It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at

Brendon F. Stewart  BA. MA(Sydney College)

Doctor of Philosophy

1999

University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury
PLEASE NOTE

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

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Declaration

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

Brendon Stewart
Acknowledgments

To my Principal Supervisor, Associate Professor Jane Goodall, I acknowledge gratefully your encouragement. Your diligence and attention to detail, your patience and intellectual challenge, your unstinting willingness to guide the project through difficult periods will always be appreciated. Your faith in my project was invaluable.

My thanks also to Associate Professor David Russell for his time in talking through the thesis with me and in particular drawing my attention closely to the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. I must acknowledge the stimulating conversations with Dr Vladimir Dimitrov and the generous way he shared his research. His work has greatly informed my thinking.

Thanks are due as well to the people I worked with in Auburn. In particular the core group: Alev Guven from the Australian Turkish Social and Cultural Trust; Olga Mina and Rollar Sowaid from the Bhanin El-Minieh Association; Lucienne Sadowski from the Auburn Youth Resource Centre; Van Trinh and Matina Mottee at the Asian Welfare Centre and from Auburn Council Peter Prantz and John Cumberford. A special thanks to Mahmoud Yekta from the Auburn Community Development Network for his insights, critiques, encouragement and enjoyable walks together. I am indebted to my friends Leslie Devereaux, Susan Murphy and Maggie Gluek for the time and trouble they took in reading and commenting on different sections of this thesis.

A deep thank you to my companion and partner Kerry Stewart. We worked together on the initial field work research and her ease with people and attention to detail made the project so successful. Over and above that, she has read, corrected and made editorial suggestions on the thesis as well as supported me whole heartedly. I am grateful.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Tactical Thoughts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Towards an ecological epistemology)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline Hanson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blue Hour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling Australia Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Community in Mind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Nation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll Believe That When I See It</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy The Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Australian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Bibliography</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Illustration**

Figure 1. “Pauline Hanson and the Svengli-like figure of John Pasquarelli, the minder sacked this week” in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Saturday, December 14, 1996) (Chapter 2 Pauline Hanson p. 59)
Synopsis

In this thesis I emphasise the lived experience of being a migrant, and of living in a multicultural society. My concern is to acknowledge the multimensionality of these experiences. I have conducted a number of interviews with people from ethno-specific community groups in the Sydney suburb of Auburn. These interviews explore the physical, emotional and spiritual aspect of coming to terms with a changing sense of what is home and what is foreign.

The tenor of the thesis is strongly optimistic because I contend that the optimism helps bring out the more sophisticated and tolerant aspects of multiculturalism. I refer to theories of complexity, phenomenology and ecology to help make meaning out of the recent social history of Australia. The thesis is an enquiry into the social ecology of multiculturalism in Australia in the late 1990's, using Auburn as a case study. Auburn has a large and varied immigrant population and is strongly identified with the Turkish community. A very fine Ottoman mosque, built by the community, has become a Sydney landmark.

The interviews themselves work as conversations which flow freely and explore people's feelings and ideas. The contributions by the people of Auburn are woven through the thesis as voices in their own right, rather than as quotations for a line of argument. I have been guided by a strong and deep sense that social ecology, as a project, works to open up dimensions of awareness and to acknowledge complexity by addressing the physical and sensory levels of individual experience as well as the broader political and social contexts which frame people's lives.
Although a great deal has been written about multiculturalism, relatively little attention has been paid to the lived experience of people as they go about their everyday business in an ethnic neighbourhood. My thesis acknowledges that the success of contemporary Australian multiculturalism has something to do with the broad based policies that implement this social phenomenon. More importantly, multiculturalism succeeds because it has become the culture scape in which the soul of the community wanders. The thesis acknowledges that there is something intellectually difficult about the word soul, but there is an ecological value in James Hillman's idea of the soul as not an elevated idea but rather one "down in the earth"; soul in this sense is about place, finding and taking root in a new place.
Introduction

Even though multiculturalism has been an official cultural policy in Australia since the early 1970s, up until recently I had two basic conceptions about it. I thought that multiculturalism was a policy to assist non English speaking people and consequently was not relevant to me as an Anglo. Secondly I felt I was excluded from the multicultural society by those for whom it was set up. As time passed I realised that I was not living in a separate Anglo society, but rather all about me was an ordinary multicultural community. My lived experience was at odds with my conceptions.

My thesis and inquiry are taken up at a time when the community is engaged in a very public discussion about what multiculturalism might mean. The underlying presupposition of a multicultural society is that a variety of cultures can coexist together within one society. Living with difference calls us to acknowledge that each of us has quite different expectations about how we might go about our living. The task of the state is to devise and sustain a framework in which these different cultures can thrive without restriction or harassment. "Minority communities therefore should be preserved, their cohesion maintained, and their diversity recognised in law consistent with a unitary legal system."1 A populist interpretation of this tends to dissolve differences into a tolerant mix of personal and cultural pluralism while accepting that people are trying to make a material difference to their lives. I suspect however, that multiculturalism challenges us to become a more sophisticated society, different from the past. It expects that we will strike up new relationships internationally and begin to imagine a different future.

Field work for this research was carried out in the local government area of Auburn. The municipality encompasses the Sydney suburbs of Silverwater, Auburn, Lidcombe, Berala, Regents Park, Homebush Bay and Rookwood. Here there is a very high proportion of residents over 65 years and an extremely high population (37%) of people with non English speaking backgrounds. Approximately 40% of the population have an annual income of

below $15,000 and 30% of the population are receiving some form of welfare benefit. The primary non English speaking communities are Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Yugoslavian. To help coordinate this work I was able to establish a core group. Initially I made contact with Peter, the multicultural community liaison officer with the Auburn council. He introduced me to Mahmoud from the Auburn Community Development Network who introduced me to the various community workers in some ethno-specific cultural groups. The Core Group, as they became known to us, brought their experience into the planning and design of the research, and we met on a regular six weekly basis for a year, sharing ideas, feedback and our own stories. Storytelling was an important part of each of the Core Group meetings. Every six weeks one of us would tell our story (including past, present and imagined future) about home and our relationship with Auburn and Australia. The stories were not recorded on tape, but hand written notes were taken. Some of these stories, or parts of them, have been included in this document. There has been continued contact with, and feedback from, the Core Group members. This has been an invaluable part, for me, of feeling at home with the research and in Auburn. In a very practical way, these people set up the interviews with members from their particular ethnic community. We decided to adopt this process of having people recommended for interview because some members in the Core Group expressed concern that many of the people they work with might be unwilling to participate in the research without some form of community approval. Each interview was audio taped and later transcribed. The five community groups I worked with in Auburn were:

Anglo: represented initially by Peter Prantz from Auburn Council, then later John Cumberford from the Auburn Library

Turkish: represented by Alev Guven from Australian Turkish Social & Cultural Trust

Arabic: represented by Olga Mina and Rollar Sowaid from Bhanin El-Minieh Association, and Lucienne Sadowski from Auburn Youth Resource Centre (later to leave)

Vietnamese: represented by Van Trinh and Matina Mottee from the Asian Welfare Centre

Mahmoud Yekta from Auburn Community Development Network.
It was decided to interview people who could understand and speak English so the researchers would be able to build some rapport, to maintain spontaneity and for ease of transcription. The research itself involved interviewing six people from each of the four community groups and recording these conversations on audio tape. Later the recording was transcribed and passed back to the person for comment and approval. There were twelve women and twelve men spread over an age range as shown in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
<th>18-25 Yrs</th>
<th>26-49 Yrs</th>
<th>50+ Yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANGLO</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Neville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURKISH</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Narelle</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARABIC</td>
<td>Serkan</td>
<td>Sema</td>
<td>Koksal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIETNAMESE</td>
<td>Mahmoud</td>
<td>Wissal</td>
<td>Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thanh</td>
<td>Mej</td>
<td>Nhan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An assumption I am making is that, apart from the Aboriginal people, we are all migrants to this land. The experience of migration tends to make one want to tell one's story. Indeed this story telling about the experience of migration has become an important part of the ongoing evolution of our Australian story. Throughout the thesis I insert the voices of the people I met in Auburn, people with whom I had significant conversations. They appear under their first name and the text is indented and in italics. There is a legitimacy in these stories because they tell of the experiences of people who are trying to change their lives. It is this hope for something different that holds out a fascination for me, the idea of the opportunity to start again, to imagine a better life, and possibly to escape from previous turmoil: this is the stuff of my thesis.

The sense of wanting or hoping to make a change in one's life comes through in many of the stories I have listened to. To hope for something

---

2 The field work research was carried out in collaboration with Kerry Stewart, Radio Program Producer, ABC Radio National.
different has been a part of the Australian story since the first settlement. The
country has been expected to assist in the fulfillment of this hope and there has
been some satisfaction in this regard. The land, despite its harshness and
fragile biology, has been bountiful. It is churlish for some of us today to
bemoan the labours of our immediate forebears and condemn their efforts to
bring an agrarian and industrial order to the place. I am not attempting to deny
the seriousness of our contemporary ecological predicament, nor to dismiss the
urgency with which it needs repair and redress, but I am insisting on
recognising that through hard work people continue to have the opportunity to
make something new with their lives here.

I have chosen to use the pronoun ‘we’. In this I am referring to those of us
who have come relatively recently to this land and are trying to make our
home and culture in this country. We are the people who have come to settle
here. We also speak about ourselves in this familiar way in conversations. As
well, in the use of ‘we’, there is a public commentary which refers to our
society. I recognise that there is clearly a difficulty with these personal
pronouns, especially in the way they clash with the theories of difference and
other post colonial discourses. I am not assuming that we are an homogenised,
undifferentiated society nor do I want to present an unmarked voice speaking
from within a dominant group. But rather I am referring to how we reflect
upon ourselves in the ordinariness of the everyday. In the way we refer to ‘our
city’, ‘our country’, ‘our shopping centre’, ‘our school’ we mark our collective
reality through locality and particular shared values. At the same time I
recognise too that pronouns slip and slide as we identify ourselves sometimes
with a local community, sometimes with a whole culture and sometimes with
the nation.

Lytard thinks that most people have at their disposal a multiplicity of
“language games,”\(^3\) which enable them to introduce into their relations with
others, forms of communication that are unexpected. So, like new moves in a
game, this inventiveness changes things. Within communities people draw
significance and begin to make public sense from the spaces created when
various texts or “phrases”\(^4\), as Lyotard calls all the different and particular
stories about a phenomenon, begin to interact and modify each other. For

\(^3\) Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, trans., Wlad Godzich
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979) p. 61.

\(^4\) This idea is developed throughout Lyotard’s conversation with Thebaud in *Just Gaming*.
Lytard, meaning happens in public. No matter how right a particular story might be, it is not a transparent window onto the history of the remembered experience, but rather part of a palimpsest that both obscures and reveals itself differently. Meaning changes all the time as the stories are negotiated. Therefore multicultural Australia cannot be 'definitively phrased' because it's a matter of continually introduced variations.

For a time I entertained the idea of using the qualitative research analysis program called Nud’ist\(^5\) to essay the field work material and help me determine parameters within which I would then be able to describe certain phenomena about the migrant experience. While there is value in this method and program, I didn’t feel as if it was helping me to get at the lived experience, the sensual experience that obviously included me in the conversation, in a particular place and a particular time and with particular emotions and preconceptions. In conversations there is a certain disturbance or slippage as ideas, which are not necessarily logical or next in line, enter into and cut across the discussion. In this way conversations are not settled but important things are still said. Homi Bhabha makes the point that "all cultural statements and systems"\(^6\) are constructed as "contradictory and ambivalent, and any hierarchal claims to a 'purity' are untenable because of the fluctuating movement and instability determined because of the difference enunciated by each and every subject."\(^7\) I hope in my writing to get at these differently enunciated stories.

My writing is influenced by the style and thoughts of a few authors whose work I admire, in particular Gaston Bachelard, Paul Carter, Clifford Geertz, James Hillman and Stephen Muecke. In these authors I find that experience is understood as a poetic encounter. The experience of a place, of a person, of oneself, of a situation can be made public poetically, without losing any of the integrity that may adhere to the seriousness of each circumstance. I have also taken liberties with these authors and others in so far as I decided to construct a methodology of thesis writing that edits together voices of generalising authority with the voices of particular experiences. In this I am attempting to experiment with the massive commentary that has recently been generated in response to the very public conversation about multiculturalism. My thesis is

\(^5\) Nud‘ist. This is a software design package for qualitative data analysis.


\(^7\) Homi Bhabha, p. 37.
not a structure in which an argument about, and diagnosis of, the situation is being developed but rather one which, in an ecological sense, accepts the incommensurability of all the experiences. So it is an endeavour to bring into conversation the various fantasies and imaginative responses which connect us into community. My writing isn’t so much a narrative of free associations but a conversation with freed narrators. Of course these other voices are not entirely free. I take responsibility for the way I have constructed the purpose and direction of the thesis and for the way I have harnessed their contributions to my intentions.

This liberty in style makes possible the braiding of autobiography and public comment into a shared conversation. The social activist Fran Peavey has developed an inquiry methodology which she calls ‘strategic questioning’ whereby one engages in an exchange of ideas such that each person is able to elicit from the conversation what they need in order to proceed with ‘meaningful’ social action. What I am trying to do, through my writing, is to invent a strategic conversation which brings into relationship various ‘autobiographical fictions.’ Out of this, meaning may emerge that is useful in a wider public conversation. I develop this idea of a shared conversation in an attempt to destabilize concepts of fixed and established societal forms. In particular this is worked through in the chapters Enjoy the Difference and Being Australian.

The correspondence between me and my research supervisor, Jane Goodall, became a way of experimenting with an ‘explorer narrative.’ We began with an exchange of letters, letters as conversations at one remove: “Time and space stretch between letters. And a thesis, what kind of a conversation is that? Who can you have it with? Some distant and as yet un-named people called ‘examiners’, lurking about in different parts of the globe? Maybe all they will do is pounce, demanding a monologue in return for a monologue. But what I read, in and through the lines of your writing, is overwhelmingly this: you don’t want to be alone in this thesis. You don’t want to go out there, like the first girl in Picnic at Hanging Rock, into that strange uncanny space called writing where you may get killed. You want to bring into it your lovers, your

---

family, the friends who are your research subjects, who will speak for themselves. And as for me, will I write back? A letter, a thing of pathos, is a lone voice casting itself into the distance looking for its other. Can you make a thesis out of conversations?\textsuperscript{11} In response I would have to say, yes. In the conversations with Jane, and with the people from Auburn I have been able to explore some of the world in which I live. In the end this thesis is a kind of open letter, a personal account of a journey. I am writing about my experience of living in a multicultural community. It is in part autobiographical. The thesis does not develop, as objectively as possible, the reality of contemporary multicultural Australian society. On the contrary a critical purpose with this thesis is the intention to show how the subject, the author, is affected by the experience of conducting the project. In the gathering of the stories and in the process of writing about them, my insights about my identity and belonging have been profoundly altered.

I understand this research to be primarily a writing task. The writing provides the silence so important for reflection and interpretation, yet there is much that is difficult to write. For instance, the interconnectedness that emerges at the boundary of any system can sometimes be so ineffable, so unspeakable, and shot through with complex thought, imagination and understanding that it can only become known to one through some sort of bodily immersion into the writing and therefore into the story. When I take a decidedly subjective viewpoint about the research, I do so with this process in mind. To a great extent it is a reflection on my own world that is central to the thesis. It is a thesis about my identity, my reality and I offer my observations and my interpretations to see whether they accord with those of the reader.

So as I write and cobble together this thesis I am challenged as to how my words, with all their manifold references and psychic power, relate to my experience or for that matter to anyone else’s. ‘Cobbling together’ is such a wonderful ecological metaphor in that it implies something is mended or patched up. There is a certain derogatory quality to the words too as they can imply a rough and ready workmanship. At the same time a cobble is a beautiful rounded and water worn stone out of which long lasting and elegant

\textsuperscript{11} In a letter from my research supervisor Jane Goodall dated 20-9-95. The preliminary work of research interpretation and writing style was discussed in an exchange of letters which in themselves allowed an insight to emerge into the nature of this task and study.
Cobble stone paths are made. And yet each cobble stone is not identical. In the same way the selection of voices, opinion and commentary does not imply that I share equally in their value judgements. I do make distinctions, I do have opinions about the different points of view expressed by others and at the same time it is in the awkward differences that interesting processes of interaction emerge. Writing is therefore never simply about an external world, but always implicitly about the writer also. “Writing”, says Stephen Muecke “can neither totally invent, nor totally reflect social realities,” and because it is neither purely subjective nor objective it can only trace an arbitrary path through experience. What lies at the end of this is the acceptance that one can no longer control the ‘order of things’, the patterns of language and social behaviour.

I have tried to be open to contradiction. I select and circumscribe my experience and so give a particular meaning to the lived experience of this research project and my participation in the public conversation. In doing this I may clash with other experiences and other interpretations, even with my own. The public conversation involves us in issues that become manifest out of the experience of living every day in a society that has to confront changing times. I do not, for example, accept the ‘truth of racism’ but I must accept the ‘fact’ of it. This cannot be resolved in a simplistic or clearly determined way. Racism, multiculturalism, loneliness, joy, these are ideas, concepts and emotions that need to be attended to with a certain lightness, stepping back and examining without undue anxiety. An important teaching in deep ecology is to explore the possibility of ‘touching the earth lightly’. Similarly a lighter hold on our culture and history may free them up, allowing new kinds of ideas to take shape. A critical purpose with this thesis is to help identify some things that matter to the Australian people; such important things as the making of stories because stories are a way of finding one’s belonging in a community. Muecke makes the point that stories intertwine our personal and public selves, making of us members of a community. Conversations however are bound by time. They are a synchronous activity. What’s in the space between those who converse? A site of originality and strength. I will suggest that insight is produced out of the conversations. This is because conversations produce an intelligence that none of the parties actually posses alone.

---

13 Stephen Muecke, No Road, (Bitumen all the way) (Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997) p. 229.
We tell stories to elaborate and help comprehend our world. Thus we give meaning to our actions by providing some kind of fit which enables us to comprehend and recognise both our inner and outer worlds. In this way we mythologise our lives. Any distinction however, between the events of history and the history of inner experience cannot be made in terms of certainty. Neither can claim to represent a more real fix on lived experience. It would seem to be a continual exchange process akin to the exchange between suksma (subtle) and sthūla (gross) viewpoints in Hindu thought. And as events unfold, there is consequent gaining and losing of insight. The events of history become personal experiences when they enter into one's psychological process, when one works upon them with one's imagination - recollecting, recording and subjecting the events to the discipline of poetic understanding. Carter says that living in this new country is an autobiographical fiction in which poetic devices create metaphorical connections where more logical ones fail.\textsuperscript{14}

For those of us who now think of 'Australia as home' there seems to be an ever present uncertainty about the place. Even if one speaks as if one could not imagine living anywhere else, one would have to recognise that the nature of the country remains in many ways indescribably foreign and strange. This strangeness of place has sometimes been given special poetic legitimacy in which we as a people exult and make claim to a unique sense of our difference. In this case difference is used in the creation of a national uniqueness born out of the land. It is the means by which we give meaning to our presence in this new country. We read the "hieroglyphs of haggard gum-trees"\textsuperscript{15} and see ourselves in the countries unique biology, climate and geography. Tim Flannery who, in The Future Eaters describes an Australia (despite being mistaken for terra nullius) as having been managed both ruthlessly and imaginatively for many thousands of years. This story of the land has tended to reinforce the rhetoric of nationalism by insisting that we are actually very familiar with this strange place.

Another take on this is that the complex contemporary culture emerging here is less fixed and the strangeness of place is not just determined by biological or geological eccentricity. It is compounded by a cultural uncertainty about identity and legitimacy. What this means, to some extent, is that we are not merely caught up in some antipodean reconstruction of old myths and

\textsuperscript{14} Paul Carter, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{15} Paul Carter, p. 5.
fantasies from 'the old country'. Rather there is an ongoing process, still swaddled in the irony of these old stories but moving towards new variations of making a human community. Uncertainty about the social form of Australia has generated suspicion and in recent times this has emerged in the so called 'race debate', the tortuous drama of indigenous land rights, the 'stolen children' revelations and the reconciliation process. The Wik Bill amendments, which were debated in the Senate during the first week of December 1997, have provoked a further attempt to decipher these issues. In the deliberations that have gone on for some years now there has been an effort to make sense of our particular situation as a society and as a nation.

In this thesis the idea of ecology as an epistemological structure will be developed. The task of expanding the notion of ecology out from its scientific base in biology and allowing it to function metaphorically, particularly in the way one might consider social relationships, is, I suggest, an important contribution to knowledge. Undoubtedly there are difficulties in using the model of ecology to explain human relations in cultural terms. In a multitude of ways humans do not act according to the strict biology of an ecological site. However, on the borders of strongly established localities there is always a break down of clear dominance and variety prevails. Just so, multiculturalism is about variety, it is about human ethnic cultures existing together and in unpredictable ways changing. To complement this epistemological structure theories of complexity and phenomenology will also be employed to help make meaning out of the history of my contemporary community. In the long research conversations I have had with various people in the Sydney suburb of Auburn, certain kinds of knowledge about language, space and place (freedom, confinement and containment), about the instability of cultural worlds, and about strangeness emerged. These are findings, surely! The purpose of a phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the meaning of something: it is both easy and difficult. To see the specific nature of phenomena is something most of us do constantly in everyday life. When I see a person who has a different ethnic look to me I do not just perceive a person. I see a person who differs in that respect which makes me consider them as different. What is much more difficult is to come to a reflective explication of the meaning of this difference.

Ultimately the intention of phenomenological reflection is to effect a more direct contact with the experience as lived. Therefore, when I reflect on the
experience of difference I will not do so as a sociologist or as a critical theorist but as a person trying to grasp the essence of being different to and different from other people in my community. In this way I take an intellectual stand and argue that a complex cultural phenomenon, such as multiculturalism is multi-dimensional and multi-layered and cannot be clearly defined. My stand is to suggest that a process of imagination is essential to how we successfully live in, experience and contribute to our multicultural community. People live in a state of active imagination most of the time. 'What if' we do this? 'What if' we think that? 'What if' we go there? Imagination is a vehicle for carrying ideas through time and it can be shared. Through imagination people can share in how things should be, how they might be different, what's possible. It is not just that the process of imagination involves the telling and writing of intriguing stories, but also that it will work in the realm of a poiesis, and figure in our fantasies. Poiesis refers to the making of a shared poetic experience and so I am suggesting that together we are poetically making sense of this strange place.

Complexity theory proposes that no matter how much information is gathered about a system one cannot predict the next phase because complex systems seem never to repeat themselves. As Salman Rushdie has said "a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world."¹⁶ In other words there can be no way of predicting how a community will live together, how it will use facilities, what it will consider acceptable, beautiful, useful, what it will tolerate and what it will take to heart. While this is the case in terms of chaos theory, one can nevertheless see patterns emerge and repeat themselves, especially in the pragmatic ways a community will choose to live together. I will suggest that in the way people live together in our communities there are social patterns that encourage tolerance and flexibility.

Human communities are complex and, like all biological systems, their behaviour is chaotic and subject to catastrophe. The internal connections of an organism, like those of a human, are not more complex than the external connections between the organism and the environment. It has been an historical mistake to separate the organism from its environment as if they were two quite distinct entities subject to their own internal governance. These connections, both internal and external, are heterogeneous in nature. That is,

the pathways of connection are many. They are always in a state of perturbation and generally weakly determined.

Large dynamic systems with many degrees of freedom, like our society, are continually in a state of Self-Organised Criticality.\textsuperscript{17} What this means is that social systems are complex non equal phenomena, where the system itself is embedded with various ideas, policies, activities, values, and beliefs, and these all flow or stream together relatively separately. From this stream emerge interactive dynamics that are not predictable. Even tiny changes can intervene internally or externally bringing forth enormous change in the system as a whole. Such changes are sometimes called the butterfly effect. From the dynamics of social processes there will inevitably emerge various pathways of connection.

The nature of these pathways, sometimes called causal pathways, cannot be understood - as scientific, experimental method might suggest - by observation alone. As the contemporary multicultural community is so heterogeneous the pathways of connection between communities are weakly determined and the transition phases, in normal circumstances, are not knowable. In this uncertainty however, there still remains a mutual process of symbiotic exchange that involves complex connections between people and between people and their environment. Because of culture these mutual associations can be enhanced through a shared poeisis, a creative or poetic making, that is generated in the contact between people, and in the exchange and improvisation that emerges. Contact between people “begins with a distance (a physical and psychological abyss between two people) and proceeds to dissolve it.”\textsuperscript{18}

As I have been writing this thesis, our society has been witness to and participant in a crucial and indelible process of history, marking us in a way that will impact on our psychological, ecological and social selves. Much has been said, much has been acted out and much remains alive and vital, making

\textsuperscript{17} In any large dynamical system with many degrees of freedom and driven by a constant supply of energy that eventually dissipates into the system, there is an unavoidable pull towards a critical state where avalanches of change occur. The complex system self organises towards this criticality. See the work of V. Dimitrov 1977, “Social choice and self organisation” in Kybernetes Vol. 6 and P. Bak, “Self-organising criticality” in Scientific American, January, 1991.

\textsuperscript{18} Paul Carter, p. 174.
this a defining event in our history. It has been very hard to make a claim to certainty. What I tell myself about the true nature of events and situations is subject to dissolution, misapprehension and shift, as the boundaries of subjective feelings and objective facts alter.

So when I do not consciously understand something I may say “It’s all Greek to me” or possibly “It’s just double Dutch”. At other times I might say “Speak English why don’t ja!” In each case my words point to something beyond consciousness, to a figure of speech hiding there in the chaos and uncertainty. It is not accidental that Freud’s observation of ‘slip of the tongue’ and Jung’s ‘word associations’ were central in the development of psychoanalysis. Words often come into our awareness and go out in speech without reflection and we may not notice that in our language and conversations there is something of our psyche.

For a recently arrived migrant however, it’s more a situation of coming to grips with the meaninglessness of words and their relationship to familiar things. For these people language seems to have lost its fit. Meaning has to be affixed to things so they can be spoken about in communication. When Koksal arrived in Australia from Turkey he was just 12 years old. “None of us know nothing about English, you know, we thought every other word which is not Turkish to us, was English. So when we moved to Villawood we were communicating with Yugoslav kids and Greek kids and Italian kids, we thought we were learning English, but (laugh) we were learning nice Yugoslav words and Greek words and Italian words.”\(^\text{19}\) Paul Carter says in these sorts of situations where language has lost its fit “casual coincidences may be the only means of getting on: pantomimic imitations of other people may be the best way of bridging the gap, of fitting language to situation in a country where nothing as yet has a fixed meaning.”\(^\text{20}\) The more tolerant and imaginative we all are in understanding the rules of translation, the more we contribute to our own collective well being.

Australia’s reputation as a warm and friendly multicultural nation has taken a battering in recent times, as details of some of our big political issues have had an international airing. Jennifer Hewett (cites and) comments on a front

\(^{19}\) Koksal Bozdag is a Turkish migrant who arrived here in Sydney, in 1970. He was a participant in the research field work and was interviewed in Auburn on 27-5-94.

\(^{20}\) Paul Carter, p. 4.
page article in *The Washington Post* which describes "white Australia in an identity crisis." The article goes on to describe how resentment felt towards immigrants, and the fear that they are taking away jobs and radically changing traditional Australian culture, is destroying the image of an Australia as a "warm, friendly, fuzzy place."21 Among the ideas expressed in this article are two pertinent to my thesis. One idea is that Australians now have to confront the 'fact' that "trying to build a multiracial, multicultural society does cause resistance and social conflict, and that it is hard, very hard."22 Perhaps we were naive or overly optimistic about how easy it would be. The second idea is that, in the course of this complex race debate, some people have wanted to blame the debate, or conversation, for inflaming the problem. The Prime Minister John Howard wanted Aborigines and multiculturalism off the front pages of daily papers while the champions of multiculturalism, reconciliation and diversity wanted the likes of Pauline Hanson and Graeme Campbell silenced.

To its credit, the public debate refused to be silenced, and truly diverse expressions of opinion have found currency in an interesting way. "If democracy has any meaning, we need to listen to speech we don’t like."23 We are going to hear speech not previously allowed to be heard, carried by an all pervasive media "from one part of the culture to another, and brought to us by some singular personalities."24 We are going to hear Pauline Hanson and Pat Dodson. We will be challenged to listen to opinions and suggestions and to move closer to the differences they articulate, without losing a grasp on our own experience and judgement.

As well as recognising and referring to the work of eminent scholars in the areas that this thesis embraces, I have chosen also to use the work of local theorists and colleagues, unpublished papers and conversations that are current, local and involved, in particular the conversations that have appeared in and through the popular media. I want to include the ambiguity and tensions that we share in trying to live together in this contemporary community. My thesis is constructed as a social ecological study that makes the complexity of people's experience the ontological guiding force.

---

22 Jennifer Hewett, p. 13.
24 McKenzie Wark, p. 264.
The experience of researching and writing about multicultural communities is complicated. Paul Carter thinks that it is possible for one to use writing and thinking about a place and the people who live there as a way of suggesting new things about that place and those people. So in order to put into words a satisfactory account of the experience of living in this community, and to suggest something new about the way people may thrive in it, I felt it was necessary to abandon the linear narrative, and to embrace a variety of voices. In this thesis I will attempt to develop an ecological epistemology, drawing on phenomenology, chaos theory and by prioritising the personal story telling of the people who participated in this research with me.

People adapt into an ecosystem, taking advantage of convenient opportunities to make their lives secure. In this way an ecological understanding of human activity recognises that immediate gratification and pragmatic responses are quite normal. To extend and develop these into a functioning society requires the active intervention of imagination and the defining of intentions that promote notions of sustainable community life. My thesis asserts that we have always been in the process of making a multicultural society, that Australian society is an invention constrained by certain historical contingencies and biogeographical circumstances. But our intentions of course are various and therefore this social building process will never be straightforward. This thesis makes an attempt to recognise how complex is the process.

---

Some Tactical Thoughts
(Towards an Ecological Epistemology)

Telling Stories

It was only when the Vigerzi family moved in next door that I realised I was a Protestant. Not that I much minded this family of Dagos - I had heard about new Australians - but my grandmother was at her wits-end. I remember how she would lay out on her bed the elaborate orange brocades and silver epaulets that dignified her membership to the Orange Lodge, while cursing the Papist plot that would have us all before that craven image of their Mary soon enough. For my grandmother, post war immigration - especially those Catholic Ities - was a betrayal of everything she held dear.

