill Yaxley. Local funk artists like Alison Clouston, Ken Searle and Frank Littler are also distinctly regional in their subjects and sense of humour. John Coburn, born in Ingham, has lived and worked in Sydney for his professional life and Coburn's work is aligned to extreme forms of European abstraction. However, his mature style shows a complete assimilation of abstract symbols that relate to simple organic forms based on the tropical rainforest environment of Queensland. This list could be extended a long way, and take in a wide range of art-forms. Also, it must be noted that not all regional artists are concerned with overtly exploring the interplay of the marginal and the central, the regional and the international. Some Australian artists don't care where they work or even to be known as 'Australian' or 'regional' artists. However, while nationalistic localism can be

vigorously rejected, the desire for a unique Australian or regional culture to occupy a legitimate place is still there.

It appears that regional art is at a crucial stage in the passage from what McAuliffe (1993: 61) calls, painting as nature toward painting as cultural - a 'historicised' regional discourse. For instance, both the expansion of the Rockhampton Art Gallery and its promotion of local product, and the crucial new supportive educational contexts of ArtsWest, Central Queensland University and TAFE contribute to the raised artistic profile of regional areas in Queensland. Further, the development of the new forms of state patronage, for example, *Building Local-Going Global* (1995), the last Queensland government's cultural statement, and *For Art's Sake-A Fair Go!* (1996), the Liberal and National Parties' cultural policy (see also Arts Queensland and The Australia Council documents), provide a different economic base relatively independent of the market place.

The research undertaken for this paper clearly points to certain underlying patterns in and causes of the somewhat fragmentary cultural and artistic development of regional Australia. Within the current debate about regionalism and in light of the declining 'historicist' view that reduces art history to a succession of mainstream styles and movements, a paper of this kind is timely. The regional art I have discussed is not 'cliche'; if anything it pictures regional art as extremely complex. On one level, the diversity of regional artistic forms and their didactic character provides the preconditions for the pervasive ideology of 'pluralism' which dominated the 1980s. But there are particular modes of cultural experience in regional Australia which don't predominate elsewhere. A good analogy would be comparing it to a river delta.

Examining the art of a non-metropolitan region may assist in dismantling the false assumption that cultural and artistic production in regional areas is only a pale reflection of so-called metropolitan art (Searle, 1991: 58). Such action would hopefully recover and revalue the regional artistic 'tradition' in the face of what I see as its 'devaluation' by modernist art historians and critics. The aim of further research should be to de-centre the metropolitan models of aesthetic achievement by a pseudo-relativism of value within a model of discontinuous or at least variable regional development. A more thorough analysis of marginality could be the key to breaking out of the endlessly reiterated, unproductive and finally false local/international dichotomy (Fry and Willis, 1989). An alternative account of Australian art should reveal the interdependent (not dependent) relations between centre and periphery: such an account should be able to explain culturally specific expressions of regional art (Burn, *et al.*, 1988). This is an appeal for a coherent discourse of Australian art - one that can account for regional differences.

Although there is much discussion about regionalism, there has been no definitive study undertaken to obtain information about regional visual art practice. There is clearly a need for a major survey of regional art in both Central Queensland and other regions with emphasis on defining the themes that preoccupy these artists and their attitudes to practice. From this wider cultural perspective it would be possible to develop an awareness of what kinds of art forms constitute the basis of a truly regional and, perhaps, national artistic identity.

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# Chapter 14

## Cultural viability of the regional museum

*Dodie Roden*

### **Introduction**

This chapter is about the telling of history. History is never simply there for the gaze of the historian; it always has to be told. And in the telling it is always told from a particular point of view to serve particular interests. Therefore, in any form of historical research it is important to distinguish the different ways in which history is told and how certain versions become dominant at the expense of others.

More specifically, this chapter is about the telling of the history of Mt Morgan, a small country town in the highlands of Central Queensland sitting on top of what was one of the world's biggest lodes of gold. In its heyday, late last century, Mt Morgan was a prosperous mining town attracting huge numbers of itinerant workers. These days, the mine no longer extracts gold from the mountain, and has been turned into a tourist attraction. Mt Morgan has an historical museum that has on display the goldmine and township's history. My concern here is how the displays in this museum tell a particular version of the history of Mt Morgan; a history which excludes many others. The telling of this history and its exclusionary tactics raises questions about the way in which a national imaginary based on colonial bush myths is imposed on a rural community. My argument concerns not so much the social conditions of communities in Mt Morgan, but rather the way in which state and federal cultural policies perpetuate this national imaginary which continues to invoke these bush myths to the exclusion of other forms of cultural identity.