Recently old Mr Vigerzi passed away, mourned by his large family and the many friends he had. Over the last few weeks of his life I got to know the Vigerzi kids, almost for the first time. They are all middle-aged like me with children at school and university, plans and problems, concerns and uncertainties. I learned about their younger years, how they left Italy just after the war and came to the cane fields in Northern Queensland. Tony Vigerzi explained that all his dad knew was “how to work”. It didn’t matter so much what the work was: anything manual, “my dad would do it”. So he cut cane, grew vegetables, cement-rendered buildings, plastered walls and fixed motor cars. Their family worked, that was what they did here in the early years after coming to Australia.

For much of my young life, my head was full of images from elsewhere, places I’d never visited, ideal landscapes of Europe. These were the images that came to me from books, imported from England, and from my grandmother’s stories. They were also the images I was taught about at school and university. It was these places of Europe that had the touch of magic that
stirred and appealed to my imagination. It was as if there was nothing of my own that showed a local taste and spirit, that bore the print of a local thumb. When I look back to the time when I was growing up and being educated, not just at school, but in that interesting confusion of popsongs, hearsay, stories and the wonder of visual advertising, I am astonished how ignorant I was of the place where I lived and of the things of that place.

Suddenly over the last two or three decades it has all changed: we have Australian publishing, Australian films and theatre, an Australian genre in the visual arts and, of course, the phenomenon of multiculturalism which, apart from the recognition it has brought to the diversity and value of our population, has made me notice my place. Something uniquely local was all about me here in the suburb where I grew up.

The stories from people who live in the local government area of Auburn\(^1\) tell me something about the world I am living in. They are about my place, the geographical place, the emerging place, the psychological place and the political place. They are stories about home making and identity. My task, with this research material, is to (re)imagine the nature of these matters as they relate to the very contemporary issues of multiculturalism, globalisation and regionalism, community and cultural identity. Integral to my study, and an especially important aspect of it, is a refusal to avoid the conflict that at times might seem irresolvable in our society because of the uncertainties that emerge from these very issues. Fundamentally I trust in the ever changing sophistication of this country’s broad democracy. The idea of a conversation is

---

1 The Local Government Area of Auburn encompasses the suburbs of Silverwater, Auburn, Lidcombe, Berala, Regents Park, Homebush Bay and Rookwood. Traditionally this area has been thought of as working class, with a population base of around 48,000. The composition of the population has been influenced by waves of migration which has led to a diverse community. In the greater Sydney region it has the second highest percentage of population from non-English speaking countries, approximately 36% and with the greatest proportion of population with incomes below $15,000 p.a, approximately 40%. Data from the Social and Demographic Profile 1993, Auburn Municipal Council.
a confirmation of this trust. I don’t for a moment suggest that this will bring to some resolution these contemporary conflicts. Instead it will continue to raise further conversation.

A Field of Study: An Ecology of Place

One can say of life that it has to change to stay the same. It exists in molecular interactions, but the result of these interactions is life itself. Its autonomy, as one may choose to represent it, arises from its organisation as a self-producing, or self organising system. Fell and Russell describe the quality of this “self-law and its mysterious self-defining and self-referential process” as a “generative mechanism.” All living systems are continually undergoing structural change through an intermingling of various realities and so they generate a dynamic definition of them selves. Social systems can also be thought of as self organising living systems. Social systems are continually generating mechanisms with which they define themselves. To understand these mechanisms involves both an objective or transcendent knowledge, and also a subjective, imaginative knowledge.

Simply, ecology is the study of our ‘home’ from the Greek oikus, the home place, or dwelling place. Over the last few decades the study of ecology has shifted from being the concern of a branch of biological studies, to occupy a more central social ecological position. This epistemological development of ecology from when it dealt primarily with the relationship between living things and their physical environment, or, as Odum prefers, ‘the study of the structure and function of nature’ has expanded the idea of nature to include

---

ecosystems of constructed realities: the "semiosphere" as Ezio Manzini\(^4\) calls it. One can observe this in the way policy making and strategic planning activities now take into account the need for ecologically sustainable development and the maintenance of natural systems. Consider too the popularity of ecological approaches to education, health, psychology, theology, management, industrial design, urban planning and even politics. Contemporary ecological concepts are drawn upon, in this thesis, to describe social and organisational structures as 'self-organising' systems. One of the ecological characteristics of self-organising systems is that they possess great stability over time. However, this stability is maintained through the paradoxical situation of many fluctuations and instabilities occurring at local levels throughout the system. Management styles that work with and give legitimacy to these fluctuations and instabilities logically enhance this long term stability.

Neville: I find well, Australia had to be populated and I mean, after all, the government said we need more people, so, I mean, where do we put them. We've got to have people and they've got to live somewhere. You can't just restrict people to live in a certain area and say, 'you have to live in Cabramatta because you're Vietnamese'. But I mean, I have quite a few friends now that are Vietnamese and they're very good friends. In fact I go to their place and I get a welcome everytime I go there, and by the same token they can come here anytime.

Neville has no difficulty accepting that to stay the same he has to change. His external reality requires little explanation, more people are needed, and as they have come, where do we put them? He resolves this matter by being able to interact with the 'fact' that people have got to live somewhere. If he takes this on as a personal responsibility and helps his Vietnamese friends feel welcome,

\(^4\) Ezio Manzini is a design theorist at the Domus Academy, Milan. His work has been important in the development of contemporary ecology by drawing attention to the fact that people live, not only in a biosphere, but also in a highly complex and artificially constructed sphere of things which appear materially and as ideas. Indeed, the abundance of constructed things and ideas make up the nature of most people's living environments.
then the generative mechanism, so necessary to the process of a social ecology, begins to shape the experience of his living in this place, and in this community.

A way of developing an ecological epistemology that has relevance to and insightfulness about this multicultural society is to consider the concept of place. Places are widely conceived of as having an essential component of character, identity or 'spirit'. A place is clearly more than a topographical location or a physical structure. There is the interaction of the people and the physical setting together with emerging meanings that inform any experience of a place. I can provide no rigorous definition of the concept of place, since it is primarily experiential and intangible. This intangible feeling arises because our experience of place is bound up with the inexplicable sense of ourselves in the world, our 'being-in-the-world' as Heidegger suggests.5 One might assume that the experience of a place is necessarily integrated into everyday life. The notion of place, or sense of place, has relationship to a meeting ground, or maybe a point of intersection. In this way it's possible to consider its practical application to a number of different social and ecological phenomena. For instance a sense of place is relevant in the matters of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal reconciliation, land rights, rural policy, the debate about a republic, multiculturalism, cultural identity and environmental management.

Van: I mean Auburn Road now and Auburn Road four years ago when I start working, completely different. The Auburn Road four years ago is completely strange to me, sure it have a lot of variety, different cultures and things like this but it doesn't make much sense with me. It's a sort of shopping centre and I notice people from different places and cultures. But that's basic, but Auburn Road for me now is the one. You know, when I go to Auburn I like to go there, I like to meet people even though there is busy, people shopping there, it's a different feeling now.

My research began with an interest in the Auburn Mosque. I wondered how this building could have got through the council’s approval process. In 1986 the Turkish community of Sydney decided to build a large mosque modelled on that of Sultan Ahmed’s in Istanbul (classic Ottoman architecture) which would accommodate 5,000 worshippers. The Auburn Mosque serves the needs of thousands of Muslims, of various ethnic backgrounds, but mainly Arabs and Turks, who live in the nearby suburbs. Auburn has a Muslim population of approximately 40,000, predominantly Arab and Turkish. The main source of funding has been from the local Muslim community in the form of donations and interest free loans. Some additional funds have been available from the Religious Affairs Department of Turkey, the Saudi Government and the United Arab Emirates.

How did this community of Muslims organise themselves to carry through the necessary procedures? What did they learn? How did they negotiate with the wider community? Who designed the mosque? What about planning and building regulations? Who uses it? These were questions that interested me. They seemed to have such a contemporary urgency. I was curious, not so much in an objective academic way, but more so as a person whose cultural space was being radically altered by an obviously foreign cultural phenomenon.

Audrey: I don’t know, it doesn’t really affect me because I’m far enough away from it. But actually, I suppose, it is their religion, but I don’t know, if we went to their place, to their country, would we be able to build our churches in their country? I think, if they come over here, to have a better life, they should try and live like Australians do, rather than make their own little countries.

Nesrin: Yes I am happy because this way we know that we go to our mosque to pray. Yes, for my children’s sake, they know that mosque belongs to us. Sometimes when we’re passing by they point to it, “that’s our mosque isn’t it mum”, so I am very happy to see there is a Mosque in Auburn.
Gregory Bateson's thinking about an ecological epistemology involves the logic of cognitive understanding. That is an identification and appreciation of tangible events in one's environment. Bateson argues that ecology is of a "communicative, rather than material, order." Using the principles of ecology he develops an epistemology that is concerned with connectedness and interdependencies. It is an aesthetic endeavour which suggests that an ecosystem is best described primarily in terms of its informational aspects, and not in terms of its biomass or energy capacity. In other words, what organises and maintains an ecosystem is not a positive energy budget alone (although this of course is important) but also involves an aesthetic and imaginative structural field. Ecologically, societies that communicate and share their knowledge about connectedness and interdependence are more likely to be sustainable and healthy.

This thesis takes it as an assumption that our multicultural society is a self-organising system. It is possible therefore to offer an understanding of the society in terms of an ecological epistemology. In the life of this society one can observe the many fluctuations and instabilities that accompany the management and evolution of its ecology. As a community we are in the midst of a paradoxical situation, wondering how and what to make of this place - the geography, the biology, the human enterprise - and how to live comfortably and prosperously with the incredible multi-culture that has emerged here. If, as Bateson suggests, ecologies are continually being invented from the imagination of individuals and the communities that inhabit them, then the stories that carry this imagination are important, and logically form the basis of any ecological inquiry. The stories about our multicultural community, for example, are stories that communicate something about the nature of this place and the organisational structure of this society. Such stories invariably ramble

---

through mythical, psychological and spiritual landscapes as well as landscapes described as political, cultural and environmental.

There are certainly some difficulties with the idea that one might extrapolate from ecosystem theory to social process. What I want to take from Bateson in particular is that an ecological understanding, based on aesthetics and imagination, provides a way of thinking about the conversation within a community on the nature of its beliefs, values and thoughts about its own existence.

Generally the experience of living in an environment is shaped through language, in that explanations about the experience of living are always being made with ourselves or with others. The contemporary biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela8 have argued that such explanations will always be complicated, because of the way people communicate ‘representations of reality’. Maturana and Varela contend that, as a human, one can only know a particular experience of the world. What is called empirical knowledge originates from the individual’s experience and is expressed through language ‘as if’ it represents an external reality, independent of us. People share their understanding about their experience of living through the ways in which they communicate. What there is to know about something involves us taking personal responsibility for the ‘invention’ of our knowing.9 To function in the world people seek out workable solutions through the interplay of communications and we can find any number of different kinds of solutions, some quite fanciful, for the way people might live together.

---

8 Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela co-wrote a controversial biological theory of knowledge which was first published in 1987. The Tree of Knowledge (Boston: Shambala, 1988), has received enthusiastic support from a range of academics and practitioners in fields as diverse as family planning, biology, cybernetics, systems science and communications.

9 Llyod Fell, David Russell, Alan Stewart, p. 27.
I want to take up the work of James Hillman to explore further the ecological notion of an intermingling of realities, especially as people might experience it in our multicultural society. Hillman’s broad approach to an ecological epistemology is in terms of what he calls ‘soul making’. There is something intellectually difficult with the idea of soul. It carries ‘a lot of baggage’ especially as a ‘new age’ concept. In this way it has re-emerged within certain ecological discourses, like deep ecology. What interests me, in Hillman’s concept, is that it offers the idea that soul is not an elevated idea but rather ‘down in the earth’; soul is about place, finding place, settling down in a fertile valley, in which to take root.10 There is an ecological necessity in this idea. The most obvious manifestation of this ecology of soul is in the way that indigenous people the world over sing their land. Hillman says that space and time are important in the way people develop an ecology of place. They must take time and be prepared to devote their imagination to encouraging a soulful presence there.

While soul functions in an individual, the greater part of its function, according to Hillman, is outside the body, in the world, in the society. It is here that the world can imagine itself. Hillman’s primary metaphor for expressing the processes of imagination is the notion of the soul in action. Soul, however, has no ontological status. It does not denote the presence of a thing. Rather he chooses to suggest that it has to do with a ‘quality of relationship’. Often the soul has been associated with the breath. And the breath is not just the physiological function of taking air in and out of the lungs, but it also involves a communicative imagination - that of animating - breathing life into activity. Soul is made by people experiencing life. It is the part of the community conversation that is conducted poetically, a kind of reverie, an activity of poesis. Hillman explains that his basic psychological ideas about the nature of the soul

10 David Russell, The soul is not in the body! So where in the name of the Gods and Goddesses is it? Unpublished seminar paper (UWSHawkesbury, 1995). David Russell is the Associate Professor and Director of the Social Ecology Research Group at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury.
accept its inherent diversity. This "paradoxical essence" gives the soul a "multiple and varied unity." 11 I experience our multicultural society as a multiple and varied phenomenon. The multicultural society is engaged, for me, both imaginatively and objectively.

One of the characteristics of a new country, or a new society, is that newness is always being incorporated. It is only relatively recently that some ecological or collective sense of living with the 'clashing stories' has begun to influence our way of understanding this multicultural society. What I want to suggest about multiculturalism is that it be thought of as a process in soul making. Listening to these clashing stories calls for an imaginative response. I don't think it necessarily means that we each have to understand the other story clearly. It is not a mutual sharing. Rather 'your story' evokes a story in me. I don't want to contrast the ideas of soul making and ideology. There has been a tendency to promote multiculturalism as an ideological policy, and I acknowledge that this has been a useful and successful enterprise. What I wish to expose is that the soulful and the ideological manipulate each other, while at the same time functioning together. What this means is that multiculturalism has to be sustained ideologically: by overarching laws, anti-discrimination policies, ethnic integrity and institutional tolerance. At the same time we each live the experience of multiculturalism. We each imagine dealing with this newness in a variety of ways. A soulful process, I suggest, slows down "the parade of history (ideology sic)" 12 and so allows the various experiences of this multicultural society to coagulate into the emerging story of Australian society.

11 James Hillman, Re-Visioning Psychology (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) p.127. James Hillman begins Re-Visioning Psychology saying "This book is about soul-making. It is an attempt at a psychology of soul, an essay in revisioning psychology from the point of view of soul. John Keats clarified the phrase 'soul-making' in a letter to his brother: call the world if you please, 'the vale of soul-making' then you will find out the use of the world. For Hillman the human adventure is a wandering through the vale of the world for the sake of soul-making. James Hillman is an Archetypal Psychologist and founder of the Dallas Institute and author of a number of books including We've had a hundred years of psycho-therapy and the world's getting worse (San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1992) where he articulates a clear ecological perspective.

It has taken some time, historically and emotionally, for the non indigenous people of this land to begin to ask how they might live here in a way that makes sense. How might they dwell in this place in a way that has a logic and a function. Such a logic must take stock of the history of their coming and settling down here. There has been a psychological, and therefore historical tendency, for non indigenous people to think of Australia as lacking in soulful presence. This idea of a *Tabula rasa* has been with us here, for more than two hundred years. This was present in the myth of *Terra nullius* and has remained, in more recent times, with the fantasy of a White Australia. Certainly for many people who have migrated to this country, the hope of starting afresh has been an important idea. Early European agriculturalists saw what they imagined to be endless expanses of agricultural land of the finest quality. Early Chinese immigrants to Australia saw *san gum shaan* (new gold mountain), and still many new migrants see an opportunity to prosper in the land of plenty. Each wave of immigrants have usually assumed that their new homeland was untouched, often in the face of the most blatant contrary evidence. *Terra nullius* is not solely a British delusion. As people have arrived here they have tended to see the apparently unoccupied regions of Australia as a space in which to flourish.

Van: *Now, I think, besides from the sense of security, like you know owning your own home, I think, what important is a sense of successful settlement. I mean, like a new personal achievement, you know like the sense of economic advantage. Because for example, to own my own home, then my children, when I have maybe some, can stay with me.*

But if we desire a more soulful presence then this implies a messiness, and an intermingling of all things human with the corresponding complexity involved. Stephen Muecke wonders about the yearning for the ‘real Australia’, a place
with a soulful presence, with an identity. He remembers the movie *Smiley*\(^{13}\), set in a country town with the reassuring figure of Chips Rafferty in a khaki uniform patrolling on horse back. This is now only a part of the ‘paradoxical essence’ of our identity which Muecke sees as the relationship between inside and outside, where ‘my’ stories clash with ‘their’ stories. “Where ‘they’ can at various times be the British, Americans, Asians. Identity palpitates, like breathing in and out. Both space and time is involved, pause and movement.”\(^{14}\)

The phenomenon of One Nation\(^{15}\), which I will continue to discuss throughout this thesis, has vividly exposed the divide between so-called correct ideology and popular imaginative impressions. The electoral success of One Nation has opened up in a very public way a discussion about what sort of society the people in this country want to live in. All sorts of accusations and counter accusations fly back and forth, but what has become very clear is that ‘ordinary people’ (one of the great catch cries of One Nation) have turned the common currency of their street gossip, their personal opinions, common knowledge and certain shared feelings into a revolt against the imposition of an ideological multiculturalism. In response to this there has been an attempt by the advocates of an unquestioned multiculturalism to belittle One Nation’s solutions, calling them naive and dangerous to the nation’s well being. But as the popularity of One Nation continues to mount, this ideological position has been progressively changed. There is a public discussion now which accepts that some former policies might have been distant from the ‘ordinary people’ and arrogant when it came to accepting or appreciating how ‘ordinary

---

\(^{13}\) Smiley (motion picture), Directed/Produced by Anthony Kimmins 1956. With Colin Petersen, Ralph Richardson, Chips Rafferty, John McCallum and Sybil Thorndike.

\(^{14}\) Stephen Muecke, No Road (bitumen all the way) (Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997) p. 78.

\(^{15}\) One Nation is the political party formed by the former independent Federal Member for the Seat of Oxley, Queensland, and which recently, June 13, 1998, secured 10 seats in the Queensland state elections. The party espouses controversial policies on immigration, multiculturalism, Aboriginal welfare and services and economic management.
Australians' thought and felt about their community. The point I want to get at here is that despite all the research, the detail of policy drafting and the manipulation of public opinion, ordinary people draft their own understanding of how it is to live in this multicultural society. The lived experience, which constitutes the ecological epistemology, will always be a complex mix, a manipulation of so-called facts and so-called opinions.

Bringing together awkward and sometimes conflicting ideas isn't necessarily a way of resolving, or indeed understanding, the disparate attitudes about identity and Australianness that have emerged in our society recently. By its very nature a multicultural society will always involve some conflict. The confusion that this conflict seems to generate has been well noted. The difficulty for each of us, and for the community, is to trust that the "dissonance and incongruities that pervade, and paradoxically, unite the whole modern world"\textsuperscript{16} can generate a deep and full engagement with the richness of living here, now.

Van: It looked like there isn't any past, sorry. I got no feeling of that time. You know the seas were rough and we were sea sick and like, also I could not breathe. There are a lot of people inside the boat.

For me, every time I think back my home town I think, this place it's got my friends. I can remember every single street and the primary school, all the schools I've been through. It's funny that I did not remember the sad things, totally the good things only. Even though you know how two years before I left my country there were big fighting between Cambodia and Vietnamese. I mean a lot of weapons and people being beheaded and floating along the Mekong River, but I do not remember. That doesn't come up in my mind.

In Van's story, her memories of Vietnam have become embedded in what Stephen Muecke calls a 'mobile discourse'. Such a discourse can so easily be taken from place to place. As she reflects upon her experience she may begin to make sense of that time and how it is that she has been so displaced from her former friends, from all the schools and every single street. But by implication Van's story has now become part of the story concert upon which we as a community must reflect. The Vietnam War took us in that direction; Van's story is an Australian story too. Such stories are a necessary part of the sense making, the soul making, the logic and function of dwelling here. The more stories that are shared, the more understanding can emerge, and the more understanding the greater the possibility for new ideas and new perspectives through which the community can consider itself. Stories help construct an ecological epistemology by allowing the complexity of experience to come through. They enable people to engage imaginatively with an event, become entangled with it, and then the story becomes a local Australian story.

I am advocating a serious reflection upon that component of Bateson's thesis which is to do with one's imaginative response to this place and the society which is emerging here. But he is just as careful to advocate that the biological domain is fundamentally important. According to Tim Flannery, Australia's strange climate is overwhelming influenced by a cycle called the El Nino Southern Oscillation, the consequence of which many of us carry in our heads in the remembered lines:

I love a sunburnt country
a land of sweeping plains,
of rugged mountain ranges
of droughts and flooding rains.

---

17 Stephen Muecke, p. 69.
The Australian natural environment does impose itself on the way people live in this country. Policies and discussions that speak of ‘becoming part of Asia’, for instance, which many Australians accept as an imperative, need clearer definition, especially in an environmental sense. The Australian physical environment is startlingly different from that of neighbouring Asian countries. Therefore, the economy in Australia will differ fundamentally from that of the Asian nations. So too a culture has emerged based both on this biological and geographical difference and, as well, on how we have come to know ourselves in this land. Flannery says “there are certainly excellent arguments for Australia increasing its trade, cultural, scientific and other links with its Asian neighbours. There is no disadvantage either in having a large proportion of the Australian population derived from Asian people.”18 But because of the unique way this environment works, everyone who ever lives here will have to adapt.

A Mode of Thinking: Phenomenology

I have gathered together twenty four conversations, recorded them onto audio tape and transcribed them to hard copy. A conversation suggests that people are talking together somewhat informally. A conversation takes its direction from what emerges and develops between people. Understanding comes out of the moments of intersection and the way ideas cross paths. I am using parts of these conversations to create an inquiry. I make a partisan claim for this work - which I call phenomenological and ecological - that it is knowledge which cannot easily be hypothesized. I am interested in writing about the way my experiences, and the experiences of others, unique experiences, are shaping our community. To write is to “trace lines of flight which are not imaginary and which one is indeed forced to follow, because in reality writing involves us there, draws us in there. To write is to become.”19

---

Van Manen suggests that hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. The research and the writing are aspects of the same process. Writing gives time for reflection by providing the silence from which the story haltingly emerges. I understand too that a post structuralist critique would insist that there can be no single objectively valid reading of a cultural situation. My reflections cannot transcend the subjective to arrive at an objectively real situation. Paradoxically, of course there are emphatically real situations, what one might call the particular reality of particular places and circumstances. What I intend to do in this thesis is draw on the particular stories of people who live in what is sometimes called, a multicultural neighbourhood. I propose that these stories, subjective as they are, offer a variety of reflections. "And a method that encourages variety is also the only method that is compatible with a humanitarian outlook."20 This is the essential assumption of phenomenology. Sometimes when someone has told me of a wonderful experience during a conversation, I realise that I have been given something unique. Honouring these unique experiences is crucial to the research.

Phenomenology begins with an open-ended trust in 'being there'. It is not enough, however, to simply recall experiences with respect to a particular phenomenon. Instead one may attempt to recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects of the lived experience are brought back, as it were, so that one may recognise these as "possible experiences" or as "possible interpretations" of that experience.21 The source - and to some extent the object - of this phenomenological research is the world of lived experience in the suburb of Auburn, which has a large and mixed migrant population.

---

21 Max Van Manen, Researching Lived Experience (New York: State University Press, 1990) p. 41. Max Van Manen is Professor of Education at the University of Alberta, Canada. The characteristic of his phenomenological research work is that the 'lived experience' begins and maintains the inquiry.
Wissal: My dad came here first, to Auburn, with my uncle, his brother and then my mum. Later he brought my grandma here, from Lebanon, and my two other uncles and aunts. After that my grandma brought my other aunty and her husband. That’s when the family started. Yes, and we all live so close, we’re very close. The families here are so big, like my aunts, like I think they have got 6 or 7 children, it’s big. Most of the time we see our relatives because we are always visiting each other. Even when I go out the majority is Lebanese, it’s full of Lebanese people. I could never lose that culture, there’s always people there to remind me of it.

Phenomenology is a critical science which aims to describe human experience and behaviour as they are lived. It represents an attempt to build a philosophy and methodology without the pre-suppositions inherent in the methods of scientific empiricism. Phenomenology argues for a suspension of judgement and a focus of one’s attention on the experience itself. It is not concerned with revealing facts; rather it seeks to reveal and understand experiences as they appear and as they are lived through. Therefore, if I wish to bring a phenomenological attitude to this research it requires that I be constantly raising the questions: What is it like to be a migrant? What is it like to have migrants move into my community? What is it like to live in a multicultural society? What is my home like in a multicultural community?

A phenomenological inquiry then, dwells with the concern for ‘what is’. ‘What is’ the lived experience of some migrants? What is the lived experience of some people who don’t think of themselves as migrants? Bachelard speaks of “the phenomenological doublet of resonances and repercussions”.

---

22 Phenomenology began with the work of Husserl (1958) and was developed by Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Schultz. It is both a critique of scientific empiricist attitudes and a replacement for them. Scientific empiricism demands an attention to the knowledge concepts derived and justified by experience, rather than focusing, phenomenologically, on the process of experience itself. Here, there is an attempt to reorientate science along lines that would have more meaning for humanity.

resonances we hear the story, somewhat detached, as it moves over the
different planes of our lives, while the repercussions, or reverberations invite us
to own the story; to become intimate with the story. It is the reverberations
which bring about change and the possibility of unity. The story may have
been told by another, but one begins to have the impression that one could
have created it. It becomes a ‘new being’ in one’s language. It is at once a
becoming of expression, and a becoming of being.

I acknowledge that the stories each person tells about their lives will
circumscribe the meanings that they wish to give to the experience. They select
the aspects of the experience which they wish to disclose. These meanings have
real and particular effects in their lives. But still they are stories determined by
certain experience which also includes a co-authoring within a community
which shares in those experiences. Each story is thus constructed within an
historical and social context. Rarely do stories embrace all the contingencies
that arise from ‘life as lived’ because they are composed with many gaps,
inconsistencies and contradictions. It is in trying to resolve these
inconsistencies and contradictions that I am provoked to engage actively in the
process of making meaning. The lived experience continues to be constituted
through an ongoing story telling and then re-telling of the experience, what
Geertz concludes to be a “copying that originates”²⁴

When I record and then transcribe the interviews, I cannot claim that what is
told is a true account of the succession of events through which the person has
passed. These case studies are solipsistic. They are about dreams, passions,
fantasies, wishes, pain, joys, ambitions. They are also, most crucially a
commentary on and explanation of events. None of these can be witnessed by
me first hand. The material is fiction too, because it belongs to those categories
of the human mind that emerge from memory. Each person tells their story as
they remember it. There is always the possibility of invention and, as there is no.

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, “Making experiences, authoring selves” in Gilligan and Price, ed.,
corroboration, this material can not be called empirical. As well, I transpose some of these statements into a story about something else, my thesis. In a real sense it is this thesis writing which is providing the focus, selecting the incidents I choose to consider relevant, while discarding others. Certainly the chronological sequence of events is changed. Max Van Manen speaks of this: "even life captured directly on magnetic or light-sensitive tape is already transformed at the moment it is captured"\(^{25}\). The transforming nature of 'capturing' the material will cause a loss in the meaning of the experience. An account of, or description of a lived experience is never identical to lived experience itself. All the 'scraps of language' - the conjunctions, repetitions and redundancies, ums, ahs, you knows - are partially lost; as well as all the physical gestures, the laughs, tones and body expression that do not translate into the writing. However to 'capture' these stories is part of my experience of the research. The captured material is transformed by me, through transcription.

Contemporary multicultural society may be acknowledged and apprehended through empirical observation. At the same time it can also be observed imaginatively. We know from our day-to-day experience that these two ways of being are linked. How one sees the world influences what one imagines and does about the world. David Russell speaks of an ecology of relationships\(^{26}\) in which the world of lived experience is both literal and metaphoric. One can see in the way popular cultural phenomena work, like television programs, (for example A Country Practice or Heart Break High) reflect different sentiments about being Australian. When people are telling stories of travel and migration, for example, there is often a braiding together of these empirical and imaginative forms of knowledge. Stories like these are about change, trauma and opportunities. They are also about great loss and reserved excitement.

\(^{25}\) Max Van Manen, p. 54.

Every form of research and theorising is shot through with values. Reflecting about aspects of the migrant’s experience, the nature of home or the value of a multicultural society is already related to the very lives and values of those doing the research. My values, the values implicit in the way I see, are those of a middle aged Australian man whose ancestors migrated here from the British Isles. I have reaped the bounty of twentieth century affluence, I am Protestant in my most basic faith and I live within the security of these cultural realities. But, like many of the people I have been in conversation with in Auburn, I too have experienced migration. I lived for many years away from Australia, and at the time thought that I would remain and become a citizen of this other country. Circumstances, of a kind which are not unfamiliar to people who live away from their roots, called me back on the death of my father and then I became caught up in this society again.

Not long after returning to Sydney in 1977, I took up a teaching position with the NSW Education Department, working in one of the newly established Intensive Language Centres.\textsuperscript{27} I found myself travelling each day to the far western fringe of the city, to Casula High, where I would teach the English of science, maths and physical education to about one hundred Indo-Chinese children. All of these children had been airlifted from the war zones of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Each day they would be bussed to school where they would be taught together in classes separate from the general school population. During recess and lunch, however, they would play alongside all the other Casula High children. One day, just as I was turning my car into the schoolyard, I noticed that the children were all standing up near the bus that had brought them from their hostel. There was quite a commotion at the gate.

\textsuperscript{27} The NSW Department of Education (as it was then called) established a Multicultural Education committee in 1977. Money for the development of Intensive Language Centres was made available from the department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and managed through the Commonwealth Schools Commission. The second Fraser Government (1975-82) endorsed the Galbally Report, which had reviewed post-arrival programs and services for migrants, encouraging the notion of multiculturalism as a significant departure from previous education policies of assimilation and integration.
and when I walked up to find out what was happening, I found a small group of people handing out a flier and insisting that only the Casula High children should get one. I think that some of the Indo-Chinese children had thought that they could take one, but they apparently had been rudely rebuffed. The people handing out the fliers were from the National Front, or some similar group. The regular high school children didn’t seem to be that interested in the concerns of the pamphleteers. They stood around in groups near the gate secure and confident, some made derogatory comments. ‘My’ children were just cross, and I think scared. As for the people from the Front, they seemed anxious to get away as soon as I arrived. So what was this all about? On that morning I had to escort these children - the sons and daughters of South Vietnamese merchants, government officials and military personnel - in through the gate and into class. I wasn’t particularly politicised, although I had marched in anti Vietnam War demonstrations and I had applauded the Whitlam Government’s quick and decisive decision to withdraw our troops from the war. I suppose I was a libertine leftie.

But here I was, feeling incredibly protective of these South Vietnamese children and angry at the agitation I’d just experienced. The irony of ‘defending’ the children of a right wing military regime from the right wing of local Australian politics escaped me at the time. I went on to develop my English as a second language teaching skill and taught for some years in Intensive Language Centres. I suppose the point of telling this story is to confirm for myself that I have been invested in and immersed in the experience of recent migration to Australia, a sort of bit player, tagging along as the community changed.

Here I would have to acknowledge that by declaring myself so ‘upfront’ I may run the risk of valorizing these qualities and characteristics as if they are to be the measure of appropriateness. I hope to demonstrate though, in the way I am writing and thinking in this thesis, that containing structures like white
Anglo Saxon Protestant men are only partially coherent and can not maintain such integrity. Individuals, like the community, I suggest, are continually invaded by foreignness.

Many of the people whose stories I am referring to are immigrants, yet the term ‘immigrant’ is imprecise. Clearly, apart from the various indigenous peoples of this land, we are all immigrants to this country. In contemporary Australia, ‘immigrant’ refers to populations as diverse as Poles, Germans, Italians, Greeks, the Slavic peoples, Chinese, New Zealanders, Lebanese, English, Irish, Scottish and more recently Vietnamese, Turkish and Afghani. These people differ in religion, family and community customs, and political experience. The nature of the migration experience often shapes attitudes towards the host society. The predominantly Anglo-Irish population who came to Australia from the first days of settlement in the main remained and turned into the local population. Similarly, many non English speaking peoples who came here over the last one hundred years or more accepted assimilation into the local population as the most appropriate way to make their home here. By contrast, the migrants of more recent times - mainly Vietnamese; Chinese from the mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong; Korean, Iranian, Afghani and Lebanese; and, most predominantly, English and New Zealanders have no pressing desire to cut their ties with their native countries. They prefer to keep their options open, to preserve the right to return as well as the right to stay.

"Phenomenology is the study of essences" said Merleau-Ponty. Here the word ‘essence’ should not be mystified; it is not some ultimate core or mysterious residue of meaning. Rather, through a phenomenological inquiry the essence of an experience may be revealed in such a way that one is able to grasp both the obvious or literal nature, and the emotional or metaphorical

28 Max Van Manen, p. 39.
significance of this experience. This twofold character of phenomenology allows for concrete reflections to blend with personal meaning and so suggest an appropriate way of thinking about being in the world. The political and cultural intervention of a complex phenomenon like Pauline Hanson can only be apprehended appropriately then, when what she has to say and the emotional impact of her agenda are considered together.

Certain concerns with phenomenology as a research method are sometimes expressed in terms of both empirical and ideological critiques. However, as my work is largely about championing the subtlety and vigour of our multicultural society, and contrasting this with the popularism of the very current race debate, the issue of critically considering phenomenology is not my main concern. In many cases it would be obvious to say that phenomenology overlaps with empiricism and gives ideologies a human touch. Or possibly phenomenological inquiry is empirical and ideological all at once.

The empirical position would claim, however, that any departure from a scientific empirical methodology leaves the findings open to charges of idiosyncracy. In as much as phenomenology seeks the subtlety of depth and variety in experience, it gains depth at the expense of breadth. Phenomenological findings are not easily replicated or validated and they cannot be easily integrated into what we are accustomed to call theory. For the empiricist the use of phenomenology leaves the field littered with ideas whose generalizeability remains forever in doubt.

The empirical critique demands a strict definition of terms and a measurability which would strip my approach of its meaning. I don’t think it is possible to reduce the various ‘lived experiences’ explored here to structures and definitions of cognition and behaviour. Personal accounts of the experience of migration, of settling down, making a home, of memories, will not fit a mechanistic explanatory model. Nonetheless these experiences of
mariation, of settling down, of being disturbed are valuable. They offer an elaboration of the collective understanding of our contemporary multicultural society.

Nesrin: We came in 1974 and we lived in Sydney until 1985. My mother then decided to go back to Turkey, so we had to go with her. We went back in 1985 and stayed in Ankara until 1991, then we moved back to Australia. We had a two story house in Corum, near Ankara. My grandmother was living with us, and my father had his own workshop. He was a cabinet-maker, carpenter I'd say, he worked at home and my uncles were living in Ankara too. They were married and had pretty good jobs, positions in various places, mainly government offices.

My parents were the ones who decided about our future, about their future. They discussed it amongst themselves to come to Australia. They thought that they could have their children learn to speak another language and perhaps try another country. See what's out there. Better living conditions. Like we had a nice house in Corum, but I guess my parents wanted more. They weren't dissatisfied with anything there, but it's just that I think they wanted to find out what's out there. How the other people are living and perhaps make a few dollars. That's another thing, to be better off financially. Although he had a job there, he had his own business, I guess he didn't have enough finance to move out to a bigger shop, perhaps to own a shop in an industrial area, something like that.

Nesrin's memories and reflections on her family's plans are a case in point. She speaks about coming to Sydney and leaving her grandmother behind in Turkey. Also, she offers an interpretation of her parent's ambitions and fantasies. The way she talks about these lived experiences involves what fuzzy
theory calls ‘hedging language.’ 29 This means that the experiences she describes can be comprehended by others in an approximate way; not just in terms of language but as a shared understanding of the experience because others have had similar experiences too. For example when she speaks of her parents’ plans about wanting more; they weren’t dissatisfied with anything there, but it’s just that I think they wanted to find out what’s out there; how the other people are living and perhaps make a few dollars, she is describing a situation which many people have some experience of. Her reflections can be partially appreciated by most people, despite their particular subjectivity.

It would not be possible to measure in any comprehensive way how Nesrin’s experiences contribute to a social knowledge. Merleau-Ponty suggests that “experience adheres to the surface of our body; we cannot unfold it before us, and it never quite becomes an object” 30 but it remains intimately and ambiguously part of our ‘bodily space’. Through these sensate feelings - and most of us know such feelings through the experience of place or journey or memory or relationship - one can get a sense of being intermingled with the body and feelings of others and with the ‘body’ of the world. These ideas of a communicative, rather than material relationship to place and memory, to community and individuals are fundamentally ecological.

29 Vladimir Dimitrov, Fuzzy Logic Seminar, (UWSH 1995). Dimitrov explains that ‘hedges’ are linguistic qualifiers which modify the degree of membership of a ‘fuzzy class’. In Nesrin’s case her parents plans belong, to some degree, in the fuzzy classes of the ‘future’, ‘the value of another language’ and ‘adventure’. Dimitrov goes on to say “we are born with a potentiality to understand and manage fuzziness in every day communication. We learn how to reduce or enlarge it, how to reinvent and re-shape it, how to analyse or synthesise it anew in order to be understood better or to make other’s viewpoints more clear and meaningful.” Dr. Vladimir Dimitrov (research scholar at UWSH) is inquiring into the application of fuzzy and chaos theories in complex social ecologies. He is author of a number of papers including, “Fuzzy Symplectic Systems: A new framework for multi-stakeholder decision making” and “Fuzzy logic and the management of social complexity” both in Fuzzy Systems Design: Social and Engineering Applications Edit. L. Reznik, (Heidelberg: Physica Verlag, 1997).

Nhan: For my leaving actually I decided strongly I would leave. So when I left my country I had to go to Thailand first, that's my country when I first left. I felt very happy in a way, but actually that time also very sad for me because I left my loved ones behind, that means my relatives and also my friends and even my girlfriend. So that time very sad. But because like, maybe I have an ambition for myself. I stay in Thailand for more than 2 years in a refugee camp. I have a few friends, they are Australian, they are working in Thailand. Some of the reasons for me to choose Australia is because the weather here maybe a little bit similar. And at that time we thought Australia is a big country and less people, if we join in, for example it's not really overcrowded like other counties. Now when I leave Sydney, and travel to Vietnam, I miss it a lot.

Perhaps the most incisive critique of phenomenology comes as an ideological argument. Cosgrove argues that the phenomenological approach has been unable to deal adequately with the historical/temporal aspects of place, community and environment. He asserts that phenomenology is implicitly idealist and subjectivist, and ignores materialist influences on environmental and community experiences in its concern for the experience itself.\(^{31}\) To look only at experience, he contends, runs the risk that underlying ideological structures of power and oppression remain buried and therefore continue to function unchallenged. Of course there can be no doubt that dominant ideologies and power relations remain, but again, I would suggest, these ideologies remain only partially consistent. This is because no matter how stable a system appears, ideologies are subject to continual change. So while the nature of the experience, as told by people, may function unselfconsciously to prop up the existing power structures, the stories also reflect this continual process of change. Ideology underlies all discussions about the experience of migration and our social experiment with multiculturalism. Yet any theory of

‘false consciousness’\textsuperscript{32} which would undercut the phenomenological approach can only come from a viewpoint that does not entertain the possibility of people doing things just for the sake of it, with little motivation from the expediency of ‘historical materialism’. When Nesrin speaks about how her parents just \textit{wanted to find out what’s out there} and \textit{how other people are living and perhaps make a few dollars}, I think she is talking about an attitude that’s quite ‘okay with itself’ and common to many people’s experience of migration and travel. However, the ideological critique of the phenomenological approach does produce a dilemma which I accept is difficult to resolve directly.

\begin{quote}
   Nhan: \textit{It change a lot, but I was lucky enough to live in a family that we can trust each other. For many other families they could not trust even their own children. Because, like the school, or the curriculum, or the education system had completely changing. They just like try to teach, or to brainwash the children. Whatever doctrines or education system they impose on them, the kids did not know anything, just study their race, their hatreds, their feelings. Any peoples against the government are betrayers and also any events, any activities like for example leaving the country or doing something secretly that’s against the government. There’s like how to say, counter revolutionaries or something, and you would be severely sentenced or prosecuted.}
\end{quote}

Nhan’s experience of the Vietnam War exemplifies this dilemma. He chose to leave Vietnam for ideological reasons and he brings those experiences with him into this experiment with multiculturalism. The adventure of migration for him involves his experience of being ‘Australianised’. Certain ideological critiques would argue that this is the consequence of an obvious historical process, quite materialist and independent of an autonomous self asserting its

\textsuperscript{32} Ken Dovey, ‘Place and Placemaking’ in the proceedings of Paper 85 Conference (Melbourne: RMIT, Faculty of Architecture and Building 1985) p. 99. ‘False consciousness’, a widely used Marxist term, refers to the assumption that by concentrating on the experience itself, individuals may think that their experience is independent of what Marxist’s argue is the ‘historical materialism’ that underpins all social and human experience.
own desire. I don’t think it serves the value of Nhan’s story well to concentrate on an interpretation of events in this way. For one thing, this society remains actively involved in the Vietnam legacy, but the particular ideological positions that once separated the countries have now been radically revised, creating a situation for Nhan to rethink his experience of Vietnam. While he may have left Vietnam under the pressure of war and defeat, he also had personal ambitions; and as the turn of events would have it, these ambitions can now include a return to Vietnam.

Stories about living in this multicultural society don’t necessarily have to connect, they don’t have to reinforce each other, but they do collectively have a historical weight of connection. We are drawn together in becoming Australians. An ecological understanding of this process accepts too, that living systems are not seamless patterns of connectedness, but that there are gaps which permit the necessary markings of distinctions and differences.
Pauline Hanson

Following the Queensland elections¹, social and political commentary quickly turned to try and make some sense of this political and cultural phenomenon. The commentary, however, still tended to dismiss Pauline Hanson² and One Nation as populist (what ever that means) and blamed the mainstream political, intellectual alliances for failing to articulate clearly the nature and significance of contemporary change. This misses the point, although there is truth in the critiqued failure of the major political parties to have comprehended the electorate’s mood.

Something different has happened here. Hanson did not so much exploit the differences between the two parties; she exploited the policies they agreed on. In crucial and sensitive areas Hanson went out on a limb where she found a lot of people prepared to listen to her. She exploited public anxiety about such things as: the make-up and size of the national population and the level of immigration, foreign aid, multiculturalism, the function and role of ATSIC³, the sale of public assets and amenities, and the apparent unrestricted and unregulated foreign investment. (Hanson foreshadowed the difficulty this country would face if it adopts the Multilateral Agreement on Investment being sponsored by the OECD, sometime before the ACTU took a serious interest in

¹ On June 13, 1998, Queensland Elections were held. A number of opinion polls suggested that the One Nation Party could win at least 4 seats. After the count, the party secured a swing of 23% across the state and now has 10 members of parliament. In the October 1998 Federal Elections One Nation candidates failed to win any House of Representative seats. Nonetheless, the party secured a positive swing of 10% and its primary and first preference vote count was greater than the combined tally received for both the Democrat and National parties.
² Pauline Hanson was elected to Federal Parliament as the member for Oxley, Queensland, in the elections of 1995. In these elections, the Keating led Australian Labor Party was defeated by the Howard, Liberal/National Coalition. In the 1998 Federal election Pauline Hanson lost in her bid to be re-elected.
³ ATSIC: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council.
the issue). So what does this mean when considered in terms of a contemporary ecological epistemology? Surely it is necessary to recognise that, in the processes involved in identifying with this multicultural community, one should not insist on completion or unity. One has to accept the partial truth in all statements about this community.

This way of thinking about the situation is paradox driven, making it possible to recognise the simultaneous expression of contradictory statements, and so acknowledge ambiguity and ambivalence. This society is not only more complex than we presently know but also quite possibly more complex than we can ever know. Knowledge about the society is only partial, approximate at best. Therefore, the coexistence of opposing ideas and statements allows a greater variety of ideas to participate in and develop our knowledge about our society. “For every well defined direction about a problem, there will be an opposite and equally well defined direction.” A multicultural society, by its very definition, has to recognise that many people in the community have difficulty in the way they feel about these profound cultural changes.

Lodi: In the ordinary shops, Coles or Woolworths or Flemings, there is a lot of things you can’t find. But when you go to a Lebanese shop, they’ve got, it’s like a second Lebanon. You don’t need Lebanon any more, everything is here now, because everything is imported to Australia, and they’ve got everything: bread, you name it they’ve got it. Like five years ago, mum would send a letter to Lebanon, “would you send me some fig jam”, even though they have it here, but her’s was made in Lebanon. And now it’s the same thing, they’ve got fig jam made in Lebanon, they’ve got sweets that’s made in Lebanon or tins of chick peas and that’s all made in Lebanon.

4 ACTU: Australian Council of Trade Unions on March 16, 1998 sponsored a day long conference and seminar: Globalisation, the Asian Crisis & the Future of Australian Jobs to discuss the implications of this agreement (MAI). Jennie George, the current president of the ACTU publicly admitted that she found out about the MAI from Pauline Hanson’s web site.

5 Vladimir Dimitrov, unpublished seminar paper (UWSHawkesbury School of Social Ecology, 1995). Dr Vladimir Dimitrov is a research scholar in the School of Social Ecology.
Conversations work as an evolving story, a narrative about the events which are taking place, unfolding right now. First of all, in telling and creating stories one is not merely recounting in a chronologically sequential way, but rather, in the anarchy of the imagination ‘making-it-strange’, and I hope, by implication, interesting. The attraction of a public conversation is that the community may go beyond simple interpretations of identity and difference and enter into a ‘fusion of horizons’ as Gadamer might see it. Such a process is both a temporal and spatial concept. It is historically formed, representing the perspective bequeathed to us by our pasts, and it includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.

John: I can walk down Auburn and feel at home because I know the people behind the moustaches and the veils. I know they’re just people like everyone else.

Can writing about conversations be analogous to providing a theory⁶? Certainly, in carrying out research there is an aim to find a description, even an interpretation, which will seem plausible because of the richness of its contingent detail. The structures which lie in some sense behind the rich details, and give them a pattern and significance, will be determined through an accumulation of material and the selective organisation of ideas from the conversations. There emerges, through the writing, an imaginative process of ‘coming to know’.

---

⁶ The academic community has always accepted that research discovers things. But writing also discovers things, which is a process that fascinates me. By experimenting with writing itself - ways of putting things, different associations, ways of positioning yourself in relation to what you are writing about, ways of seeing - you can make thought move in directions you would never have come upon through more straightforward approaches to recording research. There are modes of enquiry that close things down and modes of enquiry that open things up. Something is opening here, I get the same impression when I am reading Bachelard, (In conversation with Jane Goodall).
I think I can claim that the experience of multiculturalism is impossible to capture in an objective way. It can be approached, to some extent tested and aspects of its nature suggested in various documented ways. The process of my writing here is not to be taken as imparting knowledge about the reality of multiculturalism but as raising an interest in, and about, its reality. What I am trying to imagine for myself is an ecological epistemology that accepts as a fundamental notion that complex dynamic relationships are always in a state of process.

We are in danger of being swamped by Asians

In a recent Sydney Morning Herald article, "Backyard Apartheid", a family discusses the circumstances of their 'mixed' marriage. The husband, speaking of his father's hatred and disapproval of the marriage, says, "it had become a matter of principle for him; he had the right to hate. And all this was before John Howard came to power and welcomed the climate of free speech that now apparently prevails."7 Peter Davis, Shire Mayor of Port Lincoln in South Australia, seemed to echo the father's sentiments when he described the children of interracial couples as 'mongrels', admitting his comments were offensive, but defending himself with a claim to "free speech."8

With this an urgency came to my work. When the Federal Member for the seat of Oxley, Pauline Hanson, used the same argument to defend her statements on immigration, multiculturalism and Aboriginal welfare - 'this is a free country and I can say what ever I like'- I realised that there was clearly an attitudinal change in the society. The rationale for my research has been to support and encourage multiculturalism and to find out more about how this multicultural society is functioning. So it is with personal concern that I

---

7 Greg Roberts, "Backyard Apartheid" in the Sydney Morning Herald (October 24, 1996) p. 11.
8 Greg Roberts, "Mayor against 'mongrel' children stands his ground" in the Sydney Morning Herald (October 24, 1996) p. 3. In recent years public statements about issues of racial disquiet have been limited to some radio talk-back hosts, notably Ron Casey on 2KY in Sydney, an academic, Professor Geoffrey Blainey and a Labor politician, Graeme Campbell, Federal seat of Kalgoorlie.
approach the emerging disquiet with multiculturalism. What seems important now is to come to a better understanding of how a certain public opinion was way out of step with my own regarding multicultural Australia. The ‘great immigration debate’ sparked by Geoffrey Blainey in the 1980’s exposed a growing concern that shifts in immigration policy would inevitably lead to an ‘Asian invasion’ and a loss of jobs, and presented an argument that official policy was not in keeping with public opinion. Meanwhile, there has been an amazing bandwagon effect since the recent Queensland election, and One Nation is building support in many regional electorates across the country. The support is probably, as many commentators have now noted, a protest against a variety of government policies, most of them economic, and multiculturalism is easily targeted in this way.

Presumably one should have been better prepared for the Hanson phenomenon. One can take little comfort from the failure of social theorists and policy designers to consider more pragmatically the arguments put forward by Blainey. But it is important to note that over the last few decades there has been a fairly successful change in the way the so-called Asianisation of Australia has been accepted. At the risk of being flippant, it is as if the mainstream cultural style has blended, with a certain degree of elegance: chops with polenta, spuds with pesto and sushi as a side dish. The ongoing development of Australian society, and the emergence of somewhat assimilated cultural identities will inevitably lead to a gradual acceptance of greater diversity.

Historically the society has shown itself able to move with relative stability and to remain intact through changes, from colonisation to Britishisation, to Europeanisation and on to Asianisation. Along the way there has been brutal racist violence perpetrated against Aborigines and people of non British stock.

---

The society knows this about itself, and in official policy and public discourse there is an openness around such history. The widespread support for ‘Sorry day’\(^{11}\), reconciliation and the considerable opposition to One Nation are testimony to this. It is interesting to read in the *BIMPR Bulletin* \(^{12}\) of the three major areas of multicultural research still in need of continued study and better public explanation. The first relates to diversity in Australia, and in this a good deal of work has been done. Much of it has been to explore community profiles, Australian language resources, intermarriage, settlement studies, religious communities, and studies of commonality in the Australian society.\(^{13}\)

The second area is related to government policy and programs as outlined in the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia 1989*. Research is needed to better define multiculturalism, and to examine issues such as basic rights, social justice, human resources, language, communication and community relations.\(^{14}\) The third area, of research into public opinion and debate on matters related to multicultural Australia, had received no major attention by the bureau.\(^{15}\) One might ask, what had been made of Blainey’s intervention? Had it been assumed that there would be no further public debate? Had it been assumed that the relationship between public opinion and public policy would be complementary?

\(^{11}\) *Sorry Day* was held on 26 May 1998. The idea for a day of apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was proposed at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in May 1997. It was roundly supported by the Governor General, Sir William Deane, church leaders, many politicians, academics and the general public.

\(^{12}\) *Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research Bulletin* was produced and published by the Commonwealth Government for 7 years (1989-1996). A restructuring of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, after the election of the Howard Coalition Government, saw the closure of this research bulletin.


\(^{14}\) Trevor Batrouney, p. 7.

\(^{15}\) Trevor Batrouney, p. 7.
Pauline Hanson has forced again a debate on the future of multiculturalism in Australia. Further, by making a claim to her democratic right she is demanding that this democracy remains pluralistic and tolerates the expression of her opinions.

Hanson assumes that she and her supporters have a mandate to promote racially inflammatory ideas and defy existing systems of order. In this she is deeply challenging. She is calling into contention relatively recent developments in cultural and institutional attitudes towards race in this society. I would "have to be dragged in chains", she said "to participate in a reconciliation process organised by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission" to resolve complaints brought against her. It has been suggested by some commentators that Hanson is providing a response to an urgency and fear in the society that is the consequence of rapid social and cultural changes in particular, economic and cultural globalisation which encourages the removal of trade tariffs and the demise of certain ‘ways of life’. She opposes the privatisation of national utilities, and positive discrimination policies that favour the less privileged in the society. She opposes a multicultural policy that doesn’t orientate people towards assimilation into an Australian culture, and unchecked immigration with no accompanying population strategy. The speed and lack of consultation with which these social and cultural changes had been instigated has, hitherto, been accounted for by many politicians and bureaucrats as the necessary restructuring strategy which, in time, would provide beneficial outcomes for all.

For me, the quandary is that while I applaud some of these contemporary orthodoxies, others I reject. When it comes to economic globalisation and the privatisation of public utilities, like so many other people I mistrust the government’s intentions and I don’t fully understand what it’s about. The

---

16 Greg Roberts, “Hanson will ignore human rights summons” in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (October 24, 1996) p. 3.
closing down of industries that have served this country well, and the massive
unemployment that follows has to be challenged. In the main, however, I have
been positive and excited by the changes over the years. So at first I couldn’t
easily identify the motives or the circumstances that seemed to generate this
“stream of hatred that has been bottled up by political correctness/civility”.17
What is in the air? What is this blood letting? Where have I been? How can we
be thinking like this as a people after so many years of migration, integration
and what seemed, at least to me, to be a relatively successful pluralism? Have
my views been too optimistic?

My optimism should not obscure the endemic presence of racial concepts
that have been part of the social and cultural development of Australia. By the
eyear nineteenth century, classification of humanity by racial variants had been
well established and written up in the scientific literature of the day. It wasn’t
long before theories began to emerge which suggested that race determined
culture, and that differences between cultures were caused by the differences in
the biological characteristics of the different races. The interweaving of race
through biology, culture, and language had in itself a very simple basis in
experience. In most societies, then as still to a large extent now, a child was
born into the society of which it was to become a part, and whose language and
manners it would learn. So a concept of race which does not distinguish clearly
between social, cultural, linguistic and biological classifications and which
tends to make a unity of these seems quite logical.

The historical coincidence of colonial expansion, an emerging egalitarianism
and rational scientific thought lead to the development and acceptance of
Social Darwinist theories.18 These theories qualified the differences between
races as being a consequence of varying stages in evolution. In a colonial

17 Greg Roberts, p. 11
18 Keith McCormochie, David Hollinsworth, Jan Pettman, pp.44-49.
country like Australia, this sort of thinking provided justification for the provision of policies and strategies in regards to the treatment of Aborigines in particular, and later of Chinese immigrants and indentured labourers. The implication of Social Darwinism was that human societies and individuals in those societies are subject to patterns of cultural domination and subordination. *Survival of the fittest* was considered to be the way of Nature, therefore inevitable and desirable for the benefit of the species as a whole. Australian society functions today in the long shadow of these ideas. It is only in very recent years (1968-1973) that the last official racial policies were disbanded in matters to do with Aborigines and immigrants.

I suspect then that this ‘stream of hatred’ that Hanson has supposedly touched comes from a deeper place than the unemployment debate, or globalisation, or being part of the Asian sphere of influence. But in other ways it seems unreasonably confused. So many people have come here, stayed, and made this place their home. I think one can see all around major social change. Asian immigration goes on all the time, and is being accepted relatively comfortably. In so many ways migration has been successful. Being successful doesn’t mean that difficulty, hardship, accommodation and a process of trial and error has not been asked of all concerned. Is this current furore just a momentary phenomenon? A passing scream of frustration, nothing to worry about? Just ignore the likes of Hanson and Davis.

The Jungian analyst Anne Noonan wonders “that it is a woman who is taking on the saviour role in Australia, a shadow aspect of the little Aussie Battler and the ‘drover’s wife’”. In musing about this, Noonan says, “Hanson displays that part of the Australian psyche which is borderline. It fears abandonment, there is no sense of a core self. She seems to be terrified of the unknown, with a dreadful fear of ‘the interior’ as empty or persecutory, with no intimate history of place as meaningful or sacred. She can make no
connection to either an indigenous sense of soul or place, nor be open to the meanings that new arrivals are trying to contribute.”

In her first parliamentary speech Hanson said that “Immigration and multiculturalism are issues that, for too long, ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate by the major parties. I and most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolished. I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. Between 1984 and 1995, 40% of all migrants coming into this country were of Asian origin. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate. Of course I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in whom comes into my country. A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united. The world is full of failed and tragic examples, ranging from Ireland to Bosnia to Africa and, closer to home, Papua New Guinea. America and Great Britain are currently paying the price.”

So I write this in a climate of social and political tension. I want to use this thesis to comment on the situation as it unfolds. Dealing with circumstances as they emerge means that one is always asynchronous with the contemporary issue because one tends to be thinking out of an older history with older ideas and values. Indeed, I may only be able to comment and report on the changing nature of this intriguing development, without being able to make sense of it. When I first began this thesis, Pauline Hanson had only just been elected. Now, as I bring it to a particular conclusion she, and her party, have secured at least ten seats in the Queensland parliament and she clearly remains a force in Federal politics. So, some of my earlier thoughts are already answered. Hanson

19 Anne Noonan, “Psyche and Environment” in Sense of Place: Depth Perspectives on Australian Landscapes and Environmental Values. (University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury, 1996) p. 335.
20 Pauline Hanson, (Member for Oxley), First Speech Australian House of Representatives 10th. September. Appropriation Bill No. 1 in Hansards (Canberra: 1996).
and One Nation are not just a momentary phenomenon. Nor can the community, in particular the intellectual elite communities choose to ignore her.

Neville: The place where I worked for 13 years, I was asked when I took up that position would I mind working with Asian men, and, I said ‘no.’ I said ‘that doesn’t worry me one iota’ They said, ‘oh well, the last chap that was here said he wouldn’t have anything to do with foreign people’, so I said, ‘that won’t worry me’, I said, ‘if its work and if they’re doing their job that’s all right and I’ll do my job’.

The situation that Neville describes is probably common enough in many work places. What he is talking about is that people need to feel confident that in some way their presence will persist despite the contemporary realities of internationalism, multiculturalism, or late capitalist economic reform. I know that when some people come up with stereotypes like ‘Asians are this’ or ‘Asians are that’, I jump to the fray saying ‘that’s wrong’ because the category ‘Asian’ makes absolutely no sense at all. One just cannot lump fifty or sixty percent of the world population together and talk about them so indiscriminately. In turn, however, I cannot ignore the way such stereotypes hold currency in the wider community. In the lead up to the 1998 Queensland elections a number of newspaper articles offered analysis of the groundswell in support for Hanson. “Basically, I saw a politician’s lips moving (Pauline Hanson) and it didn’t sound like bullshit”.22

What Hanson seems to have touched is that deep need to feel a sense of identifiable continuity in a community. Wendy Kelly, a school teacher, is worried about her children in an area where youth unemployment is around 30 percent, and she sees no realistic options coming from the mainstream political

22 Darryl Wheeley, quoted in Bernard Lagan “One Nation’s Secret Army” in the Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday June 6, 1998) p. 36.
parties. In other words, the established social institutions don’t seem to care, nor do they provide the infrastructure necessary for her community to prosper. What she rails against is the perception that special assistance is made available for Aborigines and recently arrived migrants.

What seems to be happening in this country is that the debate is not ‘about facts’. It is not an objective debate. It is an objecting controversy about ‘what is the nature of being Australian’. This controversy includes how we feel about our society. Do we have a society that welcomes migrants or do we have a society which feels uncomfortable with all, or with some migrants?

Finding our way through all of this is actually rather difficult as there seems little doubt that in the broad Australian community, and also in the psyche or soul of the community, racism remains deeply embedded. The matter is not so much whether we as individuals or whether sections of the community feel offended by this, but whether the society has enough institutional sophistication and a cultural psychology insightful enough to disarm damaging racist policies. I think that institutionalised racism has been gradually dismantled in Australia over the last three decades. This is not to say that racist attitudes don’t linger, but I believe that as a society we have moved a great distance in this regard.

I think that One Nation presents not so much a failure of faith in these institutional changes, but more a wake up call that announces how complex and unpredictable matters to do with race, culture, identity, fairness and security are. One Nation seems to have a more wide ranging support base than some critics are prepared to admit. There are many single political and social agenda issues gathered together in One Nation. Some focus group surveys

---


24 Rob Brook, “Hanson’s a hot topic in Hong Kong” in Letters to the Editor Sydney Morning Herald (October 24, 1996) p. 14.
indicate that the party attracts people from all ethnic groups\textsuperscript{25} and it can't be simply labelled a party for poor whites. It's interesting to note that 'race' is not high on the list of concerns\textsuperscript{26} for most of the people surveyed. Primarily their anxiety is with the massive changes in the economy, the high unemployment rate, the destruction of communities, and what they seem to perceive as a lack of fairness and support in matters to do with sharing welfare assistance.