### **The Political Rationality of the Museum**

This chapter uses Tony Bennett's article 'The Political Rationality of the Museum' as its theoretical point of departure (1996). Drawing from Foucault, Bennett uses the concept of political rationality to define culture as a process of governmentality, and takes on the task of exposing tensions, gaps and crises which occur when a governing institution's rhetoric is compared with its practice. The aim of this 'cultural policy' critique is to bring practice in line with

rhetoric for the sake of widespread access and all-round equity. But in adopting Foucault's definition of culture, policy analysts have placed themselves in a process where the need for reform can never be satisfied, as Bennett and his colleagues freely admit.

Certain institutions, as Bennett points out, generate an inevitable 'mismatch' (1990: 36) between those seemingly all-inclusive governing principles, and what takes place in practice. This mismatch 'supplies the conditions for a discourse of reform which proves unending because it mistakes the nature of its object' (1990: 36). The rhetoric claims to embody the aims of an institution deliberately in order to screen the specific embedded hierarchies and modalities that create a particular order of things - the political rationality - which constitutes that institution. In other words, a rhetoric acts as a noisy decoy or distraction while unequal power relations quietly continue.

Bennett applies this concept of political rationality to the institution of museums. He suggests there are two rhetorical principles which claim to embody the aims of this institution. The first is that everyone has a right to have access to these culturally important sites. The second concerns how cultures are adequately represented in such sites. He argues that these principles provide a 'discourse of reform' which has 'remained identifiably the same over the last century' (1990: 36).

What these rhetorical principles screen is a political rationality which is about the management of publics and the formation of citizenships. He points out that the 'modern episteme' brought in new knowledges which gave 'white man' the chance to differentiate himself in an evolutionary process (1990: 42). Museums became places where 'he' could be reassured of his ascendancy in the order of things. Objects started to be arranged in sequences and 'produced a position of power and knowledge in relation to a microcosmic reconstruction of a totalised order of things and peoples' (Bennett, 1990: 43). So when white, bourgeois man is represented in the museum through objects arranged in evolutionary sequences he becomes a 'natural' universal quest - how people should be. Those who are not given priority or even a space in these sequences are encouraged to strive to be like universal man in order to be accepted and given a place.

Following Foucault, Bennett claims that the architecture of the museum can also wield a power to reform public manners and contribute to the differentiation of peoples. Displays are arranged in spaces designed so that people can constantly watch over and monitor the behaviour of others. This sets up a self-regulating form of control because if you can watch others then others can watch you. Displays are also set up so people have to file through, rather than forming crowds which might be inclined to get disorderly, thus driving 'a wedge between the respectable and the rowdy' (Bennett, 1990: 49).

For this chapter, then, I look at Mt Morgan's historical museum in the light of Bennett's political rationality of the museum. Although I agree with him when he says the museum is a technology that has a 'distinctiveness as a vehicle for the display of power' (1990: 40), I want to point out that this chapter is not about uncovering Mt Morgan museum to reveal, as Bennett might, 'a microcosmic reconstruction of a totalised order of things and peoples' (1990: 43). Bennett's critique is aimed at metropolitan museums where the national imaginary connects more strongly with other institutions of government. It is therefore

inclined to accept the very universality of the model of governmentality that he critiques, thereby denying the possibility of alternative imaginaries. For instance what would it be like to 'tell' the history of Mt Morgan from an Aborigine's or woman's perspective.

## **Displays**

The displays in Mt Morgan museum are arranged in terms of evolutionary sequences and knowledges. Each knowledge is set apart either by walls or signs. For example, the display you are encouraged to view first is, in the main, a geological one. In this room the rationale is based on the 'origins' of Mt Morgan, which of course are directly linked to the gold mine. The objects on display form a scientific knowledge of how white man extracted gold out of the mountain. Different kinds of rocks show the stages 'man' needs to go through to reap the reward of gold. There are also photographs on the walls and some early tools lying around which show how Mt Morgan became a gold mine. In one corner, strangely out of place, is a very small collection of Aboriginal objects and photos. The photos show Aborigines 'posing' as Aborigines for the white man's camera. A caption on one of the photos suggests, ever-so-lightly, white man's presence may have caused some disruption. It says, 'between two cultures' and the photo shows some Aborigines sitting in a camp. There is also a hand-drawn map which shows how the area was divided into tribes. This is ironic since the exhibit clearly outlines the full presence of Aborigines in Mt Morgan and surrounding areas and yet the representation they get in the museum's version of Mt Morgan's history is almost non-existent.