People need to be able to speak out their resentments. Generally they do, 'down the club' or over at the pub, at the office, during lunch breaks or wherever they may be getting together. It would seem that people's resentments include feeling uncertain about multiculturalism, the nature of immigration today, rapid changes in their neighbourhoods and feeling like they can't protest or speak out. Whether or not this is true, in an empirical sense, Hanson has been able to expose just how many people have felt curtailed by what has become known as 'political correctness'. It is a very nebulous phrase, but the meaning of it seems to be evoked whenever criticisms aimed at matters relating to minority groups are expressed.

To some extent the structural changes in our social institutions towards race and the encouragement of minority groups has been accompanied by an ideological guardianship which emerged to safeguard these important systemic realignments. The issue that One Nation highlights is that there is a difference between the street and local community way of knowing about race relations, and what the social institutions must do to counter inequalities in this democracy.

\textsuperscript{25} Paul Sheehan, "One Nation takes hold on Sydney's outskirts" in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} (Saturday July 25, 1998) p.1.

\textsuperscript{26} Paul Sheehan, p. 1
Nesrin: My father was very careful on that, actually our Greek neighbours wanted to be friends, close friends, but somehow my father did not allow that. Not only that it’s because they being Greek, it’s not only that, but he did not want any foreigners mixing with us. It was only the Turkish community, the Turkish families, because he use to say, they have different customs, and it’s just that, no.

Nesrin’s father makes the point. Just because the society has institutional strategies in place to encourage tolerance, fair dealing and an openness to others, this may not translate into the lived experience of people’s everyday lives. None the less, when John Howard failed to condemn, from his position as Prime Minister, the racist implications in Hanson’s political agenda, he undermined the institutional sophistication of this democracy and weakened the cultural psychology and responsibility needed to face down her challenge. Howard let this kind of sometimes ill informed street talk slip into the political chamber and refused to repudiate its historical and psychological ignorance. As Prime Minister it was his responsibility to remind us how wrong it would be to simply turn the page on our history. As Dr, Alex Boraine, Vice-Chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission said, “you first have to acknowledge it, and then you can turn the page.”

Ien Ang suggests that Pauline Hanson’s popularity points to “the deeply felt regret among her constituency over the cultural loss brought about by the emergence of a much more hybridised, pluralist and diverse society. This loss is real and has real effects on people’s everyday lives, and must be recognised alongside the much vaunted gains of multiculturalism”. Hanson has thrust into the political and cultural space of this country a challenge and predicament. The emergence of this hybridised, pluralist and diverse society

---

27 Alex Boraine, quoted in James Woodford “Haunted by History” in the Sydney Morning Herald, (Saturday May 24, 1997) p. 38. Alex Boraine is the Vice-chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He was here to participate in the National Reconciliation Convention, where he delivered a message from South African President, Nelson Mandela.

would seem to be an inevitable development in the interconnected, interdependent globalised world we now live in, and precisely for this reason, questions of cultural identity, collective memories and transcultural futures are much more urgent. "In the cultural hybrid predicament we have to learn how to live with its awkwardness,"²⁹ and also how to act more wisely and critically in a world in which we no longer have the secure capacity to draw the line between the difference and the same.

The balance of political power in Queensland may now be held by the One Nation Party. In my heart I wish that Pauline Hanson had never lasted so long. In much of what she says there is nothing but gripes, she offers very few ideas, and her rhetoric invariably sounds mean spirited. I have to admit too, in quite a snobbish way, that I feel she is without charisma. The question would seem to be, at least for the likes of me, how come she has endured? I think the answer lies in her first speech to Parliament where she said "for far too long ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate by the major parties".³⁰ Hanson talked about things politicians weren't supposed to mention. In turn sections of the media and many intellectuals tended to oversimplify her, declining to take her seriously and being very selective in what they chose to examine from her speech. This oversimplification of her position, by simply naming her a racist and a fool, failed to understand that a lot of people actually wanted to talk about these issues.

The member for Oxley made a number of claims in her first speech which call attention to this predicament. I will use some of them as discussion topics in this thesis.

²⁹ Jen Ang, p. 8.
³⁰ Pauline Hanson, first speech.
• we are in danger of being swamped by Asians.
• ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate on immigration and multiculturalism.
• most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolished.
• Asians have their own culture and religion; they form ghettos and do not assimilate.
• a truly multicultural country can never be strong.
• I should have the right to have a say in whom comes into my country.

Figure 1

These are very important issues which have become central, or at least very forceful, in the public conversation that this society has begun to come to terms with. While this set of concerns differs in some ways from previous community anxiety about immigration, identity and loyalty to Australianness, it remains similar to certain public opinion about immigration commonly expressed since the Second World War. There has always been resentment against newer arrivals and their supposed privileges in the form of assistance to settle, to learn English, get employment, and be united with family and so on. In 1946 Australians were asked to specify from which country (apart from Britain) they would prefer immigrants to come. 71% chose the Dutch and only 10% wanted
Italians. By 1951, 26% were prepared to accept Italians. It took some time for this Italian presence to impregnate the mainstream and give birth to a contemporary Australian culture that could now hardly imagine itself without a localised Italianness incorporated into our sense of who we are living in this place today. While the community has experienced the reality that immigration adds immeasurably to our society, Hanson raises the important issue of a more participatory, and no doubt conflictual say in any future Australian population design.

A Sri Lankan friend of mine described her early impressions of Australia when she came to live with her brother in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond. “Living in Richmond at that time meant that I did not encounter many English speakers because most of our neighbours were Greek. I remember being surprised about not hearing much English in the neighbourhood.” She also told me a story about her first job which was “during a school vacation when working at a Salvation Army hostel for the aged. I was a kitchen hand and for someone who had done no house work - in Sri Lanka middle class families could easily afford domestic help - this was quite a shock. I also felt the cultural differences, for example calling my supervisor (an older woman) by her first name. In Sri Lanka this would be considered extremely disrespectful, if I had done that as a teenager in Sri Lanka I would have got into a great deal of trouble, however, she insisted on it. This experience quite confused me.”

For Nelum the customs of this new country were curious, and laughing at them helped. She and her family would also laugh at some of the racism they experienced. When her young brother was called an Ethiopian (at the time of the severe famine in that country), she and her brothers and sisters stirred her mother about not feeding him enough. I don’t want to excuse racism, but there

31 Keith McConnachie, David Hollinsworth, Jan Pettman, p. 226.
is something in the nature of humour that helps guide individuals through the
difficulties of being on the receiving end of racial prejudice.

In his book *Local Knowledge*, Clifford Geertz develops his idea of the ‘social
drama’ which is continually emerging in all communities as they participate in
cultural and attitudinal change. This is basically a regenerative process, a
strategic interaction in which people are not merely ‘gaping spectators’ but
captured up bodily in a sort of drama in which they “surrender and are
changed.”33 Such a surrender involves - to varying degrees - a disconnection
with the past. The change is one of cultural discontinuity.

Serkan: I think there was some problems, like in my family, like family problems
you know. My parents, they tried to, you know like we came to this new country,
to this new life but they didn’t want us to change. They want me to stay the same,
like as in Turkey. As I was in Turkey. It was very hard, I didn’t want to
disappoint them.

I certainly don’t underestimate the difficulties that Serkan found himself in.
But the process through which he is able to surrender to the various cultural
interactions with which he is involved, is surely an important study for today.
If the notion of a unified society has lost its historical effectiveness, and the
nature of meaning is unfixed, then how does one remain committed to the
democratic institutions of this society? What is needed to maintain and
enhance social tolerance and flexibility? In a culturally stylish, yet important
way one experiences tolerance and flexibility in the everyday changes of street
scapes, house designs, community art murals, trends in music and hairstyles,
houses of worship, and the different familiarities with shopkeepers; the smells,
tastes and touch of food. As with a lover, one may be constantly surprised, and
in the surprise act without knowing, surrendering to the changes.

The Kokoda Track

A sense of home is a very important concept for us as individuals and for how a community feels about itself. It is fundamental to an ecological perspective and it locates people into a certain normality. Our home-life is that part of our lives which we think of as private, the home, as a domain being distinguished from two public domains, that of work and the other of politics. This distinction is integral to the nature of the liberal democratic institutions which structure this society. Within these structures private life is respected so long as certain conditions are met, most notably respect for the public order. For some people public order is the domain most threatened when they express their fears about being swamped by new comers.

Audrey: Oh it use to be quieter, it’s hard to say you know. I suppose it’s more ethnic now. I feel a bit uncomfortable really, cause there is a lot of Middle Eastern people there, and there are Asians too. Maybe I’m a bit prejudiced against them or something, but you know shops have food out on the footpath and everybody is talking, I suppose they’re friendly enough.

Audrey attaches great cultural value to the idea of a private home-life that some how will be reflected back to her from the public domain. The situation is, however, that for many people who have made this place their home, the distinction between the public and the private becomes a source of some conflict. The concept of an autonomous private life is not readily accepted in an Islamic family where home-life spills out into the community more readily and that community has considerable influence in family matters. The distinction made in mainstream Australian society between public and private challenges one of Islam’s fundamental principles where it is incumbent upon an individual, as well as upon a social group, to work for good and against evil. Therefore, what an individual does is subject to scrutiny and possible correction by the community. Individual behaviour tends to conform to the
collective judgment; consequently, there can be no shielding of the private from the public place.

Koksal: In the Turkish community, whether you're a male or female, you know, your parents are arranging your marriage and they make sure you get married before 18 or 20. So I was married when I was 18. My marriage was arranged through my older cousin in Turkey, so I went there. It was the only time that I went there, for three months, yes. So I was very much in a circle where my parents sort of rules your life and you accept it. I think it is still with the community today.

This is where the actual experience of a phenomenon challenges me. In a theoretical discourse I can accept that there may be a variety of ways of living in this multicultural society and indeed I question Pauline Hanson and Audrey's anxiety about being culturally swamped. But deep in my cultural character too is a sense of what seems 'normal'. I take for granted that the normal and therefore natural and proper way to eat, to reproduce, to die, to arrange the house, to address others, to respect parents, to raise children and to deal with relationships between men and women is implicitly there, in the habits of my society. So when Koksal challenges these assumptions about what are acceptable and possible norms for this society, in for example the planning and arrangement of marriage partners, I admit I have to force myself to accept his views. Koksal too, can neither renounce the internalised habits on which he has built his identity nor continue to observe, unchallenged, his customs in this new society. His private life is subject to voluntary and involuntary transformation and acculturation. This process depends upon a number of factors, not least of which is the capacity of the larger diverse community to willingly accommodate a greater understanding of what is possible.

These matters provoke strong feelings. They raise questions over which there are important disagreements. How are different people to live together? What
are the rights and obligations of immigrants to a host society? What does this society look like? How does it feel to go shopping in this society? To work in this society? To accept or hesitate about its diversity? And how does one participate in this society?

Amber: *Multiculturalism, well, I don’t know, but I think too much is happening too quick now, in our area. I would like to have more say you know, it’s just that I feel outnumbered.*

These questions are just as confusing for people who were born elsewhere as they are for Amber. Indeed people who have only recently come to Australia spend much of their time as bridges between two half-known cultures, with feelings of only partly belonging anywhere. Therefore, the various lived experiences of multiculturalism cannot be easily resolved through some ‘grasping of the facts’, but rather through an investigation of what it is that gives these particular experiences their special significance. As individuals it is necessary that we are able to express strong feelings. Otherwise, appropriate intellectual, psychological and physical connections between people may be difficult to imagine and implement. Societies are constituted self-referentially. What this means is that everything emerging from the society is a product of that society. The significance of the current race debate is that it belongs to the society; any resolution will have to emerge from that same complexity.

One of the most contentious and difficult matters to emerge from the public conversation since the 1995 Federal elections has been the way Hanson and the Prime Minister, John Howard, have both refused to accept any guilt or blame for this society’s history. They would like to be part of a contemporary Australian society that dispenses with Labor’s regrettable flirtation with and endorsement of diversity which “diluted their simple and pure conception of
the nation.” 34 Hanson said, “this nation is being divided into black and white, and the present system encourages this. I am fed up with being told, ‘this is our land’. Well, where the hell do I go? I was born here, and so were my parents and children. I will work beside anyone and they will be my equal but I draw the line when told I must pay and continue paying for something that happened over 200 years ago. Like most Australians, I worked for my land; no-one gave it to me.” 35 The Prime Minister, John Howard responded with “Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control.” 36

My concern with both of these statements is that the community is being asked to try and put aside all that human messiness made from the intermingling of good intentions, utopian fantasies, cruelty and greed that has been left on the tabula Australis. I personally don’t ‘buy’ the idea either, that Australia’s history is simply a saga of despoilment and genocide, and yet the gift we owe to ourselves is not to be found in denying ‘past actions and policies’ but rather in engaging sensuously with this messiness. It isn’t so much, I believe, a matter of having to ‘pay and continue paying for something that happened over two hundred years ago’, as if a debt simply involved a pay back. For me it’s a matter of being interested, or taking an interest. While I don’t want to reify complexity theory and give it unquestioned scientific status, there is value in the way it helps counter Hanson’s and Howard’s desire to be done with a ‘past over which we had no control’. A paraphrasing of Ashby’s law of ‘Requisite Variety’ would have it that if there is a ‘region’ of great variety, then any management structure, to be applicable to that ‘region’, must

35 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
36 John Howard 1997, In his opening address to the Australian Reconciliation Convention, quoted from James Woodford, “PM’s apology draws protest” in the Sydney Morning Herald, (Tuesday May 27, 1997) p. 1.
be expressed in terms of great variety.\textsuperscript{37} In other words, by reducing the variety and complexity within a society, correspondingly then the dynamics of that society are reduced. Pauline Hanson considers herself just an “ordinary Australian.”\textsuperscript{38} The wonderful thing about ordinariness is how ecologically appropriate it is in all complex situations. Ordinary Australian society is constituted as a ‘region of great variety’. Therefore, any attempt to eliminate contradictory and difficult ideas, either by hiding them under legislation, simplifying or socially maligning them, can only serve to sacrifice this social variety and vitality.

Fatma: Yes I come back because my house here, house important, and I like Australia. We don’t want to go to Turkey, go back, maybe just make a holiday. But, you know, I don’t think multiculturalism so good, too many people, different language, different people, I don’t know, maybe nice.

The migration of many people to Australia could only produce a complex multi cultural society. This modern society is constituted relationally and so inevitably a mutual translation of foreignness takes place. As a society we are swamped and invigorated within this complex plurality. Difference has entered the host culture, with the result that the host is now transformed into the multiplicity of the ‘guests’\textsuperscript{39}. Out of this collage/montage, a new and distinct object is continually constructed. As Walter Benjamin theorised it, the aura of the original is invigorated through this newly imagined plurality.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} W.R. Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety suggests that to deal with (make meaning of) variety or complexity and diversity in a system, one has to provide variety equal to or more than the system. In turn, if there is only partial or fragmented or one-sided action into a complex system there can only be a partial understanding.

\textsuperscript{38} Pauline Hanson, first speech.


In the last years of the Keating Labor government the phrase "creative nation" was coined. Implicit in this idea was the assumption that a modern society does not naturally evolve. It is deliberately made, largely by government, but also through the intentions and actions of its people. The Keating government openly acknowledged that Australia had to radically change much of its domestic social policy in order to accommodate the changing international world and in particular our relations to the countries of Asia. In February 1994 the Prime Minister and the State Premiers meeting as the Council of Australian Governments jointly adopted a report which recommended that Asian languages become mandatory in all Australian schools. In the same month the Minister for Defence announced that knowing an Asian language would be a requirement for an officer in the Australian defence forces. The racial debates we have witnessed since the most recent federal election (May 1996) have attempted to redefine the nation once again, this time in ways that repudiate multiculturalism and aboriginal reconciliation.

There remains amongst some intellectuals and cultural commentators a critical discourse which suggests that Australia and Australians have no sense of identity because the society that has developed here is somehow determined by a lack. A lack in the Freudian sense, as Meucke would have it. There persists an Oedipal desire to grow up and be complete. "For instance, the familiar cultural- cringe story is about intolerability. We can’t stand it that Australia is childlike in relation to empire, to Europe; Australia, always being talked about as if it is coming of age. And if it isn’t in relation to England, it is in relation to some other country: we have to ‘mature’ in relation to the US, in relation to Asia and so on." 41 This critique is true to some extent. But this doesn’t

41 Stephen Muecke, No Road (Bitumen all the way) (Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Press, 1997) p. 225. The idea of lack is also developed by Deborah Bird Rose, "Rupture and the Ethics of care in Colonised Space" in Prehistory to Politics. John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual Time Bonyhady & Tom Griffiths, eds., (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996) pp 190-215. Australians' behaviour, she says, is always an attempt to fill the void left between them and 'home', which is somewhere else. What is at issue in the notorious cultural cringe is the matter of 'where are we?'
undermine the experience of what is emerging locally. The great strength of a multicultural society is the capacity to refuse homogenization either into a fulfilled sense of nationhood or to provide comfortable meanings for confusing facts. In this way the society remains fragmented. Yet there is a desire amongst many people to pull together into a community, a community that encourages the possibility of becoming fulfilled in the messiness of this shared, possibly immature culture.

A shared culture is always being modified. It is modified by the imagination of individuals and through the intervention of cultural policies. For example, anthropologists tell us that a people begin to recognise themselves as a people, that is, as a culture, through the symbolic treatment of the dead. To maintain the social and civic order people don’t just bury their dead and forget about them. They attribute some power to the dead, they affix a symbolic narrative which tells them, the living, where they come from. In Australian culture the Anzac story, and in particular the Gallipoli failure, is one such symbolic narrative. It is a powerful identifying story, but today it is a story somewhat confused, as the society tries to reassess its imperial history and to identify itself with locality.

The Keating government tried, in 1995, to reorientate the symbolic narrative to the more ‘Asian’ Kokoda Trail.42 This was an attempt to imagine a different historical story, possibly a more relevant story. Indeed, it’s a story of victory out of which we may reflect upon our different social and geographical reality.

---

42 After the sinking of the US Naval fleet in Pearl Harbour in 1941, followed by the fall of Singapore and the defeat and capture of the British military garrison, the Imperial Japanese armed forces continued to advance through the Pacific towards Australia. In early 1942 Japanese troops invaded Papua New Guinea and captured Rabaul and Lae. The Australian defence forces, in some confusion, under-manned and in the command of Sir Thomas Blamey reinforced the garrison at Port Morsby. During the following year this army advanced towards the enemy, over the Kokoda Trail, eventually defeating the Japanese and turning the tide in the Pacific war.
Van: My parents not sure which country we could go because we escaped as refugee. So we are not sure which country. However, if we can make the choice Australia is our family first preference. At the time I already got two brothers, who live in the Netherlands and Australia. The younger one says Australia is the best. Actually it is illegal in our country to plan for escape, however through the stories of both my brothers we got a feeling, a sense that Australia may be closer. Number one, it is geographical area, number two is the weather is a lot better than Netherlands, and the third thing is my brother has a good lot of impressions about. I remember he mentioned something about all the different cultures here. And he mentioned about in summertime when people go down to the beach with their towel and, I mean easy going, easy lifestyle instead of the controversial shootings and things like that. And through the pictures he sends back we can see something different in the way people dress too.

When Van talks about an easy lifestyle, instead of the controversial shootings and things like that, one is reminded again just how mature, confident and tolerant this society is. I think it is important to pay heed to this and focus with some conviction on the ethical care which is grounded in the here and now of this contemporary community. Many of the people I have talked with in Auburn remind me over and again just how tolerant, free and organised the Australian society is.

A Fusion of Horizons

Hillman says that people and communities formulate symbols to recognise and give meaning to their actions. These symbols provide some kind of ‘fit’ which enables people to comprehend both their inner and outer worlds. It is through the stories people tell that this idea of fitting into and comprehending the world is made and then elaborated. In this way people are mythologising their lives. This process is made possible because of the way people play with ideas. Sometimes ideas allow one to see through the ‘literal and the obvious’
into an unknown, yet manifest future. Hillman describes this ‘power of insight’ in terms of a series of steps.

First there is the moment of reflection or wonder, a puzzlement which occurs in the midst of what might be called ordinary experience. This wonder or puzzlement at first can only grasp the obvious and apparent quality that may be there in the experience. In a real sense one is at the surface of the event. It is still to be explored and penetrated into. Its value is not yet comprehended in a deeper way. The story begins as one tells oneself something in the language of ‘because’ and ‘why’ and ‘how.’

Ali: I decide to come to Australia because I read about Australia on the camp, I ask about Australia, I make a little information about Australia. At the first time I look for the freedom, people told me about Australia. This is very important for me. I am not looking about the money at the first time, I am looking about the freedom.

It is well to remember that this process of mythologising the experiences does not mean, necessarily, that people know more fully or surely what is taking place. The process of mythologising events and behaviour into stories, or accounts and explanations, does not lead to more certitude about what is happening; there is no ‘more’ of any kind. The emergence of mythical qualities within events confirms ambiguity, it does not settle it. “What lies at the border is not certainty, (like the idea of ‘freedom’ for Ali! sic) but rather a spread of mystery.” So in the second stage of Hillman’s suggested process one begins to justify one’s involvement by trying to bring out and reveal, or show the deeper value in the story and in the thinking about the story.

---

44 James Hillman, p. 142.
45 James Hillman, p. 142.
46 James Hillman, p. 142.
Van: I mean the worker’s more open than the community, and it’s good to have some services and someone to facilitate, to bridge the gap. Sometimes the community doesn’t realise that they keep the gap by wanting to keep, like, Asian centre for Asian people and Turkish centre for Turkish people. OK for sure we do open for everyone but I mean, in my mind, some people and I admit I do, have a racist attitude.

So last year we organise a festival, the Auburn festival. A lot of people come along. We engage many people from different cultures, mainstream culture came too; that’s a good side of multiculturalism.

Van takes us into the story of multicultural Australia in a deeper way. She is able to explain that being a member of the Vietnamese community, within the wider mainstream community is confusing; especially for those who would like to bridge the gap. Even though she recognises that the Vietnamese community centre is open for everyone, it just doesn’t work that way; she is racist, she isn’t certain about other people. The good thing about multiculturalism nonetheless, is that it can engage many people from different cultures, mainstream culture too. So something is revealed to her when she becomes involved in the festival.

Van: But the bad side of multiculturalism, at the same time I can see, is a level of racial tension among different groups, like you know the sort of ‘Asians out’ or some people say ‘Turks are like this’, ‘Lebanese are like this’. They still don’t like each other. It is interesting, sometime it is the community worker keeping the people away from each other.

In the third instance a narrative begins to develop around the phenomenon. It helps elaborate and expand the experience. In this way the experiences are turned into an account, an explanation, a story that has meaning beyond the
personal. Van knows that she is part of the ‘problem’; as a community worker she can set up situations that keep people away from each other. If multiculturalism is to work then the racial tension among different groups has to be confronted, and by everybody, including the community workers.

Even stories that have evolved their meaning beyond the personal remain largely an account or explanation of particular memories. The very nature of memories insists, as I have said, that they be mutable and evolving so they can be clues for our imagination in the present. Stories preserve the past as a reservoir of instances of how people acted in the face of events, a sort of history of useful information.

Pauline Hanson is also telling some of this story. It’s a populist story, reactive in the way Hillman describes the ‘because’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ process. Most of her speech to Parliament is in the language of ‘because’- because “taxpayer funded ‘industries’ flourish in our society servicing Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority groups”, ‘why’ should mainstream Australians have to suffer a “type of reverse racism;” and ‘how’ come I should “continue paying for something that happened over 200 years ago.

"Like most Australians I worked for my land; no-one gave it to me." ‘How’ is the government going to “turn things around.” In contrast, Van seems to be telling her story, even though she experiences doubt and confusion, in terms of reaching out with other people.

47 James Hillman, pp.142-143
48 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
49 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
50 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
Van; I think it is happening when people feel allowed to get out, allowed to meet naturally, not because we organise the Asian centre to visit some place, or organise the festival and then have to trap people to come along. That doesn’t work. It is more in terms of a mental idea, it is very hard to define because people will not be confident to meet with others if they’re not secure in themselves. I mean in my case, it’s taken me four, five years to find the sense of security, the sense of how I know who I am, what I’m good at, what I’m bad at, you know to order my strength and weakness. In order, you know to take one step further, to reach out with other people.

Because people’s stories are able to be shared and played with, it might be possible through them to bring to life a more imaginative response to the cultural predicament we find ourselves struggling with. Imagination works by playing, and it plays with what it has. This play is not frivolous. Play is the mode of innovative understanding which can bring the actual and potential discontinuities within experience - together. Conversations go on a meandering journey picking up hints and suggestions, offering insight.

As Jane Goodall says, there is an intelligence ‘in the system’ that none of the parties actually possesses, an insight produced by the conversation.\textsuperscript{51}

Conversations don’t need to actually tell you anything.

\textsuperscript{51} In conversation with Jane Goodall; ‘What are you researching into?’ she asked, picking up Francis Bacon’s probe metaphor. ‘Are these conversations, with the Auburn Community, “research”? You must make a thesis out of research. This is one of the ground rules. To research into, is to look into, to keep under observation, to gain insight into, to get into focus, to make a clear picture. To do justice, in this thesis, to what you see as the subtle, and wonderful reality of our multicultural society here in Sydney (and indeed, in Australia) you must engage innovatively in an imaginative strategy, a play, that recognises there are rules to be observed. These rules define certain limits to freedom, but still allow an infinite variety of individual moves. I think it is that rules provide a context within which an understanding may manifest itself.’ However, there can be no play without prejudice either. It takes the experience of the ‘game’ to open the mind, to modify and develop one’s initial conjectures, which are often rash and premature.
Brendon: What are the memories that come to you Gungor, when you think of your home in Turkey?

Gungor: Yes, yes, once we started to live in the city, when we came to Ankara, I was, I think seven years old, it was after World War 2, I was in Ankara with my father, and it is still before 1945. Every night we used to close the curtains to make the dark room, because some aeroplanes can come and throw the bomb, or something like that. Life is very difficult that time you know. We used to get the bread, quarter bread each person, and we have to get some stamps from the government to get this one. Can you imagine, I was growing boy. Still I am hungry, you know, when I see bread, I jump the bread now and I start to eat.

If the way conversations work best is to bring us into a sharing of experience, then ‘I’, my ego, cannot stand against, and in opposition to, the ‘other’. One would quickly find extreme limitations in such a conversation, as I think has happened in the way Hanson was demonised and turned into an oppositional other, a racist fool, a ‘deranged women’. She in turn accused the proponents of political correctness (what ever that might mean) of becoming “so arrogant in their ways and their attitudes that they’ve forgotten about what’s happening to ordinary Australians.” What emerges from both Van’s and Pauline Hanson’s stories is a similar desire. The two women offer stories about the needs of people to feel confident about themselves and their rights to a place here. So in this way, both stories provide insights into the shared experience of living together. To privilege one story over the other by virtue of ideological bias would reduce the possibility of bringing to life a satisfactory response. The spinning, bouncing, playful as well as the painfully dangerous nature of sharing experience would be lost.

I suspect that most people would prefer to share their experiences in an encouraging and embracing conversation. Gadamer says of people engaged in such conversations that they are 'being conversed'.\(^{53}\) There is an *ecstasis* involved here which takes people away from the self and into a framework, a context in and through which a revealing, an outcome, even a destiny may occur. Such a conversation, that can do away with the split between 'I' and others, self and the world, past and present is pertinent for many people especially today, as it would appear so often that people find themselves 'not at home in the world'.

Brendon: *Can you tell me about the Buddhist temple that has been built out at Bonnryigg. Was that an important thing to have happen for the community? I'd imagine it must have helped people find some peace, especially after the war and leaving their country, and maybe other family members.*

Cung: *Well you know Vietnamese people are very sentimental. Most people hide their feelings, they don't express feelings openly. So you don't really know that person feels happy or sad. We are also very religious too. In every home we have established an altar to venerate our ancestors, or to venerate the Buddha. And then those who are Christian to venerate God and so on. So we come here to resolve the problem of being lost, especially for the old people. I think the Buddhist temple is very necessary. For the spiritual life, yeah.*

Gadamer suggests three different modes of encounter between the 'I' and the 'thou'. These modes relate to Hillman's ideas of moving through the literal and obviousness of phenomenon and into a more insightful understanding of our lives. Sometime 'thou' is considered as wholly separate and as an object to be manipulated and controlled. 'I' confronts 'thou' in "a free and uninvolved way, and by methodically excluding all subjective elements in regard to 'thou',

discovers what 'thou' contains.”54 In this the behaviour of the 'thou' is made predictable, just like other typical events one may experience. By treating the other as an object I prevent it from speaking for itself; the conversation is wholly one-sided. Gadamer cites Kant saying that it is morally irresponsible to use others as a means to an end. To treat the other purely as an object involves the implicit domination of the other.

A second mode of encounter involves acknowledging 'thou' as a person but nevertheless 'I' remains self-related. In this, the conversation lacks reciprocity: for every contribution 'thou' makes, 'I' make a reflective counter contribution. In a sense I know the other better; I put meaning on the words in her mouth. There can be no valid claim to 'truth' coming from 'thou'. Academics are notoriously good at this form of conversation. So too are welfare workers, politicians and sometimes parents. In the aftermath of the Queensland election no politician, from either main party, even faintly suggested that they may have got it wrong and that voters might indeed have a legitimate grievance that the system was ignoring. They continue to make claims, to "express and to even understand the other better than the other understands themselves."55

The third approach involves an encounter in which 'I' experiences 'thou' truly as thou, that is, listens, acknowledges and engages in what she has to say, and recognises her claim to legitimacy. Without this kind of openness to one another there is no genuine human relationship. Openness must sometimes accept things that are against myself. This experience of the other must acknowledge not simply the 'otherness' but also that the other has something to say to me. Alphonso Lingis says that it is in conversations that we will know how to embrace our asymmetrical complementarity. "Conversation with another is to lay down one's arms and one's defences; to throw open the gates of one's own position; to expose oneself to the other, the outsider; and to lay

54 Hans-Georg Gadamer, p. 36.
55 Hans-Georg Gadamer, p. 36.
oneself open to surprises, contestation and inculpation. One enters into conversation in order to become an other for the other.”

But we each bring our own anticipations and fantasies into such a conversation in the form of our beliefs, concepts, attitudes, norms and practices. These are instilled by the historical experiences that constitute our world view. A conversation that is open may allow a different world view, removed somewhat in space and time, to emerge. However, the voice of the other is structured and understood in a different framework than my own. In practice ‘I’ must relate the other’s voice to my familiar conceptual framework, while at the same time I respect and preserve the truth of the other. Gadamer refers to this as a “fusion of horizons”.

When people are engaged in conversation that offers the ecstasis that Gadamer speaks of, there still remains a type of semi-permeable intellectual boundary. One is involved in an ongoing construction of interpretation, partly shared and partly private, based on the expectations, prejudices and structures of meaning each brings to the conversation. The forming and fusing of horizons is constituted through a montage of separate episodes which can sometimes be related, sometimes in a contradictory manner, without an ending in which everything is resolved. So there will always be a space that exists between people engaged in an embracing conversation. Those who converse will always be subject to a relation of ‘I’ and ‘thou’. The I-Thou relationship indicates the way in which one comes to an understanding of anything unfamiliar, such as a foreign culture.

---

Cung: You know that the old Vietnamese people when they come here, there is a problem for them. Most old Vietnamese people want to cling to their homeland. Where they were born. So even in Vietnam they don’t want to move far from their native village. So when they came here in Australia that is a very big problem for them. You know some feel very sad, you see and very confused. Some that always thinking about their homeland.

It is not necessarily possible that a fusion of horizons can be made fully conscious. Such a project is not some objectively controlled event but happens as it were, ‘behind our backs’. Some form of deliberation can only be apparent in retrospect. The fusion of horizons is an instance of the workings of the hermeneutic circle. Consider this hypothetical conversation between Van and Pauline Hanson. It is a constructed conversation that attempts an interpretation.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{I think multiculturalism is work, ... “I and most Australians want ... multiculturalism abolished”}

It proceeds by way of a projection of a prior understanding of the situation. This then is reflected back into the conversation and there it may disclose the base or prejudice of one’s projection.

\textit{I do have a level of racist attitude with some people; ... “Of course, I will be called racist”} \textsuperscript{59}

What is possible now is that one may modify or abandon one’s prejudice and so restructure the prejudice recognising it as another projection.

\textsuperscript{58} This is a constructed conversation between Van, a woman from Vietnam and member of the core research group, and Pauline Hanson.

\textsuperscript{59} Van and Pauline Hanson.
I mean, we have to open the community. Sometimes the community doesn’t realise that they keep a gap, like you know, Asian centre only for Asian people, or Turkish centre only for Turkish people. ... “I must stress at this stage that I do not consider those people from ethnic backgrounds currently living in Australia anything but first class citizens ... but abolishing the policy of multiculturalism will allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia.”

This ‘conversation’ (an invented juxtaposition of statements) between Van and Pauline is neither objective or subjective but is an interplay of interpretation and possibility. Racism is clear cut in this exchange but it is not possible to call one and not the other racist. Nor can there be a precise way of thinking about multiculturalism.

The way meaning emerges for us might be determined by the constantly changing possibility of play and contingency. So the conversation becomes part of a ‘chain of connection’ that enables the circulation of contrasting ideas. In a sense the horizons do not fuse, but they can be seen and acknowledged.

**Going Global**

David Malouf62, in a recent radio conversation, made the point that assimilation was a far more interesting and daring project than any attempt to create a society of mutual pluralities. This daring to put together difference doesn’t result simply in a culture of Anglo-Australians but rather, an Australian culture with a relationship to the English language. What might he

---

60 Van and Pauline Hanson.

61 The notion of a ‘chain of connection’ was taken from Deborah Bird Rose “Rupture and the Ethics of Care in Colonised Space” where she refers to John Mulvaney’s “Encounters in Place”. in Bonyhard & Griffiths, eds, Prehistory to Politics. John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996) p. 191.

62 David Malouf, one of Australia foremost authors. Malouf was born in Brisbane of Lebanese parents and has used the issue of ‘identity’ in many of his novels, most notably Johnno, The Great World and Remembering Babylon.
make of Mej, a young Chinese/Vietnamese women who, after fleeing Vietnam with her parents and staying for nine months on a remote Malaysian island, migrated to Sweden, where she lived and was schooled until she arrived in Australia ten years later.

Mej: I think of myself as Swedish, cause I'm still a Swedish citizen. I'm only a permanent resident in Australia. So I'm pretty much Swedish.

There's a video shop in Auburn just across the station and we hire Cantonese videos from there. We contact with heaps of people, cause, like, we know a lot of Cantonese people, like relatives and friends over the years.

I suspect that Malouf would welcome Mej and agree with her that heaps of people now form some sort of new international proletariat which is emerging from the ‘convulsive upheavals’ that so characterise this century. Frederic Jameson argues that these convulsive upheavals have generated a broad discourse about the nature of contemporary culture, particularly in the way "diverse ideologies and languages"\(^{63}\) are brought into relationship with each other. One can sense this especially here in Sydney, a city which is filled bodily and intellectually by people like Mej, Van, and Pauline. At the same time this local Sydney variant of ‘diverse ideologies and languages’ has become part of the global diaspora.

Jameson suggests we currently lack the perceptual apparatus to access what he calls this postmodern ‘hyperspace’, experiencing it, for the moment, as a bewildering immersion in the global multinational and decentered communications network.\(^{64}\) But while people may find the rapid social, economic and cultural changes hard to comprehend in a democracy like ours,
they can attempt to turn the bewilderment into a coherence. I have drawn
attention to this in the way Hanson supposedly speaks on behalf of many
people who think of themselves as dispossessed by these changes. In contrast,
Mej lives comfortably with this postmodern geography and history. She is at
home in the world of Cantonese, English and Swedish speaking people, in the
geography of the diaspora and the technological spread of world language
networks. Huge economies are sustained by the various diasporas. She is part
of and confident in a world wide exchange, a chain of connection that is
maintained in videos, movies, world music, culture festivals and global
Television.

The food and cuisine writer John Welchman considers Sydney to be the
world centre of ‘Fusion Cuisine’. People now speak of ‘Fusion Music’. What I
understand these ideas to involve, in some sense, is a blending which retains
subtle indicators of all the component parts. “In the ‘melting pot’ cuisine of
Australia, the overlays and combinations have become as subtle and exact as
the finest marquetry.”65 The flavours are not dissolved into a soup or gravy but
lay next to and enhance their identity with that of another quality. This is what
I find fascinating about places like Auburn and Bankstown and Campsie and
Chatswood and many other suburbs in the large cities.

Nhan: yes, in relation to the food, Thailand or Hong Kong are similar, but
actually not exactly like what the food that we are having here, in Sydney.
Although Vietnamese food in Sydney is a lot different from Thai or Hong Kong
food, yes, something in the way, yes, when, like even now if we went back to
Vietnam the food there is a bit strange to me. Before I left my country, the food
there wonderful, everything nice, delicious, but now, I went back and the food is
not as nice as in Sydney. The cooking, maybe the recipe, something different from

Sydney, I think Sydney also have the best Vietnamese food. I miss it. When I went to Queensland for about two weeks conference last year, we longing to get back to Sydney, just to go back for the restaurant, down there, to have a bowl of noodles or something.

David Malouf’s thesis that contemporary Australian culture is formed in relation to the English language but open to and immersed in various global diasporas, makes sense to me. There is certainly something exciting about exploring the possibility of identity in a globalised world. Part of this involves an assumption that globalisation will sweep away, as contemporary capitalism supposedly does, the old nation-states upon which modernity and national identity were dependent. “What I want to emphasize” says Homi Bhabha “in that large and liminal image of the nation, is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it.” 66 But like all complex ideas that are both theoretical and belong to lived experience, such assumptions as Bhabha’s can only be partially true at any given time. Thus Piers Akerman, responding to the Queensland elections, can say that it was a “rejoinder to the urban sophisticates’ endorsement of undefinable multiculturalism and a sharp retort to those who claimed Australians lack a national identity.” 67 Nonetheless, even in the face of a substantial number of people’s adverse reactions to multiculturalism, I remain excited by the possibility of it, because I too can embrace and be part of the ‘new ethnicities’. As Salman Rushdie, responding to a review of his book The Satanic Verses, said “a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world”. 68

Gungor: You don’t know Turkish, you want me to explain Turkish? Real Turkish is tall blond, blue eyes. Today you can see in China, some place, and when you go there, they’re called Turkish, blue eyes, really. But that Turkish people came 1071, from middle of Asia, today you are seeing in the old world, so many Turkish people, they are not real Turks, they are Mediterranean people, they are short, dark hair, dark eyes and dark skin. A little mixed up into Turkish people. Turkish is a name, it is like a mosaic, do you know mosaic, you put one piece there, the other piece there. Kurd is one of the main people, they are fighting now against other Turkish. Who is the Turkish people?

Who indeed are the Turkish? And for that matter who are the Turkish in the mosaic of Australianness? A way of thinking about, and with, multiculturalism is to emphasise the sense it gives of an open-ended receptivity to the unpredictably new. In particular its responsiveness to new themes and new ways of thinking, writing and producing knowledge. My chosen task, my way of participating in this social drama, is to be responsive to the challenge and disruption caused by the popularist right, while championing the value and inevitability of our multicultural community. “The people Hanson has demonised as scapegoats, Asian immigrants and Aborigines are not the cause of our woes today and cannot be blamed for them. Let’s look elsewhere for them. These are not the people to carry the blame.”

Van: That’s why I feel extremely isolated, a lot of friends I visit, especially the ones who came on the same boat, and arrive in Australia the same time with me, most of them, as quick as they can be into trying work. They work hard, and they’re trying to own their own home, but the moment they own their own home, they stuck with it. Not stuck but they become a prisoner of their own home, they do not move out, they do not come out at all, and they close the door. They close

---

the ear too, to protect themselves, I mean in my friend's case, they can't speak the language and they feel frightened.

The problem, in part, lies elsewhere, in the postmodern 'hyperspace' which Frederic Jameson describes as bewildering, global and decentred. Calling it a postmodern hyperspace however, cuts no ice with the twenty five percent of voters prepared to vote for the One Nation Party. The rise of an unembarrassed xenophobia stridently challenges, and I suspect, cynically rejects opaque intellectual discourses. In Tasmania, when Pauline Hanson spoke, many in the audience saw her, not so much as a politician, but as the voice of ordinary Australia. This is a critique that a number of different influential and intellectual groupings must heed. In his opinion piece Our delayed reactionaries Robert Manne concludes, “in a classic formulation, inter-war fascism was described as the mobilisation of those who felt themselves the losers in the process of modernisation. For its part, contemporary right wing populism might be described, rather similarly, as the mobilisation of those for whom the era of globalisation has offered, thus far, not prosperity or hope but anxiety, meaninglessness and fear.”

John: I thought, when the mosque was almost finished or getting that way, I thought “well, I’ll take the staff down and we’ll go there and have a look.” And even, you know, that was really an interesting experience, even some of the cynical staff members, it was hard not to be impressed when you went inside, it really was, it was so different. I’ve been in churches in Northern Italy where they wouldn’t let my wife go in unless she put on a black scarf over her head. And yet, when I went into this mosque all I had to do was take our shoes off, well, that’s fairly not a big deal, and the girls had taken scarves, expecting to be told to wear them, but they were told that wasn’t a problem. And they were taken to see all the

---

areas of the mosque. But the actual building itself is really going to be the centre of Auburn. I think it's just going to be the landmark of Auburn.

Despite the faith of some empiricists, reality is not a given. It has to be continually sought out. There has been a tendency to educate ourselves into thinking that reality has very little to do with the imagination; it's as if reality is always on hand, there before one's eye's, tangible, while the imagined is at some distance. This separation does not hold. Events, yes, are on hand, but the coherence of these events, which is what one mostly thinks of as reality, is an imaginative construction. The social drama is the process out of which people construct their realities. I feel strongly that this process is best approached through hard work, precisely because reality is a form of production. This will involve deliberation. It is necessary that governments openly promote multiculturalism. At the same time an endemic multicultural society is emerging here. Pauline Hanson has reminded me that something like what was implied in Labor's 'creative nation' agenda has to be reinvented. As individuals and as a community we know a lot about cross-cultural communications, more and more people from non Anglo backgrounds are participating and managing the high levels of government, education, legal and corporate culture. And throughout all this most of us are satisfied with the reality of living together in this country.
The Blue Hour

Anna Berghetti recalls how "the date was set for me to go by train to Geneva. My mother was very composed until the last moment. I can always remember the train leaving the station and my mother screaming. I thought her heart would stop. Ah, poor mama, poor mama. The train went, I got onto the ship and said goodbye to Italy. I did everything in my power to get on that ship - marrying by proxy, wearing a wedding ring, being a virgin with my little trunk, saying goodbye to my mother and father and going on a journey, over the horizon, until I reached Melbourne. For the first time I was by myself, without mama and papa. Oh golly, the thrill and the challenge to be on my own, responsible just for me! The adventure was just too much, and yet scary at the same time.”1

Anna, like many people who migrated here during the booming 1950s and 60s found themselves, as it were, by forgetting their past. Oh golly, the thrill and the challenge to be on my own ... without mama and papa ... responsible just for me. The challenge now seems different; many people are searching to find themselves by remembering. There is a pressure to discover something of one’s life through an imaginative encounter with the past. Some have become intrigued with the homes, families and communities left behind in order to be modern. Home would appear to be a far more personal and private space than the open-ended journey into the future that Anna took so many years ago. Moreover, the reorientation to home is a look ‘back’, backwards in time to one’s childhood, back into one’s historical pasts.

---

1 Anna Berghetti, in Liz Thompson, From Somewhere Else. People from other countries who have made Australia home (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 1993) p. 38.
Marshall Berman observes that people do not necessarily try to blend or merge themselves with their pasts in some sentimental way. Rather, he says we bring to bear on our pasts the "selves we have become in the present, to bring into those old homes visions and values that may clash radically with them. Maybe even to re-enact the very tragic struggles that drove us from our homes in the first place. In other words, our rapport with the past, whatever it turns out to be, will not be easy."²

Hao: I come from Vietnam and I come here. I arrive in Australia about 26 months ago. I live here with my parents and my daughter and my sister. I arrive in Australia through refugee camp. I spend for 3 years in refugee camp in Malaysia. Before, I live in my country all my life. I am away from my country because of the communist political reason. I escape from my country in 1975 when communist took over.

I'm living all my life in Vietnam, I am 52 years old now. I was born in the city, the Capital Saigon. I came from south of Vietnam and I live all my life there. From the fall and the Communist's coming they confiscate everything and say my family is capitalist. They confiscate the house things, the house, everything. And they send us to the country. They say that is the place for re-education, but that mean the misery. You have to re-educate your life because your background has got capitalist behaviour.

In this chapter I wish to develop further the theme of an ecological epistemology that recognises how a place, arrived at, can become a home. This is the social ecological experience that continually forms the logic of this society's presence here in this land.

The striking thing about Auburn is the way culture seems to be erupting all the time. All the stuff people keep mulling over at dinner parties and in the

pages of The Australian Literary Review - what does it mean to be Australian now? - is there in one’s face. The question ‘What does it mean to be an Australian now’ is charged with an anxiety about a very complicated collective past. Along with Hao, I too am in the place for re-education. I share with her, despite our very different experiences, what Robert Hughes calls a belief in reinvention and the power to make things up as one goes along.\(^3\) This, of course, means that one can never know what might come along, one can never be certain what the reinvention will turn out like. It is not possible to predict how the sequence of phenomena in the dynamics of real-life complexity will emerge. James Hillman might caution us at this point, reminding us to keep our imaginations free from the need to respond literally to the complexity of lived experience, because this complexity is often paradoxical and chaotic.

Ghassan Hage makes the point that migrants are sometimes associated with a nostalgia for a lost past, often equated with homesickness. In this sense “nostalgia is assumed to be the exact opposite of home-building: a refusal to engage with the present.”\(^4\) Nostalgia emerges from the memory of a past experience imagined from the perspective of the present and clearly “nostalgic feelings do not only abound in migrant life but in everybody’s.”\(^5\) In an interview with Kerry Anne Kennerley on the Midday Show,\(^6\) Pauline Hanson was asked to comment on a question, presented as a scenario, in which the parents of a little Chinese school child might find it very hard to explain to that child why she may now be being picked on because of her racial qualities. The simplicity of Hanson’s response underscores this troublesome and contemporary difficulty with the past. All she could say was ‘what do the parents of Australian children say to them when the school is hosting a multicultural day and they have no national or traditional clothes to wear.’ I am

\(^5\) Ghassan Hage, p.105.
\(^6\) The Midday Show, TCN Channel 9 production. April 14, 1997.
presuming that for Hanson the echoes of other stories that make her present world strange have to be muted because, I suspect, she might prefer that the Australian child should remain uncomplicated by differing and contradictory accounts of the past. National and traditional clothes from somewhere else provide for her, only a troublesome connection with the past. In this she refuses to engage with the present.

To be fair to Hanson, it's not as if one lives consciously with the complexity of the question, 'what does it mean to be an Australian now?' For most of my adult life, and indeed for my parents and neighbours this has not been an issue that preoccupied us. Nonetheless, people who have come to live in this modern country cannot escape certain feelings of alienation. I suspect this is because migration suddenly makes a particular past important. Most tend to transcend this, both by concentrating on an identity, located somehow in their origins and past, and through a faith in the newness and possibility of the future. For many, including most recent migrants, identity is not tightly tied to a past, nor to an acceptance of paradox and chaos. One's identity is here in a certain presence and it will be further clarified in an exciting future. Without always clearly articulating it, most people living in Australia believe in the modernist vision of an always emerging future, a better future.

Koksal: We came to Australia for a better life. I believe, better system, you name it. In fact at that time I didn’t know much about the lifestyle myself, but my parents thought we’d be better off in Australia than the position they were in Turkey.

Still, it is important to note that during the 1970's a radical reappraisal began to emerge in the way our modern society dealt with its relationship to the future. Because of massive changes in the economic systems of the world, countries like America, and in turn Australia, could no longer maintain the growth and expansion that had characterised their modernism up until then.
“Modernity could no longer afford to throw itself into ‘action lightened of all previous experience’ or to wipe away whatever came earlier in the hope of reaching at last a true present ... a new departure”7. The moderns of the 1970’s couldn’t afford to annihilate the past and present in order to create a new world ex nihilo; they had to learn to come to terms with the world they had, and work from there. The great economic boom that had gone on for a quarter of a century after the Second World War was slowing down due to a combination of inflation, technological development, and a sort of ‘character’ crisis, for which the long drawn-out Vietnam War may be to blame. Then also an emerging world environmental and energy crisis, highlighted in Rachael Carson’s book Silent Spring, and a little later in the dire warnings from the Club of Rome. This new ecological understanding, together with the Middle East oil cartel’s challenge to Western assumptions about supply and demand, seemed to collapse our modern society’s capacity to continue creating a brave new future.

Now at the end of the twentieth century modernism’s willful forgetfulness may be ecologically unsound, but even so, this will to make the future does stir people’s energies, desires and critical spirit. What has become known as modern Western decadence remains a rather more complex desire than simply achieving a ‘radically new departure’. Surely modernism has greatly contributed to the way people have been engaged in the comprehensive ideals of freedom and self development?

Karl Marx, for example, wrote widely of the individual’s desire for self development and freedom: “The free development of physical and spiritual energies” (Marx; 1844 Manuscript), “development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves” (Marx; German Ideology), “the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all” (Marx; Manifesto), “the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces”

---

7 Paul De Man, in Marshall Berman, p. 331.
(Marx; Grundrisse), and of course "the fully developed individual" (Marx; Capital). What are the possible consequences of these ideas? One now understands, I think, that people are far more complex than their particular cultural origins might suggest.

Contemporary social discourse would argue that dispossession from home, family, place and culture makes any articulation of a faith in the future impossible, or at best confusing. To name the qualities and characteristics of this future around which many of us can agree will surely be difficult. But, ecologically, it is possible to suggest that all complex adaptive systems anticipate their future. They do this by making predictions based on the various models of the world they already know. When people yearn for a communal life, their understanding of such a life is guided by the kind of communal feelings and knowledge they remember having had in specific situations in the past. These guide home-building in the present because people seek to foster the kind of homely feeling they know. This is why yearnings for 'homely communality' generally translate into an attempt to rebuild the past.

These models are much more than passive blueprints. They are active, they are our lived experience. Equally important to note is another feature of adaptive complex systems, namely, their ability to occupy different niches. Moreover, the very act of filling a niche opens up more niches for different symbiotic relationships. All this is by way of saying that while one may be ignorant of what the future holds, the ways of coping with that uncertainty are not so desperate.

---

8 References from the works of Karl Marx as compiled in Marshall Berman, p.127. Berman collects together a series of quotations from Marx addressing the question of individual freedom and development.
People have a great capacity for resilience and learn how to ‘bounce back’ by utilising change to cope with the unknown. This entails dealing with dangers as they arise. “Far from relying on uniformity and regulation, resilience becomes most feasible under conditions of variability and spontaneity.”\textsuperscript{10} To be resilient is to be tolerant of the unpredictable.

When Anna Maria Dell’oso \textit{walked softly through the city of 100 languages} she remembered again her ‘life as a wog’. Out in the streets of a Western Sydney suburb she recognises the junction of change and tradition. “I’m the child of Italian migrants, who,” she says, “determinedly followed an upwardly mobile track through the suburbs. They came here with nothing, they worked their guts out, shrugging off wog - dago - chink - slope - wop - refso - gobackterwhereyacomefrom; they sent their kids to school, they got a business, pay off the house and the car - then pay off the kids’ houses and cars - and in one generation go from displaced person to doctors, mayors and heart specialists.”\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Living Here Involves Us All in an Obligation to Place}

For most of us, our earliest years are a saga of involuntary journeys - from the womb to the cradle, from the comfy back verandah to the school playground. Later too, for some, there is a journey from the small village to the city, or from a war ravaged country to a refugee camp. The feelings that emerge when reflecting about the loss of such places and the journeys involved, may haunt some of us, and yet to share these feelings offers a chance to know more fully about ourselves. To share with others who have come to belong here, and to know more about our collective pasts, and our collective desires, is


\textsuperscript{11} Anna Maria Dell’oso “Walking softly through the city of 100 languages” in the Sydney Morning Herald (26 March, 1994) p. 8A.
important as we come to terms with making our home here. Sometimes, indeed, the nature of the cultural home is more visible when a stranger comes and overrides the boundaries which the community has established. New people push and pull the history about. Finding appropriate ecological metaphors which structure the world in ways other than ‘them and us’ requires quite a daring leap of imagination. “It is not only that there is water in the world, but there is a world in water”\textsuperscript{12}

It is possible for us all to think ecologically about our world. Alphonso Lingis suggests that “we civilised men, who have produced our own environment” and “see on everything, even the raw material of nature the practice of rational discourse”\textsuperscript{13}, have to take stock of this ecological enterprises because “we find, in principle, nothing alien to us, foreign and impervious to our understanding.” Certainly we are shy about looking into our institutions, public works and community gatherings for the visitations of alien spirits, demonic or divine forces. We have given up the idea of making pacts with the “forces of volcanoes and rivers and skies.”\textsuperscript{14}

Somehow, though, I sense there is an ecological understanding emerging which has to do with a realisation that something has been lost, or forgotten, or possibly only just realised. There is a reawakening to the “other community” which is prior to our rational one. This other community now makes demands and seeks a different explanation from us, about out intrusion and about the community we are prepared to share in.

\textsuperscript{14} Alphonso Lingis, p. 6.
When Lydia Miller talks about the *Festival of the Dreaming* she invites non-Aboriginal Australians again to try and understand "their country better by enthusiastically leaping through the 'window' which indigenous arts provide" and into "the psychology of this country".\(^{15}\)

The most complete and uncompromisingly other 'stranger' for most non-indigenous Australians are the Aborigines. The great blessing of Mabo and Wik is that they have given all Australians the opportunity to say something quite radically new about the past, the place, and the very many notions of the Other. The challenge is in being able to take up this encounter with imagination. Aborigines make up only 2% of the population, yet one feels their presence disproportionately, as it were, to the actual percentage of the population. In conversation, Stephen Muecke suggested that if one were to ask an elder what they might make of this 'presence', this force, he or she might answer: *We Aborigines have given away so much, and we continue to do so. The power is in the sharing.* In a sense they 'blew the lot' in their exchange with us. Witness all those secrets stolen in the first place by inquisitive anthropologists and more recently given, shared or sold in their increasingly popular art forms. Witness too the desire by many non-Aboriginals to know more about Women's Business, bush tucker and Song Line Journeys. There seems no reason why Aborigines should facilitate such power. It's not just that we are reactive to their suffering, something has been (ex)changed. Anthropologists call this *potlatch*, an economy of reciprocity in which a social virtue is established through the abundant sharing of goods and stories. "*Potlatch paradoxically creates the strongest community with the weakest materials.*"\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Lydia Miller speaking to Debra Jopson, "One Nation or 301 Nations?" in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Saturday August 9, 1997) p.15s. Lydia Miller was speaking about the Festival of the Dreaming - September 14 to October 6, 1997 - one of four major arts festivals in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics. Miller says, "we've got the United Nations right here, Aboriginal people are the most sophisticated diplomats, trust me. We have had thousands upon thousands of years of sophisticated diplomacy".

\(^{16}\) Stephen Muecke, No Road, (Bitumen all the way) (Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Press, 1997) p. 190.
Van: I rarely go out, like bushwalking and things like this. But from time to time I do organise outings for you know friends. I remember one time when I went to, I think it’s on the way to Canberra, I can’t remember, past Goulburn, and I remember when I stood there I’m glad to be in the open space. But at the same time it’s frightening. The smell and the sense of freedom, I mean it’s confused. Once I feel like, I’m free and glad of the, of a sense of freedom, but at the same time faint because it is hard to cope. When I touched the ground I find interesting that a different feeling comes. Something like an Aborigine maybe. Because it’s just completely different you know when you’re in the city as when you’re out there in the country. The smell, the feelings and the sound, I nearly faint. You know big cities, or small cities, by first world country or the third world country cities all the same, it’s all the same, it’s busy and things like this. But when you go out the open air is different, the culture of the land is there. A culture of the land there and the people there. I mean the country people tend to be more universe for me, in terms of disregard to the culture, disregard to, you know the occupation.

In the Mad Max trilogy\(^\text{17}\) the protagonist Max finds himself in a place where the divide between nature and culture is not so much dissolved as conflated in some post-apocalyptic world. In these films the landscape is never pristine. It is never sacred, nor does it appear as a resource available for exploitation. Although Jon Stratton thinks that “nature and society” in these films are depicted as “discrete and opposed entities linked positively only by mining.”\(^\text{18}\) These films suggest to me that the land is a place littered with past attempts to use it. The Mad Max trilogy is “part of a conversation in Australian culture about landscape.”\(^\text{19}\) Throughout the films Max is offered a “choice between more or less free ways of ordering culture and nature, past and present, self and environment. Max has to choose between a world based only on the

\(^{17}\) The Mad Max trilogy (motion pictures), Mad Max, Mad Max 2 and Beyond Thunderdome, Director, George Miller. Production, Warner/Kennedy-Miller, 1979, 1981, 1986.

\(^{18}\) Jon Stratton, p. 41.

institution of property, *bartertown*, or one based on conversation and storytelling."^{20} Max opts for storytelling, and thus there is the possibility of beginning again by assembling the fragments of memory and the stories of desire.

Van: *I mean, my feelings when I first come, at that time is confused because being in the camp and two different camps, one in Indonesia and one in Singapore is completely different and then when I first arrived I stay in hostel. Then from the hostel to my brothers home and then we move to another house, so at that time I did not have enough time to actually realise what had happened, whether I can fit in or not.*

Van, like Max can ‘begin again’, in this landscape of possibilities. She comes into the conversation assembling the fragments of her life. Her post-Vietnam life. Even though *it’s frightening*, she is putting an order to her memory and to her self and to the way she sees herself in this place, to *the smell and the sense of freedom here*. To live fully in a place people need to feel that it is crowded with the evidence of lived life, that the place has a particularity, an enchantment. That it is marked by the love and meaning that they experience and by the suffering and death that they know. We need landmarks which we can name and recognise, which speak and are touched with significance. We need trees, plants, animals, birds which give us the sense of being in a rich and sustaining nature, and which fill our consciousness, as well as simply the space around us, with names and the enlarging sense of other beings. Without all this we are neither fully at home in this place nor fully ourselves. When Europeans first arrived here, the place seemed unenchanted. In 1770, Joseph Banks described New Holland as “in every respect the most barren countrey (sic) I have seen” and as “thinly inhabited even to the point of admiration.”^{21} From this

---

^{20} McKenzie Wark, p.99.

perspective, the land was so hostile that a few 'savages' could only just survive. "In this terra nullius - this empty land - the rich European mythologies of a magical cosmos seemed improbable" 22 What our European, Asian, and Islander forebears saw when they confronted the land here was how much work would have to be done. It was a land which, in their terms, was meaningless and would remain so till they had changed and shaped and made it fruitful, and their own.

Koksal: Going to picnics, this sort of developed later on, when people start buying their own cars and things. As the time went on, people sort of start meeting at different places. Other thing that happened was we Turkish was giving names to small parks and places, in Turkish language and meeting you there. Rather than using the Australian name you know.

Like Koksal, many of us have come into the reality of our own lives here, especially when we feel that we are crowded in with the products of our living. When our things are touched with sticky fingerprints we know that we come out of a place that is richly inhabited. Many people have 'jumped through the window' now and into 'the psychology of this country' and the place has begun to reveal itself. An appropriate ecology emerges as people take up their obligations. In coming to see and care for the country, we also see how the Aborigines cared for the land and how their sense of custodianship, their recognition of value and significance in the land, constitutes another and equally mythical way of considering this place and dealing with it.

I'm taking the bus home in the early evening, being gently moved about by fellow travellers. I settle down to reckon with my past and its history, in this journey through my place. Where is my community now? In certain societies which one might think of as traditional, the community is sometimes unified

22 Helen Grace, etal., p. 86.
around a common deity or ancestors. In the various communities that have emerged in contemporary suburban Sydney, what is the process by which they form and hold a lively commitment to human relations? The experience for many here in Australia is that of leaving behind, in another place, some qualities of identity and origin. We are a people who have ‘become Australians’. The common condition of our being is that of being near or far from ‘somewhere else’: England, Scotland, Ireland, Western NSW, Vietnam, Poland, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Argentina, Fiji, Korea or any of the hundred other places that have contributed to the vast Australian mix. Does the meaning we make of becoming Australians move about reasonably intact from one discourse to another, and do we each come to think and conceive reasonably similar things about this society while taking diversity seriously?