The rest of the displays are spaced out mainly in one large room. The first display consists of photos of the white men who made up the mine's syndicate. There is one photo of a good looking woman finely dressed who, as the caption states with great pride, was the 'first wife' of a D'Arcy brother (one of the original company directors of the Mt Morgan mine). Like the precious objects on display she is represented as a possession.

Most of the displays suggest a modernist framework of thinking in so far as they are organised according to taxonomic logic. There is some attempt to thematise the displays but the theme is structured to suggest a progression into modernity which confirms and supplements the strict taxonomies of the objects. This modernist obsession with progress is also evident in the way that particular technologies, such as mining equipment, are displayed as contributing to the town's progress.

All of this suggests that the museum's political rationality is still operating in terms of a nineteenth century industrial modernism. Michel de Certeau's ideas about the writing of history can clarify some points here (de Certeau 1988). De Certeau talks about the writing of history in terms of historiography - an art, a social practice and a discourse. He points out while historical discourses 'speak of history', the writing of them, and the analyses which follow, are always 'situated in history' (20). Although de Certeau concentrates mainly on what is literally written down as history, I don't see why I can't broaden out his ideas to include a history represented through objects in a museum.



My textual analysis shows a telling of a particular kind of history. It is a story of white man's scientific and technological triumph over nature in the face of great adversity and hardship. It's a story of mateship and loyalties, resilience and intuition. But, because of my situation in history, I can also say this is a brutal history characterised by racism, sexism and environmental destruction. I was half expecting to find this particular 'telling' of history in a rural location like Mt Morgan, and it worried me at first that I should be basing a chapter on such 'old hat' ideas. But then it occurred to me there was another agenda at work here.

I need to bring in de Certeau again to explain. He claims that the importance of history to Western cultures is precarious because it relies on a power based on ambiguity. As de Certeau explains, there is a 'double status of the object that is a "realistic effect" in the text and the unspoken element implied by the closure of the discourse' (1988: 44). In other words, the realism in a historical text is always undermined by what it leaves out. De Certeau goes on to say 'if history leaves its proper place - the limit that it posits and receives - it is broken asunder, to become nothing more than a fiction' (44). I would argue Mt Morgan's museum tells a history which is broken asunder because its realistic effect - white man as the sovereign subject - no longer has political currency in a culture which espouses multiculturalism, equal opportunity and reconciliation between Aboriginal indigenous and non-Aboriginal indigenous peoples. The museum's historicity has become fictionalised and relegated to mythology. As such, it can no longer sustain the political rationality Bennett argues has remained the same since the nineteenth century.

Mt Morgan's museum has needed to adapt its political rationality in order to survive in an age of economic rationalism. It is having to sell the history of Mt Morgan to tourists rather than using it to buy citizens. The museum tells a history that has been mythologised as a rural way of life taken to be uncluttered and romantically simple, but also harsh, unjust and inequitable. City people might visit Mt Morgan and its museum because they find this myth attractive. As de Certeau points out, history relies on the 'rupture that is constantly debated between a past and a present' (1988: 44). In other words it makes 'good' history because it explicitly shows a past city people may want to feel nostalgic about, but it also places them firmly in a present where they can say 'I can't be that. I am not like that anymore'. In effect, the division between regional and national Australia is legitimised and preserved.

The museum's new economically-determined political rationality fits in very well with the 1995 Queensland Labour government's cultural policy statement to 'Build Local-Go Global'. Following de Certeau's lead, it seems from an analysis of the exclusions implied in many of the displays which embody the national imaginary at Mt Morgan that the quintessential Australian as racist and sexist is a money-earning myth worth preserving and promoting in a climate of economic rationalism and globalisation! Mt Morgan appears to be experiencing the economic strategies of both state and national cultural policies, but there seems to be little encouragement to adopt those socially constructive or progressive ideologies such as equal opportunity or reconciliation.

It seems that national and state policy rhetorics of ensuring that all Australians or 'all Queenslanders - of different ages, gender, ethnicity and experiences - have the opportunity to contribute to the cultural industries'

(*Building Local-Going Global*, 1995: 5) only apply to non-regional, that is, metropolitan areas. But, then, if representation was extended to all Australians or Queenslanders in a rural museum like the one in Mt Morgan I think perhaps Mt Morgan would lose that rustic appeal which has marked it out as a saleable quintessential Australian product.

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## **Rural Social and Economic Research Centre Central Queensland University**

The Rural Social and Economic Research Centre (RSERC) is a designated research centre within the Institute of Sustainable Regional Development at CQU. The RSERC has over 60 academic members drawn from each of the five campuses located within Central Queensland.

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- 2. Agri-Food Restructuring and the Environment**
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### **Further Information**

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