Nhan: Like, before, ten or twelve years ago there was like the immigration hostels, one in Cabramatta a few in Villawood and also Leightonfield as well. When our people, like Vietnamese people they come to NSW they either stay in Cabramatta immigration hostel or something like that. And after that, like, our people tend to move out and stay or stick together, for example Cabramatta. In that way they can communicate each other easier and they could get the things that they really want, for example food, that’s our major thing. When we first arrive food’s hard for us to eat, like Australian food or Italian food or something. We choose to eat rice rather than bread or salami or something like this.

But for me, Sydney becoming my home, but actually this is a very big thing for me to decide. At first, when I’m staying in Sydney I don’t feel like Sydney’s really my home. But when I left Sydney, for example, I was in Thailand for some time for holiday, I just realised that Sydney’s my home because Thailand did not relate anything to me. I did not miss much about my old country, like Vietnam, but I miss a lot about Sydney. It is the way we are living here.
I think it is possible to observe in Nhan’s story that a form of order has emerged in which he can hold a lively commitment to this society and to his identity as a Vietnamese man. People remember and both speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, and from a particular experience of a particular culture, without necessarily being contained by that positional identity. Nhan’s particular stories have become part of our collective memory taking shape here, and we can now appreciate them as Australian stories.

John: I was about seven I think, when we came, so I can vaguely remember my reception in Australia and what we thought about it. We went to a migrant hostel in Dapto, near Wollongong. I remember the fighting inside the camp between the Russians and probably Germans, I’m not sure, and we’d often get mixed up in it. I can also remember standing at the fence and having rocks thrown at me by the Aussie kids. So we got out of Dapto as quickly as we could. We went to live near Mudgee. Dad got a job from there in the central highlands of Tasmania, with one of the big hydro schemes. So we lived in Tasmania. In Scotland we came from the very centre of Glasgow. When we came to the country in Australia, out at Mudgee, mum didn’t even have hot running water and she had to walk five kilometers to the nearest shop, in that heat. It was a real experience for her. We came to Australia in June I think, and we were on the beach in Wollongong wondering why no one else was there. Because it was so bloody hot. For us, from Scotland I think we only ever dipped our toes in the water once back there. Australia was a real cultural shock for my parents. And yet they’ve never ever wanted to go back to Scotland. This is where they have come to and this is where they’ve stayed.

A Common Condition for Many Australians is that they are Near or Far From Somewhere Else

In Maxine Hong Kingston’s book Woman Warrior: Memories of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, the essential image of the family and her ethnic past is that of
ghosts. Her imagination is saturated with Chinese history and folklore, mythology and superstition. She conveys a vivid sense of the beauty and wholeness of Chinese village life, her parents' life, before the revolution. At the same time, she makes us feel the horrors of that life. The book begins with the lynching of her pregnant aunt, and proceeds through a nightmarish series of socially enforced cruelties, abandonments, betrayals and murders. She feels haunted by the ghosts of victims past whose burden she takes on herself by writing of that past, and she shares her parent's myth of America as a country of ghosts. Multitudes of white shadows at once unreal and magically powerful.

She fears that her parents themselves are ghosts, because after thirty years she is not sure that she knows these immigrant parent's real name and hence is uncertain of her own. Kingston shuffles her vast cast of ghosts around in the hope of finding some meaningful order in which she can stand more firmly, but her ethnic identity and sense of place remain elusive.

Hao: Oh yes, I want to say something about the comfortable and uncomfortable, about moving. Here we have the freedom. You can move everywhere, nobody mind, nobody pay attention of why you move and the reason you move. But in my country, you cannot move anywhere. If you move for some reason, the local authority have strict control.

So, I feel more safe here, living in Australia. At least we have the difficulty about the language, about speaking the language, but still it's easy for me. In my country you cannot move to a new neighbour. If for example when I moving some place here, if you live next door to me you don't mind who I am, where I come from. But in my country, even though we are all Vietnamese, speak the same language for example, the neighbour always watch you, what you do or where you come from. They looking at you a lot.

---

So what is memory and how does it impact on identity and place? Memories are slippery. They change colour and form depending on who tells them, what is told, when and under what circumstances they are told. “Stories from the past can manifest in the present as ogres or angels, with the clarity of midday sun or the uncertainty of shadows. The very nature of retrieving memories insists they be mutable and evolving.”24 Distance in time, that’s what memories negotiate; space travel, a removal from one place to another. Radical separations sometimes, going half way across the globe, memories negotiate this too. Distance in space easily combines with distance in time and distance between people. How do we negotiate this? David Malouf reminds us that not everything begins in 1788.25

Van: So what happen is when I left the country I could not say goodbye to anyone. Only my mother because she made the arrangements. We go to the meeting place where we meet other people. I remember it is about 11pm, winter time, extremely dark. We went into a small boat and then onto the river and then we got into the big boat. We travel around the river for maybe two or three days when we got into the ship. A fishing ship. It’s too dark and we could not see anything. The only thing we can see is the light when the guard make the signal to each other. The sailor very fright and they quickly throw us down beneath the board of the ship. We also find later on that the sailor put all our things into the sea because they don’t want someone to find out that a lot of people on the boat. Everything gone now. It look like there is no past.

When Van ‘came ashore’ at Sydney Cove 200 years later, she brought her history into ‘ours’. It belongs here. It is good that we be aware of the many histories of arrival.26

25 In 1788 the first British Colonial fleet arrived on the east coast of Australia and established colonies in Botany Bay and Sydney Cove.
26 David Malouf, “Identity as Lived Experience: uniquely Australian” presented to The Larry Adler Lecture at The Regent Hotel (Sydney: 24 August, 1994).
Jane Goodall told me a story about growing up in Adelaide and returning to visit her old primary school with a friend. “Both of us had a powerful sense of the place as ‘the outskirts’. It was borderland - a great sprawl of dangerous roads and cheap formula housing. There was a section called ‘the camp’, which consisted of rows of tiny asbestos-board houses for European refugees after the war. It was definitely a migrant zone. A place for the displaced, many of whom did not speak English well. Kath remembered (I did not) that the ages of the kids in our class ranged from 10 to 15. For many of them that was the last year of school they would attend. There were German and Polish kids, Australian born kids, English kids”.27

Van: I got no feeling of that time because the seas were rough. We were sea sick and like also could not breath. A lot of people inside. I remember one incident when the coast guard inspect the ship, there is a three year old child crying and the mother try very hard to shield her mouth because they don’t want to be found. Anyway at that time when we reached to Indonesian island, they are deserted. No one live there. So what happen is we reach the coral and then we must go to the island, now we stay. Actually the official came, people are nearly starving at that time, we stay around more than a week. We been trying to bribe the local authority to get a smaller boat to travel us to the second island. Then at this island I stay there 15 months. I learn to speak English there.

In The Blue Hour, which is part of a cycle of performances called Far from Where, Renato Coccolo says “I think the place ‘Australia’ has a particular importance, it has a very strong importance because the place Australia presses for a re-emergence of past memories. It is as if time and space have been merged into one category through the mediation of memory”.28 Renarto remembers how, when he moved from Italy to Australia, his background, his

27 In a conversation with Jane Goodall.
experience, was in a state of agitation, so to speak, and then when he decided to settle, or attempted to settle, that background dropped out as sediment leaving deposits of unequal thickness. Those deposits will always be the matrix against which any experience in the new place will look for a counterpart. "So it's a bit like the replication of a DNA helix, reconstituting a genetic code to make knowledge and life possible in the new place."29 The blue hour is the only time in the day and night he says, when light is the same in Italy and Australia. It is the time memories choose to come to light, deceived as it were, by that momentary trick of nature. It was in a blue hour that he realised that in his family, for generations, nobody had died where they were born.

During The Blue Hour memories arise from photographs and appear as phantoms on the stage. Once freed from the constraints of memory, these phantoms take on a life of their own. As if 'surprised in sleep' they scatter around the place fragments of the family's history, which even they can't correctly remember. Each phantom searches for different bits to patch together and make an 'approachable history'. In this way, memory is not some tool with which to reconstruct a supposedly realistic or exact history of the past; rather memory becomes a strategy for constructing another story. In a sense this new story has a little to do with the past, a little to do with the present and a little to do with the future as well.30

30 From a discussion about "The Blue Hour" on Meridian, ABC Radio National (15th March, 1996).
A home fulfils many needs. A home provides a place of self-expression, a bank of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a safe place where one might relax and let one’s hair down, and I can’t escape the fact that a home can sometimes be a place of hidden abuse and fear. As one changes and grows throughout life, one’s psychological development seems to be punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with other people, but also by close affective ties to significant physical environments. This person-place relationship is the dynamic process in my thoughts about an ecological epistemology and it is of the utmost importance when it comes to discussing the way people have made their homes here and attached themselves to Australia.

I want to consider further what it has meant to make a home here for those of us who have come over the last two centuries. I want to think of it terms of the physicality of the buildings and how they fit into the place, but also in terms of heart felt meanings. For many people who have come to live in Australia there is the emotional complexity of leaving ‘there’ to settle ‘here’, and the possibility of staying ‘here’ for the rest of their lives, while always a part of them lingers ‘there’. This chapter is organised in such a way to partly reflect the experience of arriving in a new place, then establishing a home and living there, possibly in a family, and then out onto the streets and into the neighbourhood. Auburn is characterised by a diverse population with large established communities of post World War Two migrants. Over the years the people of Auburn have adjusted to and accommodated many different migrant groups. I’ll try to evoke a sense of the place, its character and presence for those who live there. Through it all, however, there is this new challenge of One Nation which pulls at and disturbs the quiet success of home making in our communities.
Home and Away

One's home is the centre of the world, not in a geological, but in an ontological sense. One establishes a home at the heart of what makes sense, because this is where one can confidently start out from and return to. "Home", T.S. Eliot remarked, "is where one starts from."1 When a person decides to migrate, however, this not only involves leaving behind a home, crossing the water and living amongst strangers, but undoing the very meaning of the world. At its most extreme it involves an abandonment of self. In Graham Greene's novel A Burnt out Case, Querry, an architect searches for the 'opposite' of home, an 'empty place' that holds no memories for him. And yet, even on this journey into the empty places of the world, he finds that it seems always necessary to begin at once to "reconstruct the familiar, with photographs perhaps, or a row of books, and so from the first, he sets himself to build a routine, the familiar within the unfamiliar. It is the condition of survival."2 Migrating, of course, may be prompted by hope. While leaving certain familiar ways and moving in among strangers may not be absurd for a person, even when it is a 'positive' thing to be doing, there will always be an emotional dismantling of the original home.

John: I worked and lived in a small town in the Highlands. Many of my mates were Polish or Russian or German. But they had names like George and Peter and they had all come to Australia, like us and left their country behind. They talked about Australia as their home. So when I came to Canterbury and I started talking to people who said, 'yes we're only here till the wars over in Lebanon and then we are going home', even the children going to school were saying that, it really spun me out. It took me a long time to come to grips with that. To realise the position they were in. That they had to leave the country that they loved, and they didn't necessarily look on Australia as home.

1 Peter Read, Returning to Nothing, the meaning of lost places (New York: Press Syndicate University of Cambridge, 1996) p.102.
Feeling as if one belongs to a place and knows about it has never meant that one may not travel from time to time. Home, in fact, may well be best understood in terms of journeying. Contrary to popular thinking, the migration experience isn’t over when someone arrives in another country. Return visits to the place of origin are integral to the migration process. This reveals that migration is not simply about a departure and then the establishment of home in the new country. It is also about ties to the old homeland and the influence of this attachment on the development of particular and collective identity in the new country. Some of us have tended to think of migration as relating to quite distinct patterns of social space and systems of meaning; the migrant leaves ‘there’, with all its social meaning and comes ‘here’, into a different place of meaning. The lived experience for some migrants is that they live their lives across borders and develop and maintain their ties to two, or more, homes. The term ‘transnational’ has been used to describe this phenomenon and is defined as “the process by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement: transmigrants are people who take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states”.

Zucini: Well we first came here and stay for a few months. Then go back to Lebanon. Then one of the kids get married so we come back for about six years. We have one son who live in Newcastle, but we stay most of our time in Auburn with our other son. Auburn feel like home. Lebanon is more my home. But whenever I come here, we’ve got friends, this has become my second home. Whenever we miss Lebanon we go there and stay for a while. Then come back here.

In Zucini’s case the old and the new homes are part of her social and cultural

---

space. The visits back and forth are part of her migration experience. Why people migrate is such a mix of motivations and dreams, and once someone has migrated there is often a degree of ambivalence about their lives. Certainly people have come here for economic reasons.

Nesrin: My parents were the ones who decided about our future, about their future. They discussed it amongst themselves. Mainly my grandmother was against my father's decision in coming to Australia. But my mother supported my father. They thought that they could have a better life, more money.

Then too, people come for the fun of it, for the excitement of travel and the fantasy of somewhere else.

Nesrin: My parents also thought that it would be good if their children learn to speak another language. And they would see what's out there. See another country. It would be exciting.

Of course people's emotions differ and thereby influence how they adjust to their particular 'lived experience' of migration.

Nesrin: Well mainly they miss their relatives. My mother wanted to visit her mother, she really wanted to see her. She really wanted to see her brothers and she wanted to see the country again. Renew herself in a way. To catch up on things that she did not see for a long time. Turkey was always home. When they first came to Australia they had only a plan to stay for a while. Never to live in Australia forever. I remember that. But my father passed away in 1982. He died here in Australia.

Because Nesrin and her family came as assisted migrants - that is their travel costs were sponsored by the Australian Government - there is an assumption from some people in the mainstream society that they will become 'permanent
residents'. The expectation is that such migrants have forsaken all their ties to
the old country and that they will 'Australianise'. Such a category however
does not adequately describe their experience.

Audrey: If they come over here to have a better life they should try and live like
Australians do.

One can see these assumptions at work in those areas where Australians feel
most confident. Sport is a good example. "Sunday’s grand final at Suncorp
Stadium between the Brisbane Strikers and Sydney United represented a
triumphant day for soccer in Australia. ... Almost as important as the fact that
the crowd at Suncorp Stadium was the biggest to attend any form of football
match in Brisbane this season was the impeccable behaviour of spectators".4 In
contrast the preliminary final between Sydney United and South Melbourne,
"ended with shameful scenes of violence and ethnic triumphalism. If soccer
can shed its image of being an ethnically obsessed sport, it can "look to a good
future as a major Australian sport. This is the rationalisation behind Soccer
Australia's determination to 'Australianise' the code by forcing the clubs to
drop the logos and colours that identify them with countries outside Australia.
The future is not Sydney United supporters with their 'Croatia, Croatia'
chanting. Critics have labelled the program of breaking the ethnic nexus with
the clubs as a racist initiative. In fact, it is an initiative towards proper
multiculturalism."5 While it might be useful to imagine a 'proper
multiculturalism', it seems to me that a more appropriate way of socially
constructing this process of Australianisation, involves continuing to recognise
all the expected obligations that maintain an individual's identity. In the case of

4 Editorial "Win for Soccer" in the Sydney Morning Herald, (Tuesday May 27, 1997). For more
detailed information on the alleged football hooligans associated with Sydney United, see the
work of John Hughson, A feel for the game: An ethnographic study of soccer support and social
identity (UNSW, School of Sociology, 1996). In this thesis Hughson says that in 1994 there were
approximately 40 members of a gang called The Bad Blue Boys who support the Sydney United
soccer team.
5 Editorial, "Win for Soccer".
someone like Nesrin the obligations are both to her ‘Turkishness’ and to her ‘Australianised’ life. Her return visits back and forth deeply embed her in the complex issues of culture, family and homeland.

Nesrin: I actually encourage my mother to go back. She was feeling lonely after we lost my father. Before that in 1981 I went back to Turkey by myself. I had a job. I was working in the Malaysian Embassy there as a secretary. I had a very good job. I had made friends in Turkey and everything was going well. I would report back everything that was changing in Turkey, everything nice about it I would tell my parents. My father died while I was in Turkey. I did not get to see him in his last moments. After my father died, the next morning I arrived to Sydney. I came back. I resigned from my job and for a few years I worked in Australia and I saved.

Before my father died he did not want to be buried in Australia. So he told my mother if he happened to die there he did not chose to be buried here. He wanted to be buried in Turkey where we have the family cemetery there. So my mother made some expenses. My mother went along with the corpse, with the same flight they took my father to Turkey. She buried him there and did all the necessary religious funeral that had to be done. She wanted to do all the funeral ceremony by herself, everything perfect. That was her last duty. That was her responsibility in paying respect to her husband.

The reason why my mother came back to Australia was that my sister could not enter the University in Ankara. She was not able to gain enough points to do the subjects she wanted. So having an Australian citizenship we were able to come back to Australia whenever we decided to. So my mother and sister came back to continue her education. At the moment my sister is studying at Charles Sturt University, in Bathurst. Doing computer science.
What is at issue here is whether these visits between her two homes can be
accepted by most of us as a quality that partly characterises being an Australian.
Clearly a feature of the sense of home for a migrant in this country must
include, to some degree, homesickness for somewhere else. These return
journeys ensure that relationships of reciprocity are maintained and that an
individual's social network remains extended around the world.

Van: At the time that I escape from Vietnam, I already got two brothers who live
in Netherlands and one in Australia. My brother, the one who live in
Netherlands, they plan to come back to Vietnam for a wedding. Wedding back
home. We all fly back to Vietnam for wedding. I love travel, I'd love to live in
other country. In 1989 I live and work in Hong Kong and I find this interesting.
You know I want to learn new culture. I travel around Europe too, and visit my
brothers there. But I feel like at home in Australia. It's funny, when I feel at home
in Australia I also feeling at home at other place. Wherever I go if I stay there for
a while, it's home.

At Home with the Family

The family is probably the oldest of all human institutions. The Australian
Institute of Family Studies noted during the International Year of the Family 1994,
that it is important to recognise the diversity of Australian families "in terms of
their composition, culture and race and to celebrate their central contribution to
Australia's social and economic welfare and cultural heritage."6

Wissal: Yeah, I guess it depends on what your parents teach you. Your actual
values, you know coming from the religion and community and family. You just
grow with it sort of. And as you grow your parents always remind you to know
this is what our religion is all about. They encourage you to read more about it
too, you know.

6 Don Edgar, "Focus on the Family" in BIPR Bulletin, Issue 14, (Canberra: Department of
Family structures and relationships are complex and dynamic. Families may be the source of both stability and conflict and they can also be the site for individual and social change. Most new settlers come with other family members - spouse, siblings, parents - often to join an extended family here. They always come with an experience of dynamic family change. Sometimes great family disruption is the reason for, or the precipitating cause of migration. “In all cases, migration changes family patterns, and the experience of migration means further shifts. New settlers come to a situation where family patterns are different to a greater or lesser degree from those they are familiar with, but which themselves, are in transition”. This is to acknowledge that family patterns the world over are changing in ways that reflect shifting tendencies in most modern industrialised societies: a later age of first marriage, a higher percentage of people who don’t marry at all, delaying having children, higher rates of divorce, an increase in the number of sole parents and an increase in de facto relationships.7

Families give to a culture a continuity in time, by providing the space in which together we can practice a ‘little to do with the past, a little to do with the present and a little to do with the future’. Families can provide people with some of their socialising skills, giving them confidence to move out into the wider community. Because of this, families are both important and difficult. They are the places where changes in attitude are trialed as well as being the last bastions of conservative beliefs.

Hao: I only say about my culture. In my country, so that we in Vietnam, we like an extended family. But in Australia I don’t think the next generation like to live in extended family. Because, extended family, we always have to agree even when

we have conflict together. But in Australia, I think the next generation they don’t
live here like that, they will leave. Also, in my culture, like my experience of my
family of my parents, we are always thinking we still under their focus. They say,
‘you are still my daughter, you cannot have experience, and you cannot be wiser
than I am’, so everything they say we must respect. I am sorry. I don’t want to
blame my parents but sometimes you see, I had to honour my father. He is 79
and my mother 77. But their hearing is not good, so I say, ‘mum you need a
hearing aid’, and she says ‘I am deaf because we are now living in Australia’.

My father, he has diabetes, and he like to eat certain things, a bad diet. But of
course I don’t give to him. So he says because ‘I am old you tricked me like that
because you have money and I cannot make money’. You think this is funny, but
I cannot explain clear about this. I have to hide when I eat now. I cannot eat in
front of him. So we don’t have a meal together.

Hoa is living in a flat with her aging parents and her 19 year old daughter.
Due to a range of circumstances, the family rarely eat together, and therefore do
not share in discussions about daily life. At first Hoa was saddened by this
development, then went on to describe dinner time in Vietnam in a different
context. There conflict was rife between family members. Snide remarks,
jealousies and resentment were also a part of living and eating together. She
seemed relieved to be free of that enforced closeness. Her recollections about
close family life included the contradiction of emotional extremes.

Hao: You know, in Vietnam is extended family. We can live with one
generation and another generation, another generation. We still live one house,
not easy like here. Like one example, is my family. My parents have many
children, so when we marry there is brother-in-law, sister-in-law, I don’t know
how to say, we live together yes, but we have different rooms because we have big
house. When you marry only one kitchen. So your wife and the brother’s wife
they are cooking. They have conflict about the food and they have conflict about
financial and everything. If you put more money than another brother means

112
that their wives have always conflict together. So we don’t know how to solve that.

Hoa is involved in a difficult situation, living with both her parents and daughter. The life left behind in Vietnam was one of a large extended family living together in very close quarters. The oldest members of the family were respected and consulted on any plans or problems that confronted the family. In Australia, Hoa is wedged in between these conservative views and the changing face of a new culture. She is the sole breadwinner and has access to the new culture and language. Her parents are old and infirm, and resent Hoa taking charge of family business.

The family both as an idea and as a socialising structure has always received a high priority in Australia’s immigration program. John Howard at the launch of his election campaign in 1995 said “for most Australians, whatever our circumstances and whatever our attitudes on other things, it is from our families that we draw the greatest emotional and spiritual nourishment. Stable united functioning families represent the most effective welfare system. Because the family unit is the foundation of our society it must be at the core of immigration (and settlement) policy.”9 The family reunion component of the program has allowed Australian citizens and long term residents to sponsor relatives living abroad to join them in this country. In recent years it has been the largest category in our immigrant intake. With this there is an expansion of the family’s kin network, which usually means more emotional and material security. However, when people arrive to join other members of their family there is an inevitable change in the family structure; there are changes in what the slogan for the International year of the Family calls “The smallest democracy at the heart of society”.

Australian society values and encourages family life. Of course, the tendency is towards a localised version of the bourgeois ideal, that is, a family of parents and children built up around a home. This family unit is expected to develop and maintain relationships with extended family members, with the neighbourhood and with the social institutions that uphold the society. The relationship between the family and the social institutions is always being modified and a praise-worthy development, in recent years, has been the way many social institutions have changed their attitudes and systems to accommodate the particular needs and expectations of the various family styles in the community. Consequently, institutions that deal with education, community service, religion, business, health and other government facilities offer their services and expertise in an ethno or gender specific way.

This moderate liberalising of public institutions comes in for criticism and one can observe this in recent commentary arising from the Queensland elections. Robert Manne makes the point that Hanson has articulated ambivalence and resentment at the change in the function of the institutions as well as change in the level of tolerance these institutions display. For example, as a result of successive governments there has been a move to progressively abandon the "old policy of assimilation into the pre-existing Anglo-Celtic monocultural norm. Migrants are now told they can become fully Australian without jettisoning their cultural identities and ethnic ties."\textsuperscript{10} He sees Hanson as leading a revolt by many (monocultural) Australians against what they see as the apparent loss of their settled way of life.

What I think has been missed here, by people like Hanson, is that most migrant families quickly settle into this Australian way of life. Local social clubs such as Marconi in Sydney or the Turkish-Australian Cultural Centre as well as SBS and the Ethnic Communities Councils all encourage and promote

\textsuperscript{10} Robert Manne, "The Hanson danger cannot be underestimated" in the Sydney Morning Herald (Monday June 22, 1998) p.17.
the same values: broadly middle class, consumer orientated, with an emphasis on home ownership and social mobility.

Being part of a strong family, both literally and metaphorically, has allowed many people to make a successful fit into this new place. Families and family life are central and crucial in the life of many migrants.

Wissal: My dad came here with his brother and my mum. Then they brought my grandma here and my two uncles and aunty. Then after that my grandma. They brought another aunty and her husband. That’s when the family started.

In a funny sort of reverse prejudice some migrants take as a ‘value of difference’ this centrality of family life and suggest that Anglo Australians do not value families, or at least not in the same way that migrants do.

Lodi: The life migrants live, you know the custom as a family, you know, they’re all together. They could all live in just one bedroom and they’re just happy and they’re close to each other. It’s just different. It’s different than Australia. It’s different customs. The social life is different, it’s more friendly. The atmosphere’s different, neighbours, relatives they come and it’s just different to Australian families. They seem you know, more broken up.

The 1988FitzGerald Report for the Federal Government on immigration policy noted that some representatives of ethnic communities disparaged Anglo Australians as being without culture and having no sense of family values. But what Lodi sees as different family customs are just that, different family customs. Family life has always been very important in the wider Australian community, not least in the way family stability has been equated with social stability.

Audrey: I suppose it was having the family all there. We could always come and
go as we pleased. Bring friends home. We always were encouraged to bring our friends home, for meals that sort of thing. Yeah it was just definitely home.

A common enough idea among some migrants is the way ‘they like to stay together’, offering support across the generations.

Lodi: The girl would stay with the parents till she is ready to marry. Till she gets engaged and then when she gets married you know that's it, she could leave home. It's not the same as with the boy. They don't leave home. Sometimes they even stay, they marry and stay home with their family. They build extra rooms. 'Cause the boy, it's not that they depend on him, but he's very special the boy, to the Lebanese. They think when he gets married he stays with us and he, you know have a family. They like to stay together.

But this is not an uncommon story in Australian family life either. When Audrey and Neville lived with his mother for five years after marrying they were carrying on quite a simple local custom.

Neville: I think actually it was good in a way. Mum and dad could look after the baby and we were able to go out, like at night to the pictures or a night at the theatre which was very convenient really. My father would always take Peter as he got a bit older. He'd take him out for a walk in the stroller. I think it worked all right. I don't know how the women in the house got along because I was away at work most of the time. But we seemed to be getting along all right, although I don't know whether it'd be hard to get along with my mother.

Traditional family obligations begin to break down when people move away from the authority of the past. A type of freedom emerges that is not cognisant of either the old or the new cultural structures. What is possible now is an independence from the “regimen of cognition” that Lyotard speaks of where one is no longer “constrained by linkages that regulate”.

Hao: For my daughter, if she feel one day to marry and she leaving, I don’t mind. I don’t want to keep my culture in my daughter. I mean I don’t want to keep her like extended family, because sometimes it happens like the problem I face now.

While Hoa’s daughter seems to be pushing the edges of change, for others being free of the ‘obligations that link and regulate’ is harder, and only exaggerates the feeling of dispossession. Even while the world is changing radically, some of us seem reluctant to throw off the ‘scraps and tatters and uneasy joints’

12 that bind us to the past. In the maelstrom of modern life one can still find borders and obligations which one recognises.

Wissal: Well, as I said there are six of us in the family, mum and dad, and my brothers and sister. Most of the time we see our relatives. ‘Cause we’re always visiting each other. Even when I go out, the majority is Lebanese. It’s full of Lebanese people. I know my life revolves around Lebanese people you know. I don’t think I could ever lose that culture because I’m always reminded of it. There’s always people there to remind me.

“We’ve got to make it fashionable again to value the importance of stability, and to really reinforce the importance of the family’s role in our community.”

13 Here John Howard states what were unequivocally the dominant themes of his electoral campaign: the need for calm and stability in the face of break-neck global change and the encouragement and validation of family values. The concerns and intentions in these matters remain well supported by the electorate, and despite the anxiety of some people that family values are being lost, this doesn’t seem to be the lived experience.

---

Neville: Yes, that's right, I always liked being at home with the family. I was always a homely person. I always like to be home. Even when I'm at work, I'd be saying to myself 'when am I going home again'.

Emoh Ruo

Home is the centre of one's world, a place where things make sense. So for many people who have come to live here, home is often thought of as being physically somewhere else, in Europe and today possibly in the Middle East, or in a country in Asia. The completeness of home exists in another place. It might be achieved here, if only one could make of this place something the same as that other place. This is consistent with the urgency migrant people have had in trying to make this country familiar, making as it were, a family home land. To this end the wider community endorses and has promoted the building and selling of family houses, making this a principle characteristic of Australian social life. Certainly this has been one of the most successful features of bourgeois Australian cultural life. Home ownership has been encouraged and is a mark of satisfaction that the general community wears with pride. Making it possible for most people to live in a family home provides them with the opportunity to satisfy their desire to secure and occupy a place, and to make it familiar.

People often assert this desire through the very personal ways they then link their identity to the home. Many of us appear to expend more effort personalising and defending our homes than any other physical place. The personalisation of our homes promotes both security and identity. Identity in this case is not only about 'self knowledge' but also about one's persona as recognised by the community. Jung suggests that a person's house is an archetypal symbol of the self. The house reflects how we see ourselves and how we wish others to see us.
The house then is a way of projecting our own image both inwardly and outwardly.\textsuperscript{14}

Lodi: I'd like to have a bigger home, bigger rooms, big kitchen. We all could sit, like as a family when they come. A dining room, we like that. We just all get together. Verandahs are very important. If you've got a verandah in your house and a visitor comes in, oh wow, it's something, it's very special. We sit down on the verandah, you probably see some Lebanese people sitting on their front verandahs. My family, my mum and dad, that's all they do, sit on the front verandah. We've got a little front verandah. It's a federation style and we do sit there and have coffee.

Driving around the streets of Auburn or any other Sydney suburb, one can see clearly how people use their houses to express their identity - how they see themselves and how they would like others to see them. In the cool of the vast, newly renovated Marconi Club in Bossley Park, I sometimes take a coffee on my way to work. It is a centre for the huge Italian community in the south west of Sydney, Italians who have been here now for three generations. "Italians, weren't they going to destroy western culture as Australians knew it? Weren't the Australian people not going to cope with these garlic-munching, no-speaker-de-English yabberin peasants with their weird cultural practices; so what happened? Focaccia and sun-dried tomatoes on the shelves at Franklins, that's what happened."\textsuperscript{15}

The Marconi Club, with its suburban palazzi facing onto the club’s soccer field, is a temple to Italian achievement here in Sydney. Membership is open, so nowadays the Vietnamese drink here, play the pokies and bet on the TAB. I've heard it said that on Sundays the Vietnamese get in their cars and go to look at

\textsuperscript{15} Anna, Maria Dell'oso, “Walking softly through the city of 100 languages” in the Sydney Morning Herald (March 26, 1994 ) p. 8A.
the big houses the Italians have built around Fairfield and Liverpool, as an inspiration, a measurement of success, to see what’s possible!

Lodi: In Lebanon most of the people have got apartment houses. That’s why a lot of Lebanese you see are building big houses. You don’t see any Lebanese with a little tiny house, or a tiny cottage. They’ve all got either two story houses or a big house. We all want a house like far away from the city, in the country type of house.

A loved place sharpens one’s perception of what is valuable in the shaped and fashioned space. So a house that has been experienced and personalised is not an inert box. Such “inhabited space transcends geometrical space. It is far removed from any reference to simple geometrical forms.” Yet in point of fact “a house is first and foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyze rationally. Its prime reality is visible and tangible, made of well hewn solids and well fitted framework. It is dominated by straight lines, the plumb-line having marked it with its discipline and balance. A geometrical object of this kind ought to resist metaphors that welcome the human body and the human soul. But transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered as space for cheer and intimacy”. Bachelard’s poetic view has much to tell about the way people take up a responsibility to home making. Intimacy and cheer transform the geometrical object into the living space for people whose minds may be full of fantasy and memory.

How can a construction of bricks and mortar, wood and nails, transpose itself into a place full of meaning, a place for cheer and intimacy, a home? Homes, I sense, are surely built from the memories of other homes we carry with us. Bachelard says of a house that if one is able to recapture the intimacy of the past in one’s present daydreams, then one is going to make of it a home.

---

17 Gaston Bachelard, p. 48.
The childhood homes that Gungor remembers and the house he lives in now embrace the warmth and humour of his life in Turkey. His architect brother has built him and his family a double storey house with a large living space and vaulted, wood-lined ceiling. A wooden staircase leads up to a big living area. He speaks fondly of his parents' and grandparents' houses in Turkey which had the same features. His house is situated on top of a hill, overlooking Cherrybrook and west to Blacktown and the Blue Mountains. His house is called Manzara which in Turkish means The View. His grandparents also lived on top of a hill and that memory is very special to him.

Gungor: Yes it was a two storey house, and to this house I was very comfortable. To this house came the first radio. I remember father bought and the name of the radio is Orion Radio. They put it high, like in a high place, and they cover it up too, because of the dust. I remember exactly the house. Two storey and when we walk in we are going up with the stairs, turning round, round, like that you were going when you came here. The first floor is two rooms, right side, left side rooms. At that time we didn't have the fridge you know. They use to keep the old foods there in the closet. Because there are so many children in this family they use to lock all the food up. What I did was, I use to pull and push my hand down behind the closet and I could get some food this way. I remember being caught by my grandmother. I remember this house very well.

If you stay at night time here you will see how nice the view. Remind me views, especially in Ankara when I was young. We came to Ankara, we couldn't live in the city and we rented one there. It was out of the city on the hill, like here. At night time Ankara's light is coming out and I use to sit there. That place, we didn't have the water, we didn't have the electricity, nothing, only the house light. And night time is very dark and you are sitting and watching on the hill. Ankara's light. Here it reminds me that one.
Australians generally, when asked to describe their ideal house, tend to describe a free-standing, rectangular, detached, single-family house located in its own yard.\(^{18}\)

Lodi: I could never live in a flat, you live between four walls, its just like a prison. Some flats haven't got no verandahs whatsoever. The first flat I lived in, there were just four walls. David was only young then, he didn't need to get out to play, he had his own little toys inside but it was boring for me. I looked, you know, through the window, there's a flat there, flats there and flats there, you're crowded among, you know, you feel like choking. No, I think house is very important for the children. 'Cause you know, have parties in your backyard, yeah, you can get together in your backyard. If your got children, or even visitors and in the flats, you can't do that.

The ubiquitous suburban home has come in for considerable criticism, not least because of its uniformity and the extent to which its design is governed by local council regulations. Some critical discussion within the multicultural discourse suggest that Australian suburban houses restrict the migrant in terms of choice, especially in regards to the positioning of the home on the land and the rigidity of the building materials. Further criticisms are levelled at ideas about what is permitted in relation to an appropriate aesthetic. These arguments would have it that migrant families should be able to live in much the same way as they did in their former countries. Mandy Thomas takes up this line of argument. "There are numerous aspects of Australian housing that may restrict Vietnamese people from controlling their domestic space in the way that they wish"\(^{19}\) and these include the size of the average suburban house, the way it is positioned and constrained by the road system, the unyielding and durable nature of the building materials and its interior design.

---

18 William Michelson, "Most people don't want what architects want" in Clare Cooper, p. 438.
Thomas argues that Australian houses provide some possibilities - the verandah being the most appealing - but mostly they provide disabling restrictions. "This incompatibility and discordance demands that migrants accommodate their needs to the normative Australian family and social arrangements."20 She cites the costs of renovations and local council’s building regulations as being the greatest cause of restriction, prohibiting Vietnamese people from feeling comfortable and familiar here. There is something implicitly difficult, however, about arguments that promote extremely foreign living arrangements as if they should, without question, be adopted here. For example, she says in rural Vietnam a "toilet is commonly a plank of wood positioned over a river or a pit, these are much more open and accessible than Australian toilets which frequently have lockable doors. Even in urban areas of Vietnam toilets may have screens of hanging material rather than doors."21 An equally inappropriate criticism of Australian houses, is to do with the movement and flow of people in and out of the house which is supposedly made more "difficult by the usually defined doors and large areas of back yard, which frequently lack intimacy and seclusion."22 I understand that Thomas is trying to describe the difficulties some Vietnamese people have when it comes to buying and utilising an Australian house, but this culturally critical theorising is simply too naive and I find these very difficult arguments to accept, especially in the light of Hansonism. There will always be some disparity between the experience of migrants and what they expect a home to be and what’s available in the local community. But throughout Thomas’ work I feel this tenor, this tone of criticism, levelled at ordinary, as distinct from normative, Australian suburban housing and life style which in reality, isn’t so inflexible, nor does it obstruct various possibilities for migrant families to transform the suburban ecological space.

20 Mandy Thomas, p. 107.
21 Mandy Thomas, p. 107.
There is a culturally significant style of Australian housing. It is generally a free standing house; that may not be familiar to some migrants. In a real sense an Australian house can be a mismatch between the conceptions of a home, as imagined by a migrant family, and what is available in the suburban street. Australian housing stock is invested with cultural meaning; it reflects the ordinary social relations that are structured around local council ordinances and an Australian bourgeois value system. Amongst other things, a house in this culture provides for the nurturing of the self and the development of individual personhood. Within the home space itself the very idea of a place of one’s own, an inner sanctuary which can be experienced and secured, is of profound importance. It can be quite easy to overlook the significance of a family home in which there are private bedrooms - this sort of house construction is generally taken for granted here now- but for many people arriving this is a new idea.

Nhan: The house construction there is a lot different from here. Like I have four brothers and two sisters. The brothers, we only have two big beds and also we were sharing the beds together. The two girls have different bed that they also share together. We don’t have that separate room like here. It’s like living and also working closely together, very much. I felt in one way that it’s too close. I don’t know myself.

For Wissal and Nesrin the bedroom is private. Their bedrooms are important spaces. The bedrooms provide the personally intimate space for their fantasies of freedom and self-determination to emerge.

Wissal: Yeah well, my dad before he comes in, has to knock. Sometimes he can’t come in. You know, it’s like, yeah, it’s private place. It’s a place where you’d
want to think. I have pictures of guys on the wall. But I’ve sort of grown out of that now.

Nesrin: I was happy in our family place here. I was glad to have my friends coming over to my place. We would go over to their place too. Most of the time when I told my parents that I’d like to have my friends coming over to my place they would choose not to stick around. They would leave us alone. We would play rock’n’roll and dance really well. I had posters on my wall. I had rock singer posters I was a fan of Elvis Presley at that time. I had a very giant poster of him on my wall and other groups as well. I can’t remember them anymore. Sometimes my father would get angry. He would just stare at the wall and look, but he would not say anything. I could sense he was getting angry but I guess he understood what we were going through.

Wissal and Nesrin seem both to have nurtured something very important: something they were able to discover about themselves here, by means of identifying and defending personal space. A place to be alone, to reflect and to dream.

Van: I feel at home when it’s the freedom of your movements you know. I can get home whatever the time, midnight, after midnight, whatever. I can and also I can do whatever I can.

Many of the people I interviewed talked about the changes they had made to their homes. The most common renovations were generally inside the house for example, painted walls, new furniture, carpets, appliances and soft furnishings.

Nesrin: It’s a cottage house. When we first bought it, my father had to do some renovation. Being a cabinet maker, carpenter, it was easy for him to fix the cupboards in the kitchen. My father was a very handy man. They added more
furniture and of course it was part of them now owning their own house, they were able to do whatever they wanted to do with the house.

Nesrin’s mum and dad, like so many of us, got caught up in the dream of consciously constructing their home. Bachelard talks of the very pains we take to keep this dream alive, to give to it a clarity. “A house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from inside; it is as though it were new inside”.23 Living rooms, where families gather together and talk, seem always to receive special attention in any renovation. These rooms are very important places in a house, for all cultural groups. Wissal describes how her large family live in their house.

Wissal: It’s an old, big house, four bedrooms, massive living room. We’ve got two living rooms, we’ve got one with nice furniture and the other with just sort of couches and you know the kids room. The kitchen’s small but the two living rooms, one of them I think was a bedroom, but we changed it because of our big family. Our relatives was always coming over and the kids so I guess we needed the two living rooms. There’s the formal one with nice furniture, that’s for special occasions, our feast when guests come over, when we’ve got a family meeting. Like relative meetings might want to discuss family problems or family you know a situation has occurred, so they use that living room.

When Hoa remembers her childhood home in Vietnam she speaks with great fondness of sitting and talking around the dining room table. The extended family of grandparents, parents, children, uncles, aunts and cousins all lived in the one house. They slept together, cooked together, played together, but, most importantly, ate together around the dining table. She remembered and described the important discussions: the planning, the laughing and the reflection on their lives. In fact, this interaction around the table was the most acutely missed part of her former life when she came to live here in Australia.
Hao: We have a table, everything there. The family, everything is very important because we need the place. We meet together there. After working day, after school days we come back and just sit there. Eat together. Important for us, in our country is the meal time. Altogether, we have discussion, everything, like what the problem you have to face today, in our society, in the school. The children usually ask some questions and speak everything funny. Everything they have to discuss.

Ghassan Hage speaks of the “building of the feeling of being ‘at home’” and this ‘homely feeling’ comes into being when people are either, in themselves, or in a combination with others able to provide “security, familiarity, community and a sense of possibility.”24 Many of the people I spoke with in Auburn told me how important it was for them to feel comfortable with their memories because it was through the energy there, in their memories, that they found a sense of a future. Memories triggered experiences of home, of places that they loved. To translate this love into a home in a new place is, among other things, to recognise and exploit new possibilities and opportunities.

The Back Yard

The memory seeds of childhood landscapes, those environments encountered, smelled, dug in, climbed and explored when one’s senses seemed most tantalisingly alive; where the smell of a certain flower, the call of a favourite bird, the sight of a familiar staircase, of a porch or attic window, can trigger a floodgate of memories, taking one deep into this familiar and safe landscape. Proust remarked on the paradox of the experience that beauty, in reality, is “often disappointing, since the imagination can only engage that

---

23 Gaston Bachelard, p. 68.
which is absent. Sometimes the most poignant qualities of a place come not from what is actually there, but from what is connected to it, through time and space, by our recollections and hopes. The vision, and even more powerfully the scent of a blossom may remind us of a moment in our past and let us store up future memories that hold meaning for us.”

In the mind’s eye this landscape of memory can be explored, allowing us to almost feel the texture of that tree trunk, almost smell the musty odour of grandmother’s basement. Such poignant memories affect us in countless subtle ways. Landscape and the memory of it, as Simon Schama suggests, can hold an entire cultural tradition which people then use to shape and self-consciously design a place in which they may recognise a connection to the “spirit of that place”.

Garden-making has often been associated with coming to terms with a place, settling down and shaping the place in such a way that memory and practicality coexist and enhance the connection with the new landscape. Although the early immigrant settlers brought concepts of British garden making, witnessed in the elegance of the English romantic garden displayed by Mrs. Macquarie or the English cottage garden created and sustained with such dedication around Sydney Cove, they also brought ideas for a new place and this was certainly evident in the plants brought along for the gardens. “They brought with them willow slip from St. Helena near Napoleon’s tomb and coffee, cocoa, cotton, bananas, oranges, lemons and stone pines from Rio de Janeiro and fig, bamboo, sugar cane, apples, quinces, pears, and oaks from Capetown and later grape vines from France. This exotic combination was sometimes planted among remnant Eucalypts creating gardens that were truly different.”

For this some strident environmentalists chasten us. They lament the annexation of endemic Australian nature by the multicultural nature of immigrant landscape fantasies. The landscape of my city, Sydney, from Centennial Park in the East to the Blue Mountains national park in the far west, is now deeply imprinted and beautifully variegated with plants and garden designs that give this place a certain meaning and aesthetic. "This is how we see the world" said Rene Magritte in 1938, explaining his painting La Condition Humaine. This is a painting of a landscape superimposed over the landscape it depicts, which in turn is another painting, seen through a window frame, so the two paintings are indistinguishable and continuous. Magritte makes the point that we need a design to discern the form of our world, to take pleasure in its form, and it is the culture, its conventions and cognitions, that make that design possible.28

None of this means I wish to make a facile consolidation of the ecological dilemmas that face us in this country and dismiss the urgency with which they must be attended to, because the massive arrival of exotic plants and animals during the last two centuries has radically changed the biological ecology of this place. But I want to argue that this more recent designing of the landscape (assuming, as Flannery does, that Aboriginal societies designed the landscape, particularly through the use of fire regimes)29 has been part of the great success of shared cultures here in Australia. I want to remind Pauline Hanson and myself too that knowing what it means to be Australian has as much to do with the Chinese market gardens in most country towns as it does with cattle stations, pastoral landscapes and neat suburban front lawns. The Australian landscape is a rich mix, a cultural hybrid. The verandahs around our houses are derived from the buildings of India, our market gardens from small plot farming in Asia and Europe, our cattle and sheep stations are like oases, and

28 Rene Magritte, b.1898. A surrealist painter, who lived in Belgium. The idea implied here is quoted in Simon Schama, p. 12.
our suburban gardens emerge from the mythical realm of Pan. Even our contemporary shopping malls are resurrected gardens of Eden.

Gungor has a long drive up the hill to his house. He and his wife have planted out a formal front garden. There is a grove of trees on all sides of the property and a large lawn with symmetrical beds of flowering annuals. The back garden is terraced with slate pavers and lawn down to a swimming pool. In the privacy of the back garden Gungor and his family relax and swim naked in the summer.

Gungor: I don’t involve too much in the garden, my wife, she’s very fond of this one. She’s fixing everything here. She knows all the trees and all the plants, everything she’s doing, I am lazy. I just help clean the pool and sometimes with the plants. In this place, because it is a comfortable house, I feel more comfortable, quiet, you know. You go to our back garden, very quiet. In the summer time we can walk there naked and swim naked all the time, nobody can see.

Audrey's garden by contrast is simple, neat and tidy, consisting mainly of lawn and shrubs. She mentioned the importance of a green space around the house; room to breathe, she called it.

Audrey: We don’t do a great deal in the garden. In the front there’s two big palm trees and out the back there is quite a big back yard. It is fairly flat. At one stage we had a dog, but when that died we haven’t had any more animals. We have an orange tree and mainly lawn, you know, just easy to keep neat and tidy.

Lodi describes her garden and it significance in creating a connection with the new landscape.

Lodi: A lot of Lebanese do like to have a big yard. First is for the children and you can have your parties, you can get together. Secondly the garden’s very
important. We exchange seeds, people’s got different seeds, or different vegetables they love that. I mean, my husband need to plant things. You know the whole year through, even if it's a little patch. Things like, years ago they never use to have here beans, they probably did have but they weren’t common in the shops. You couldn’t go to a shop and say, ‘I want snake beans, I want broad beans’, so that’s why lot of Lebanese use to plant their own vegetables in the backyard. And they like to have fresh vegetables.

For Nesrin’s father the garden was an important part of his life.

Nesrin: My father loved the garden, working in the garden. He planted a few trees of his own and he planted a few vegetables. He would get up very early in the morning and check on his vegies and fruit. He was quite happy. We were all quite happy in that house.

As much as one may now condemn the way the first European settlers ignored the Aborigines and their local knowledge of food and nutrition, there remains a pattern here, which continues still, with each new wave of immigrants needing to establish their own gardens and grow their food. ‘Migrant gardens’ began to change the street scape around my home when lemon trees were planted in the front yard with vegetables mixed in among the roses. Out the back there are fig trees, grapes vines, olives, basil, oregano, broad beans, pear tomatoes, artichokes and prickly pear. Wissal thinks Anglo houses look different to Lebanese houses.

Wissal: They do you know. Why, because you can tell what Lebanese people plant. Especially cause Lebanese people, on the front verandah, they might have like cans with vegetables in them. My brothers and I we used to sit in the car and before going somewhere we'd say oh that’s an Australian house or that's a Lebanese house. It's through the garden, you can always notice by the garden.
The house divides a property into two distinct parts. The back yard is a private and intimate place where the family is allowed to carry out all those very necessary family things, like dining out doors on warm summer nights, or hanging out the washing, exercising, daydreaming and kicking off their shoes. The front yard, by contrast, bridges out to the world. There is always an element of ‘show’ here. A low fence marks the boundary and restricts access, but not visibility; neighbours often talk and meet at these fences. It is where the neighbourhood begins.

Lodi: The neighbours were lovely. They weren’t Lebanese neighbours at all, they were all Australian neighbours. The lady across the road came in and asked if we wanted any help. The other neighbour was nice, and the lady behind, she was an elderly lady, and she sort of poked her head over the fence, ‘Would you like a cup of coffee?’ It was a real friendly atmosphere here in Auburn. We used to even leave the back door open just in case one of my brothers or sisters arrived home.

Neighbourhood Watch

The place where I live, like many similar places, has a kind of fluidity. It has passed through space and time. Once it was grassland and dry sclerophyll forest, later it was ploughed and farmed, now it is paved and built up with suburban houses straight along the easement line. This place is an overlaid map holding the new and ancient traces that structure my living. My sense of the scale of the place expanded as I learnt about the region, as I inhabited the universe beyond the home. My home grew and spread into an immense cosmic house. A place and a house that is as dynamic as this allows one to inhabit the universe. Or to put it differently, “the universe comes to inhabit one’s house.”

My dad was an important guide. He knew the city tracks. Not just the steps and pathways round the Cross or near Central, for example, but he had a

30 Gaston Bachelard, p. 51.
mental picture like a map. He knew the short cuts all the way from the coast to Parramatta. Remembering times with him, driving around the streets makes me think of Sydney as like a multi-layered city and only readily knowable by people with that 'special' knowledge.

Since the 1940's non English speaking migrants have been settling in the area of Auburn because of the government's 'on-arrival accommodation scheme' and also because it is a relatively cheap place to buy a house. However, the availability of cheap housing is not the only reason migrants move to Auburn. The presence of specific shops and the way the suburb feels influences these people's choice of Auburn as their home.

Koksal: To me home is at Auburn. Auburn is sort of a small village, where we were born. The good thing about is that when I go down the street, I probably know every third or fourth person who walks up and down. I decided to stay home the other day and I just couldn't. It's a part of me and I believe, myself, it's a part of the whole Turkish community here. When you say Turkish, automatically you think of Auburn. It's just part of us, we can't say we're Turkish and neglect Auburn. If a person does that he really doesn't know the process he went through. I would say it is part of everyone's ground because, what usually happens when people first come here, before they come up here, most letters to and from Australia are addressed to Auburn. You sort of get use to the name Auburn. Auburn is very important for the housewife to buy those Turkish things. My wife always says to me 'get that product from the Turkish market'.

The senses of smell and hearing are important but often overlooked when we think about feeling at home. Mahmound from the Core Group, spoke about Auburn when he arrived from Iran, It looked like Abadan, I could smell and feel home here. What has emerged in this old Sydney suburb is a type of shared familiarity, an ethnic neighbourhood, an incredibly mixed up ghetto, (if one is to pick up on Hanson's concern) rich in the culture of contemporary Sydney. Lodi's family moved to Auburn in the early 1970's.
Lodi: There was no Lebanese whatsoever first when I moved to Auburn. But eventually of course, the houses were cheap, down Silverwater, all the Lebanese, sort of decided to buy down North Auburn because it was cheaper. I got to know a lot of Lebanese then.

Koksal’s family also moved into the area in the early 1970’s.

Koksal: When we first bought the house in Francis Street we were the only Turkish who had house in Francis Street, at that time. At that time the Turkish community was not feeling comfortable to buy houses. Back in 1972/73 it was very hard for people to make a decision, till about the 80s, to buying property. Although basically, thinking about the whole family, it was to save as much as they could. Work as hard as they could and back to Turkey as soon as possible. That was sort of a common thing for the average Turkish family.

Neville describes the housing estate he and his wife, Audrey, moved to in 1954.

Neville: These houses were very cheap. The blocks of land were about 695 pounds. Then the house had to be built on that of course, it was $6,000 all up, house and all complete. Most of the neighbours were all around the same age. There were 12 houses built in this street all by the same builder. We all moved in together within months of one another and got to know everyone. So actually it was a friendly atmosphere to live in. Actually this property was built on an old cow paddock and the dairy man, who was the milk man, sold the properties and of course once the houses were established he got the milk run for all those places. So he couldn’t lose.

Neville and his wife Audrey belong to the local Historical and Heritage Society and actively support the Auburn Council’s plan to maintain and cherish the local heritage. “Hidden away in the large Lidcombe State Hospital complex
are some delightful buildings dating from 1906. Their general style and the
palm trees in front make them look like a part of colonial Queensland that has
somehow found its way south. Auburn's other main historic complex,
Newington (1832), its chapel (1838) and Irwin House (1910), are not open to the
public as it is part of the Silverwater corrective Services complex.31 In
Lidcombe too there is the extraordinary Rookwood Necropolis, the largest
cemetery in the Southern Hemisphere. Just up from the railway station is the
Auburn Mosque. A great monument for the Islamic faith in Australia. And of
course, just across Parramatta Road, are the Olympic Stadiums.

Audrey: For Heritage Week this year we had an exhibition of photos. Like old
photos of what Auburn used to be, like back when Parramatta Road was a dirt
track. Then they had photos of what it's like now. Like the same parts and we
put those up in the library which was for people to see. And 1988 the
Bicentenary, we made a wall hanging. All the ladies embroidered houses,
pictures of different houses like sewing the different architecture of Auburn.
And the birds and flowers that were originally around here. There was ordinary
workmen's houses and then some of the better qualities, and one house was
owned by a doctor, it was a nice big house. Just all different kinds. The houses of
course now are getting a lot more modern. Originally in Auburn they just had
very small workmen's cottages. But of course a lot of them, most of them have
gone. There's more or less ordinary houses in Auburn. It's just a very ordinary
suburb. Of course like all places it does change over the years.

Knowing the heritage of a place is always important. It is the rich source of
stories that weave through a neighbourhood. The stories of a neighbourhood
help in identifying how to connect and contribute to that neighbourhood. "The
dreaming place is first of all special to the people of that place, who sometimes
make pilgrimages there. It is like a Platonic cave of ideal 'placeness', it

mysteriously connects us into the place, it is in the stories, dances, songs and it is a real place." Individual histories, experiences and memories play a huge part in the way people live in a place right now. To feel at home in a place a person must be able to sense that their experience is of value to the community.

Koksal: I'm not a religious person, but most of the Turkish peoples tried very hard to build the mosque. They're still working hard. So it is a part of this Turkish community that sort of contributes to Auburn. It's not just the mosque of the Turkish community, it belongs to the Auburn community too.

In New South Wales, the current method of assessment of culturally valued places is through Heritage Studies. Helen Armstrong says that these are undertaken by a "small group of heritage professionals who are predominantly middle class and Eurocentric, deriving their assessment of places from field observation and archival research. Culturally valued places in ethnic neighbourhoods, however, are not readily accessible through such techniques. More commonly the meanings attached to places lie in ideas, stories and folklore associated with the immigrant experience," something like Koksal's story about learning English in the local primary school.

Koksal: None of us know nothing about English, you know. We thought every other word which is not Turkish was English. So when we first moved to Villawood, we were learning English and we were communicating with other kids which was Yugoslav kids and Greek kids and Italian kids. Then we picked it up later, we thought we were learning English. But unfortunately we were learning nice Yugoslav words and Greek words and Italian words. None of us know nothing about this. But every time we go to speak these words all the kids laugh. It took us about, quite a long time to learn to speak English. It was so hard, really hard to learn it, you know.

---

Some people in the Auburn community have developed a sense of their suburb according to how they have used the locality and the various facilities there. Over several weeks I would notice what people did and where they went. I noted that activities like exchanging gossip at the post office, hanging out at the station, and going to the library to check out with friends recurred in the same places each day. The meaning that is attached to a particular meeting place within a locality is dependent on who is meeting there. Places like the library, the botanical gardens, the railway station, and certain shops are used in different ways. Down by the railway station, especially after the schools come out, there is a powerful presence of young people jostling and moving freely in and out of their familiar ethnic groupings.

Serkan: Yeah well, after school I meet some friends near the station. At the bus stop there. There's lots other people there, you know. Like people might say 'you leb' or like they might go 'you Turkish, what you doing there'. You know it's not with bad feeling, it's sort of ironically.

People's lifestyle and the landscape were intertwined. Daily rituals were place-specific, and a cultural dependence on certain places seemed to be quite important in the way these people expressed their familiarity with the place.

Mej: Well, I walk around the streets. I go to the shops, you know the mall. Like you sit in the coffee area, outside they have chairs, you can sit and talk. I don't go around the entire Auburn, usually I come around this area, Auburn Road and Queen Street. I come to the library a lot. Like you see a lot of people around this area. Yes I come here mostly.

Apart from the shops, and the main streets of Auburn around the railway station, there are two other place specific sites that have accrued to themselves particular importance: the library and the botanical gardens. The library, where ostensibly people come to borrow books and learn English, has become
a meeting place. John Cumberford, the librarian, talked about the importance of this aspect, the library as a meeting place. He said it was the place where people from diverse cultural backgrounds and age ranges come together, and for this purpose he has set aside areas for quiet reading and areas where people could talk. There are always, he said, older men and women reading newspapers from around the world and talking to each other.

John: We've gone out of our way to try and reflect the needs of the community. We provide material in all the major languages. To just sit in the library is an occupation that a lot of people go on with. They come here to read newspapers for example. We have Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Turkish, Polish, Russian, Italian, Greek, Urdu, and I may have missed one or two, so we have local newspapers in those languages. We have a really good collection of Turkish material. A collection of excellence actually, probably it's the biggest in Australia.

The library is a place where people can find help in making sense of the place they have come to. It seems to be a place that not only makes available information (books, newspapers, information technology) but also allows people to engage in their own construction and understanding of the social order, the historical changes and the psychic functioning of the community.

John: What's really interesting is the children that come here to meet; and I mean meet in all aspects of the word meet. Children from different nationalities. I'll be extreme, a Serb and a Croatian boy and girl may come here, whereas the families would never let them get together. Even though I've been in libraries a long time, I still find it really strange that the library is almost one of the first places people will come to. Even people from countries where there would be no library. I'm talking about Ethiopians and I'm now talking about Somalis. They must have just arrived here. And the other big wave strangely enough is Ukrainians and some of the Russian Republics and obviously Croatians and Serbians. Lots of them come to the library. There are services here and I'm sure they couldn't know
about them, they don't know we have a typewriter to type applications for jobs, they probably don't know we have a newspaper. But they seem to know this as some sort of a centre of relevance to them.

There are not many metropolitan areas that can boast a botanical garden as a special feature of the place, but Auburn can. Here, on the edge of Duck Creek, is a garden, extraordinary and bizarre in its setting and in its architectural intentions. There are three sections to the garden: a romantic European landscape set around a remembrance pool and formal rose gardens; a Japanese garden and lake; and a forest of natives, some of which would have flourished on the Cumberland plain, others have been introduced. On weekends the gardens are often full of people, particularly Asian bridal parties, posing for photographs against the Spring blossoms or on the beautiful bridges that span the different parts of the lake. There is always a buzz of family energy, with children and parents calling out, laughing, running or just gathering in groups.

John: The Botanical Gardens are a great place. On the weekend there are a lot of people there. Council intend that anyway. They are attracting people to Auburn.

Social Ecology

For some people who have just recently arrived in a new place, there is a certain trauma associated with the neighbourhood. While neighbourhoods embrace our homes they are also away from the home, they are outdoors. Even a simple trip down to the shops, or rushing out to work, can set off fears about being in a new neighbourhood.

Van: People will not be confident to meet with others if they're not secure in themselves. I mean in my case, it's taken me four, five years to find the sense of security, the sense of now I know who I am, what I'm good at, what I'm bad at. In order my strength and weakness in order to take one step further to reach out with
other people. I think a lot of immigrant women and a lot of immigrant people when they busy, so busy, rushing for working, rushing for shopping, not settlement for survival. For their own survival or for their family’s survival. They rarely have that sense of security.

There is very little one can do about one’s neighbourhood other than accept its diversity. The nature of its constituency is always shifting and becoming the rambling place where one lives. This doesn’t mean there are no repositories of local memory, because some people stay in the same neighbourhood and maintain these local memories, maybe through generations. Nor does it mean that people do not actively add to that treasure of memory. By some ‘strange coincidence’, just after the Gulf War many different women took up belly dancing and classes were organised in local church halls. Keeping fit and enjoying the pleasure of their bodies and the company of other women made these classes popular. But they are also impressive because they did not “just rehearse the plea for tolerance and equity in a general sense, but looked at the here and now, at post-Gulf War Australia and the lived reality of some Arab-Australian women. They dramatised the experience of walking down the streets of Sydney in a veil at the height of the Gulf War tension”. 34

When one thinks about one’s home, how it works and what are the relationships that bind an individual into the dynamic of that place, one is thinking ecologically. Particularly in the way Bateson’s thoughts on ecology as an aesthetic and imaginative process of sharing information recognises that new ideas are continually coming into one’s neighbourhood. Collectively most people in Australia live in neighbourhoods, in houses aligned along easement lines in the streets of the town or suburb. In these neighbourhoods too, as well as houses there are institutional structures in place that maintain the needs of the wider community, such as schools, medical facilities, police, libraries,

---

parks, traffic management and so on. Most neighbourhoods also support quite specific community needs: small groups that meet to satisfy particular interests in sport, ethnicity, age, hobbies, community projects, local commerce and business. Generally, too, there are wild places, old remnant stretches of bush, deserted buildings; places that tend to anarchy. The neighbourhood exemplifies a social ecology.

There is a proposition, implicit in social ecological theories, that 'ecological wholeness' emerges as a dynamic of diversity. Balance and harmony are achieved by an ever-changing differentiation and by an ever expanding diversity. "Ecological stability, in effect, is a function not of simplicity and homogeneity but of complexity and variety. The capacity of an ecosystem to retain its integrity depends not on the uniformity, but on its diversity."^35 Bookchin suggests too that social stability works by virtue of the same process. Most social ecological theory is premised on the ideals suggested in Hegel's two fundamental tenets: a self-generated order in life and the human comprehension of that order. In Hegel's ethical theory "there is the idea that society can be organised such that an individual, in realising the self, would at the same time realise a universal life. Such a life would be in harmony with the interests of others and the broader social environment"^36

Notions of ethical progress are obviously controversial. It is of course possible, though not guaranteed, that we may progress ethically. Yet, just as in other human endeavours, it rarely happens in a linear way, although it has the potential to be cumulative over time. Human consciousness, as it has been expressed recently in our cultural milieu, has progressively come to recognise the degree of unity within nature and to accept that a psychological, or maybe soulful, accommodation with this unity is a necessary part of the process. In

other words, people must bring into the process of unity of diversity a
determined aesthetic quality, so that their imaginations can realise the
potential of social harmony.

It is in suburbs like Auburn that one is able to see different communities
sharing the same neighbourhood and identifying with the local place and
making of it a socially and culturally appropriate communality. Auburn is an
ethnic neighbourhood. I, along with many other people, understand and feel
what this means. The disturbing, or rather disarming fact is that Hanson claims
not to understand this. At the launch of One Nation’s policy on immigration
and multiculturalism37, the member for Oxley said of people living in suburbs
like Cabramatta38 or Auburn that they wouldn’t know whether they were
going into a butchers shop or a hairdressers because all the shop signage is in
some foreign language. People can’t make head nor tail of these ethnic suburbs,
she says. Clearly people do know the difference between a butcher’s shop and
a hairdressers. Her claim is simply ludicrous. Yet it is obvious that something
has shifted in the wider community. The day to dayness of an ethnic suburb
isn’t really about facts. It is a matter of the feeling that one gets there. Recently
the focus of discontent about the ethnic character of our society has revolved
around its apparent Asianisation. This is where the issue becomes contentious,
because a place like Auburn does have a very large Asian community.

Neville: I go for a walk every day, around the place, I meet all the neighbours and
that’s quite good. I talk to people. I talk to many people. In fact I had a good friend
there who passed away just last week. He use to have a couple of chairs on his

37 The One Nation Party announced their immigration and multiculturalism policy on
Wednesday July 1, 1998. Amongst their 13 points of principle was the intention to abolish
multiculturalism as a social policy and to radically reduce immigration. In the Sydney Morning
Herald (Thursday July 2, 1998) p. 4.
38 Cabramatta is a Western suburb of Sydney, in the LGA of Fairfield. There has been for some
years now a large migrant population including Yugoslavs, Italians, Maltese, and in recent
times, many Vietnamese migrants have come to live there. It is today thought of as a
Vietnamese neighbourhood.
front porch and I'd come down and sit and talk. He liked neighbours to drop in like that, it was quite a meeting spot for people. There's many different nationalities now. We've got Vietnamese couple living opposite us and they're very nice neighbours. I mean you couldn't wish for better neighbours around the place. There are, I don't know whether they're Arabs or Turks further up the street, but they always say 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' to you. So I say you can only treat people as they treat you. And I find that they're very good.

Anecdotally we know that during the massive immigration programs immediately after the Second World War and through into the 1970's there was always disquiet, as suburbs became ethnically more diverse. Today many people live comfortably with these older ethnic suburbs, rejoicing in their particular charm and character. This can only be accounted for in terms of a cumulative social sophistication in matters to do with diversity. So I want to pick up again on David Malouf's idea of an assimilation into an Australian culture as distinct from say an Anglo culture. Despite the disavowal of assimilation as official policy, a version of assimilation has been the way our society has proceeded. The emergence of a contemporary Australian identity has had as much to do with blending together our 101 ethnicities as it has had to do with becoming a republic. In this there has been incredible success, a credit to the schools and businesses that accepted the value of diversity, while harnessing its potential through the English language. What is at our disposal here in Australia is a successful tradition of choosing assimilation into a society with fairly equitably shared values, expressed in part as cultural diversity. The version of multiculturalism that has grown up in our midst hasn't for a moment terminated the "body of Australian egalitarianism."39 Indeed it has been, in itself, a broad based demographic reality that saw as fundamental the right of every Australian to participate in the political and social system of the

39 An idea attributed to Paul Sheehan Among the Barbarians (Sydney: ) and quoted in Anne Summers, "Leaving women up the gum tree" in the Sydney Morning Herald (Monday July 6, 1998) p. 15.
country. Given that the contemporary Australian population is more than 45 percent linked to recent immigration, this would seem to be quite an egalitarian thing to promote.

Hao: Oh that’s easy, multicultural, I think that is good. I don’t know Australia do these things. I never imagine when I come. Australia is the multicultural country and the second thing is that I don’t know Australia was a colonial country. Even my country, I live in colonial country. By the French, but different way in Australia. Here we can join with the different ones, in a festival. Inside us we have different religions. Religion is important and so we must know that because sometimes you learn a lot from everyone. They have good things, good philosophy about living. So this is good thing for living in the multiculturalism.

Robert Manne has made the point that there is no reason why Europeans - and he argues that Australia remains still, fundamentally, a European country (and it will for a very long time to come) - should continue to be reticent whenever matters of race emerge in the social discussion. He believes that European intellectuals, and some political leaders, are still caught in the dreadful consequences of the Holocaust, and therefore regard contemporary debates about race as too delicate to discuss. Clearly this social management strategy has failed, and all over Europe today there are emerging strong, ethnically specific political and cultural groupings which deny any notion of unity in diversity. This has left the space open, in our society, for anti-politicians like Hanson and talk back radio hosts like Allan Jones to fan up public fears. Manne makes the daring statement that all racial groups are racist. Some, like many of our Asian neighbours, continue to be ruthless in their racism.

Undoubtedly this multicultural society will be nudged back and forth by shifts in the cultural process of adjusting to multiculturalism. Presently the

---

society is caught in a very public airing of a long running cultural debate. At the centre of this are a number of moral questions to do with the relationship between the people who live in this community. How do we embrace the reality of the complex and eclectic process through which an individual’s imagination will merge into a shared cultural form? The process will be reciprocal, with much feedback and plenty of cancellations and disagreements. But through the medium of language and the acceptance of our various soulful presence in this place, a more encouraging sense of a shared future may be possible. Of primary importance in this imaginative process is to resolve the issues of indigenous land rights. At the same time and, continually in process also, will be the way this society welcomes newcomers. In these matters one is neither bound to an ancient code of ethnic purity nor free to adopt an indifference when it comes to participating in the making of this society. The point is we are consciously in the historical process of making this society. What it means to be an Australian isn’t clear cut. The imaginative process has to be continually reinvented. Strongly committed bi-partisan government policy interventions must be maintained, along with honest intellectual discourse and a public conversation that opens out to the lived experience of ordinary Australians. In this way at least, Hanson’s concern that ordinary Australians have been kept out of the debate about multiculturalism and immigration can be honestly acknowledged and put to rest by attesting to the fact that, whatever else, we Australians can only ever live in a multicultural society.

Neville: I mean I have quite a few friends now that are Vietnamese and there’re quite good friends. In fact I go to their place and I get a welcome every time I go there. By the same token they can come here to my place, anytime.

It is probably fair to say, however, that many Australians are now lukewarm, at best, in their support for further immigration and the maintenance of multiculturalism. One cannot walk away either, from the critique that the multicultural debate was, to a large
extent, dominated by an intellectual elite and ethnic lobby groups. Even within various neighbourhoods like Auburn, there have always been mixed feelings and attitudes to this. I have shared many of comments that express concern about this multicultural society. Some of these come from people who themselves are recent migrants. Multiculturalism has been a grass roots success story, and one can only pin it down through the expression of experience. When Neville speaks of going for a walk every day around his neighbourhood and notices that *the Vietnamese couple living opposite are very nice neighbours* and the Arabs or Turks up the street, *always say good morning*, he can only say that he treats people as they treat him, and he finds *they're very good*. A multicultural community with many shared experiences: isn't that what holds us together? Even though we will respond differently to certain shared experiences, some things can be pointed to as becoming our community story. We share in the events we call history and in the institutions that determine our relations with one another and through which we are trying to make a good and just society. And of course we share in the way we have made neighbourhoods.

A couple of years ago our Italian neighbours decided to rebuild part of our common fence. The old man, his friends and son-in-law would come around on weekends and together we would build and socialise. At the time Kerry was home with our son Patrick, who was a toddler. The neighbours have lived in Australia for about fifty years and next door for about thirty. We would say hello or talk about the weather or the garden, but conversations beyond that were difficult because their English isn't very good and my Italian is nonexistent. As soon as that fence came down, everything changed. Patrick no longer had a barrier stopping him and we would often find him playing with pots and pans on my neighbour Tina's, kitchen floor. Tina loved having him and would speak with a childlike voice in both Italian and English. She would feed Patrick and talked to Kerry about cooking. Somehow the language barrier didn't seem so great. Maybe it's fences and not language that's the problem?
With Community in Mind

I don’t mean to ignore the huge upheaval perpetrated on the indigenous communities that had lived here for so long. Nor do I wish to belittle the terrible conditions in which convicts found themselves as they were cast on the fatal shore to live under a fairly brutal dictatorship. But, from its bleak hard beginnings as a penal colony Australia progressively became, during the nineteenth century, a haven of the radical and democratic spirit which pioneered an advanced program of social reform - national suffrage for women in 1901, for example - and which fostered the world’s first Labor governments. Then, during the twentieth century, a rich but egalitarian society emerged whose growing conservatism might merely reflect its profound stability. The order of things in the emerging Australian community has never seriously been interrupted or challenged by revolution or dictatorship or anarchy. There have been no civil wars here, and no revolutions; events have rarely taken the form of the general upheaval or the sudden break.

It can be easy to ascribe the present relative tranquility to a lack of political interest or intensity rather than to know it as rights hard won and worked out over many centuries. There is a good sense to this system and an openness to pragmatic change which belongs not only to a particular history but, as David Malouf says, "like that history itself, to a particular habit of mind."\(^1\) Malouf suggests that this ‘habit of mind’ comes into our history in that quite peculiar way where, under the Westminster system, power is held and shared. In this the institution of a shadow government, the loyal opposition recognises the defeated party as a government in waiting, “and again the peculiar acceptance

---

\(^1\) David Malouf, “Identity as Lived Experience. Uniquely Australian” presented to The Larry Adler Lecturer Regent Hotel, Sydney (August 24, 1994) p. 6.
that the two parties will oppose one another and alternate."² The power which
the people's representatives exercise is contained within constitutional limits
and the interpretation of the constitution is in the hands of an independent
court. Noel Pearson says of this "peculiarly English genius for institutions of
government"³, that if there is one thing about the "colonial heritage of Australia
that indigenous Australians might celebrate along with John Howard with the
greatest enthusiasm and pride, it must surely be that upon the shoulders of the
English settler or invader - call them what you will - came the common law of
England and with it the civilising institution of native title."⁴

Speak English or Don't Come

The idea is that each one of us will be socialised into an Australian identity
by being a member of the Australian language community. A 'colonising of the
mind' by the Englishness of all texts, even SBS! Even though 'official'
multiculturalism recognises the "ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of
Australian society and actively pursues equality of opportunity for all
Australians to participate in the life of the nation and the right to maintain
ethnic and cultural heritages within the law and the political framework,"⁵ it is
obviously practical to accept this assimilation into English, largely because
participation with social institutions is necessary and unavoidable for most
people. Even so, in terms of an ecological epistemology it is possible to
understand that society can accomplish only a "partial closure, a partial fixing
of meanings and identities, a partial imposition of order in the face of chaos."⁶
In this sense the multicultural community might be best understood as 'unified
in diversity'. I am not suggesting that the community will be homogenised and

² David Malouf, p. 7.
⁴ Noel Pearson, "Open our hearts and minds" in The Australian (November 22, 1996).
⁵ The definition of multiculturalism supplied by the now defunct Australian Institute of
free of internal boundaries any more than communications are, in reality, transparent between individuals. But these limits are always relative. Even in circumstances where a person may stay within ethnically prescribed social and cultural conditions, remaining very distant and never in direct communication with the wider Australian society, they would be bound to it by a chain of intermediate discourses, which supposes an overarching common code of law, commerce and every day circumstances.

Koksal: I often see someone buying a packet of smokes. I remember my dad, he never used to throw his empty packet out because his empty packet was to give to the tobacco person and get a full one back. He had problems saying 'can I have a packet of Benson and Hedges'.

Malouf wonders what sort of mind is reflected in this system. One, he suggests, that in being able to make a particular claim or statement is simultaneously aware of the opposing point of view. This awareness is such that it extends into the idea that truth is not fully served unless opposing views are somehow stated. The education system trains and encourages us in this form of thinking and our institutions embody it. "It is, I'd guess" - and here he says "I am making a large claim of my own" - "inherent in the very language we speak, so that in using the language we are already being educated into an acceptance of what our institutions apply." He goes on to suggest that the way a culture develops under the influence of a particular tongue is through appropriation and assimilation, by letting usage, daily practice, the redefinition and extension of old forms, determine what can be done. It is because English is peculiar among languages in that, being able to mix in many elements of communication, it can always be 'making the language anew'. Malouf calls it a "multicultural affair, a glorious bastard of a language" that in mixing two root-languages of different ethnic origin has multiplied its vocabulary, refined its

7 David Malouf p. 7.
capacity for making fine distinctions and abandoned the formal structures of the inflectional and gender systems. "Parts of speech in English" he points out "live a life wonderfully free of determination by anything but context and the playful extension of precedent." The result is almost continuous change.

Mahmoud: Not all my friends speak Arabic because they come from different background. But with my family I do. Like with my cousins I speak both Arabic and English. And like when we go out to night clubs or disco party then I speak a sort of combination. My parents they don't go to clubs or anything like that, mainly because religion plays a big part in our lives. Most of those things are forbidden. They let me go.

Change, of course, is the fate of any language that is in daily use, but change in English, by the appropriation of words from other languages and the witty coining of new ones, is almost dizzyingly rapid; what is more, it is embraced rather than resisted. "We have no body", Malouf reminds us, "like the French, to guard the language against impurity. Impurity, a talent for appropriation and promiscuity, is what keeps English growing and fearlessly enriching itself."

Sema: With my mother I speak Turkish. With my father half Turkish and half English and the rest of the family English. With my dad cause he understands both he knows how to speak like, it depends on what I'm talking about. If I feel comfortable speaking that way, in English. I speak like that and he understands. But with my mum I prefer to speak Turkish.

Sema confirms David Malouf's assertion that English is a language wonderfully free to continuously change, but there are people who would find

---

8 David Malouf p. 7.
9 David Malouf p. 7.
his enthusiasm for the English language’s talent at appropriation a symptom of
colonial power play. The African American cultural critic Thomas F. Slaughter
expresses his frustration at what he sees as the vicious process of ‘internalising
inferiority’ by ‘the language’, English, as it fearlessly goes on enriching itself at
the expense of the many whose language and identity is ‘not valued’. “In my
rage, I scour my environment for resources... Key among my findings is ‘the
language,’ the very tool so instrumental in the previous process of my
devaluation. Thus in order to appropriate it for my own needs, I ‘brutalize’ the
language. I jar the syntax and shuffle its semantics. Through my violence to the
language, I mediate the being I was to the world through my body. ‘Black is
Beautiful.’” 10 Bhabha says of language that its ideological task is “the implicit
generalisation of knowledge and the implicit homogenization of experience” 11
within the society.

Certainly all Australian governments intend to maintain a social cohesion,
the idea of the many as one, based on the ideology of English as the dominant
and universal language. “New migrants: speak English or don’t come.” Michael
Millett reports: “English language proficiency will become the overriding factor
in determining whether thousands of family reunion applicants are able to
settle here, under new immigration measures imposed by the Federal
Government. This means, for example, that most young and skilled applicants
with no English, but fluency in two or more languages will no longer be
successful, Mr. Ruddock said.” 12

10 Thomas F. Slaughter, “Epidermalising the World: A basic mode of being black” in Sue L.
Cataldi, Emotion Depth and Flesh: A study of sensitive space (New York: State University of New
11 Homi Bhabha, “Dissemination: time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation” in
12 Michael Millett, “New migrants: speak English or don’t come” in the Sydney Morning Herald
(Saturday December 14, 1996). Mr. Ruddock, (Philip Ruddock), Federal Minister for
Immigration in the Howard Liberal Government.
What is the environment of a language? Is it the body, is it the speech community, is it something else? What happens when linguistic and cultural diversity are eroded from our multicultural society? “In general the relation between individual speakers, the larger speech community and other less tangible aspects of the environment necessary to the survival of a language could be thought of as an ecosystem, a complex system of different factors that must interact and be in balance in order to provide an adequate environment. While people capable of speaking a language are a necessary part of the system, they are not enough.”\textsuperscript{13} For a language community to stay viable it cannot rely upon speakers of the language alone. The enigma of a language community is that it is at once internal and external to the speaking subject. There has to be a language ecology in which the speaking subject finds appropriate relationships. In Auburn the customs and language of particular ethnic communities still survive because people use them. There are language-specific newspapers and cultural events, video shops, shop signage, and of course the library houses large collections of foreign language books, journals and newspapers.

Mahomad: \textit{I play soccer on weekends.}

Brendon: \textit{Do your friends play soccer with you?}

Mahomad: \textit{Yes, I play in an all Arabic Team.}

Brendon: \textit{What is the competition, is it an Arabic competition?}

Mahomad: \textit{No, no it’s a super league competition, just our team happens to be all Lebanese.}

\textsuperscript{13} Mari Rhydwen, “Why did we give up our Language?” conference paper Albuquerque (University of New Mexico, 1995) p. 10.
Brendon: Do you enjoy that, having an all Lebanese team?

Mahomad: It's alright, it's good communication against other teams, using our language, and it's really easy.

Strong, local ethnic community languages have been able to provide for people the significance of a personal sense of identity. This can motivate people's decisions about making an effort to maintain language and helps them construct a community on foreign soil.

Koksal: Yes the Turkish language is very important. After all, everything that I learn is from the language, or the background I have. So it's very important. I'm still teaching my daughter the basic Turkish bits and pieces. She start going to Turkish school on weekend now, Friday nights, yeah. Yes, you can say the culture, the religious part and the language makes the Turkish. It's got to be combined together, it's part of a family. It's part of society, or part of backgrounds, that's what it is really. It is sort of combined in little bits and pieces and builds everything up.

I realise that there are many issues to consider when thinking about specific language and cultural maintenance: the attitude of parents, job opportunities and street life. Among the people I have spoken to in Auburn there are a number for whom speaking their language is inextricably linked into their identity, but there are others for whom it is not. It always is an effort to transmit a language just because it might be useful at some time. People mostly do it because it is important to define who they are, what they stand for, what they believe in. These are ideological reasons and they can create problems because of the intrinsic difficulty of leading an ideologically determined way of life. Some people set out to deliberately lose their language and culture because they just get 'fed up' with being made to 'speak'. If maintaining an ethnic identity, for example, is not particularly important to someone, she is unlikely to choose to speak the language. A personal identity is never fixed, and the fluidity is ever increasingly a matter of choice.
Mej: When I speak with my Cantonese friends, like, I speak English to them. We speak some Cantonese, like to associate with Chinese, but I can’t speak Cantonese fully. I prefer English. I just speak Cantonese to buy things in Chinese shops.

“I was determined to learn English, initially, as a way of hurting my parents.” says Richard Rodriguez, but paradoxically too he remembers how his parents conspired with his teachers to insist on improving his English. This of course hints at the ambivalence which characterises so many migrant stories. On the one hand there is the rapid change to modernity with the parents urging their children to succeed, urging them to be better, braver, richer, to throw off the shackles of tradition and succeed in the bigger world, and on the other, the resentment that accompanies it.

Gungor: I cannot forget the past, but I am now Australian. I have the passport of Australian, but all the time I am counting myself as Turkish. Right. But my children is now calling themselves Turkish. That is strange. They’re Australian.

Despite the difficulties involved, the maintenance of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is of value to individuals, ethnic communities and to the wider Australian language community. In the latter case especially, linguistic diversity is culturally enriching for everyone. Even though the distinctive nature of language, custom and culture within the various ethnic communities is progressively lost in the second generation and even more fully in the third, there continues within the experience of contemporary Australian culture a creation of identity distinction. One can observe, for example, that localised accents are emerging, especially in large metropolitan areas like Sydney. These accents seem to be directly identifiable with the NESB educated generation.¹⁵

---


¹⁵ NESB (Non English Speaking Background). This anagram has been used by intensive English language centres. My observation, in the thesis, points to further research. In short there does seem to be quite distinctive accents developing in parts of Sydney that are peculiar to the prevailing community language group, for example Arabic, Cantonese etc. The accents seem to be picked up by most of the students learning English at the intensive language centres in these areas. These accents are noticeably different to the so-called ‘broad Australian’ accent.
For some people it is very important to move in and out of this continually created culture allowing themselves to occupy several identities within the same person. The recent ‘problems’ of identity experienced with Mudrooroo, Demidenko and Elizabeth Durack are testimony to this.16 There is a certain ethnic production here, the fabrication of a ‘cosmopolitan style’ that plays off popular and high cultural trends. In the contemporary art-culture industry, Aboriginality and ethnicity are important qualities helping to develop a confidence in our cosmopolitan national selves. Talking about her play Cold Harvest, Noelle Janaczewska says, “I wanted to try generating a work in two languages rather than writing in English and relying on translation. Most of my Polish vocabulary centres on food and family relationships. I considered updating my Polish, but decided instead to let my very unequal knowledge of the two languages shape the text. I made a trip also, to one of the last Cold War frontiers between North and South Korea this added another geography, another war, another language.17” The play looks at food, tradition, family secrets, mythologies of the homeland, shopping and consumerism, the weather, the Cold War and the things people choose to remember and forget. The point being that a person’s identity within a multicultural community tends to be rather chaotic and may best be represented as an infinite play of differences which makes “all identities and all meanings precarious and unstable.”18

But such an identity cannot escape its artifice. The society remains largely determined by a shared identity which is insistently upon a particular production of meaning, through the English language. Even though all cultural institutions

---

16 Mudrooroo is the pen name of Colin Johnson whose father was an American Negro and mother a white Australian woman. He posed as an Aboriginal author for many years, and has written a number of highly acclaimed books purporting to represent his experience as an Aboriginal. Demidenko was the pen name of an Australian born author, Helen D’arville, who made a claim to Latvian heritage. Using this guise she wrote an award winning novel that took advantage of her assumed ethnic background. Elizabeth Durack is a West Australian artist who created the persona of an Aboriginal man, ‘Eddie Burrup’ and signed many of her paintings with this name. Durack had written a biography for Eddie and entered works by Eddie in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award.


18 Ian Ang, p. 172.
recognise, accommodate and provide their services through a diversity of languages and values, ultimately there is an insistence on a unity of understanding through an assimilation into the English language. Historically, the English language has been thought of as the glue which will hold this sense of national identity together.

Van: *In politics, for ethnic people, I think it is information. Give the people information. It is hard. In Auburn, when we have a lot of ethnic people in this area, it is still fragmented. I try to find the reason. I mean for refugee community, like ours, we can come from different backgrounds, different ideologies. And the system doesn’t allow for change very much, you know the structure. Because we do not have the language to know what exactly it means to be a member of local government, for example. So I mean in terms of power I see here is the collective power. Unless the whole community stay together it actually relates to a failure. But the whole community need to understand the information in English. If an individual person enters the politics, the local government politics, then she joins to something else. Something he or she cannot control. She also alienates herself with her people.*

This is why our schools are so important. As popular institutions they are not simply limited to specialised training or to the inculcation of an elite culture, but serve to underpin the whole process of the socialisation of individuals. What is decisive here is not only that the "national language should be recognized as the official language, but, much more fundamentally, that it should be able to appear as the very element of the life of a people, the reality which each person may appropriate in his or her own way, without thereby destroying its identity."19 There is an Australian identity constructed from the English language community even though there is necessarily a contradiction between the institution of a national language and the daily ‘clash’ of our various tongues in search of acknowledgement.

---

The language community is a community “in the present, which produces the feeling that it has always existed, but which lays down no destiny ... Ideally, it ‘assimilates’ everyone, but holds no one, and it affects all individuals in their inner most being.”

Nesrin: I was thirteen when I came here from Turkey and start from year eight at Auburn Girls High School. I can’t remember really how many girls exactly there, in my class. We had two different special English classes, and that’s in 1974, yes. There weren’t many Chinese then, mainly Lebanese, Turkish, Italians, Spanish, South American students. We were all put in the same class with special teachers. For about one year or so. We were mainly concentrated on learning to speak English, writing. We communicated what ever we learnt. We spoke with each other but mainly sign language at first.

I had a best friend, she was from Cyprus. She only knew a few words of Turkish but we could communicate, I had many South American, Spanish friends and also I had Turkish friends as well. At the same time I had Australian friends too. After a few months I was able to communicate with them.

The modern Australian English language community would encourage Nesrin to pass through the education system and so find herself assimilated, but not held to a particular language destiny. In her life she has gone back and forth to Turkey a number of times living in what Homi Bhabha calls “the structure of ambivalence that constitutes modern society.” In fact this assimilation into different language communities is complementary because language has become one of the most important ways of mobilising the struggle for ethno-cultural recognition inside a pluralist society. The definition of one’s own group and its status as distinct from outsiders is negotiated through language.

---

20 Etienne Balibar, p. 166.
21 Homi Bhabha, p. 298.
Nesrin: I was feeling very comfortable there, all very happy, I did not regret coming back, moving back to Turkey. We had started a new life, new friends. Of course our relatives were always there and everything was going all well, until my sister failed to enter uni in Ankara. That's why my mother had to come back here. I said to my husband, why don't we go back there too. Try a new life again. Learn the language and you'll get to see Australia. He was always talking about it; how is it there, how is it like and things like that. So we had another chance. I had memories too.

Language and culture, these can only truly live in a conscious human body. Sometimes language and culture die because their whole ecosystem dies, but sometimes, using the analogy of the species, the ecosystem changes just enough that certain species cannot survive. Ecologists make a useful distinction between broad-niched and narrow-niched species. The former, being more adaptable, can tolerate far more variety while the latter are more vulnerable to ecological change. "Clearly languages and cultures vary in their vulnerability to social and environmental change." Homi Bhabha speaks about living the locality of culture. "This locality is more around temporality than about historicity: a form of living that is more complex than 'community', more symbolic than 'society'; more connotative than 'country'; less patriotic than patrie; more rhetorical than the 'reason of state'; more mythological than ideology; less homogenous than hegemony; less centred than 'the citizen'; more collective than 'the subject'; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identification."  

Thanh: Yeah, well I've learnt to live with different people. But the only culture that we know about is the Australian culture. The Queen's Birthday and so on. Christmas and all that. We'll celebrate the New Year day on January 1 as well as celebrating Chinese New Year.

---

23 Mari Rhydwen, p. 8.
24 Homi Bhabha, p. 292.
Bhabha’s emphasis on these “potent symbolic sources” of cultural identity serves, he suggests “to displace the linear historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation.”

Tranh’s lived experience displaces this linear process of history not only for himself but also for those into whose midst he has come. Chinese New Year, for example, has become a widely accepted cultural symbol throughout Australia. It has become integrated into the celebration of summer which includes Christmas, New Year, Chinese New Year and in Sydney, the Mardi Gras. Bhabha says of his own experience that he has “lived that moment of the scattering of the people into other times and other places, into the nations of others.”

The ‘moment of scattering’ is not linear in direction; people may scatter into ‘other times and other places’ where upon there is further scattering, and mixing, and adjusting and ecosystems are shifted. It is important to note that ecosystems adjust in the present moment. Adaption and sustainability have to do with the moment as lived. Tranh learns to live with different people because it is immediately crucial, it is a necessary adaption to a form of living that is made complex through migration.

Thanh: Mostly I like Australian food best, chips, hamburgers, pizzas yeah, that sort of thing. I don’t think of myself as Australian, not really. I think myself mostly Vietnamese. But there is a side of me that is Australian.

More people are living than ever before and soon, for the first time in human history, more people will be living in cities than in the countryside. The human world will have become urbanised. This is the story of the century and it is certainly the story of contemporary Australia. It will always be problematic trying to incorporate newness into the temporal moment, but what remains as an imperative for the multicultural experiment that is on-going in a city like Sydney, is that the ‘mainstream’ culture must sense that it is the ‘multi’ culture. The ecology of language and culture in a city environment therefore must be.

---

25 Homi Bhabha, p. 292.
26 Homi Bhabha, p. 291.
allowed to re-work the present as a site of great variety. The social intensity that accompanies this variety will, no doubt, create social disturbance. At the same time this intensity can generate an internal cohesion and force which will provide direction for the society. The consequence of this direction is fundamentally important. For this society to acquire the logic of a multicultural society, difference has to be understood as a complexity, an ontology of difference which sanctions a plurality of interpretations.

Nesrin: I actually like meeting other people from other countries. You get to know the way they dress up and the way they eat. You go past their shops and you know, you see them, their families. I think it’s very nice way of experiencing, finding out how they live and what they do and how they look. Now I think I can determine by looking at the person whose walking in the street. I can probably distinguish that they’re from Spain or they’re Lebanese or they’re Turkish. Without them speaking their language, I could determine that they’re from this particular country.

As Nesrin walks about in the streets of Auburn meeting up with other people from other countries, she can’t help but notice how different each person is. What seems also to be emerging for her is the experience of relationship; I think it is very nice way of experiencing, finding out how they live and what they do and how they look. There is a pragmatism to relationships. It is only in terms of relationship that it is possible for newness to become integrated, to be identified and articulated into the potential of the already existing traditions of the society. While the idea of tradition does evoke a past it also involves the future. Tradition has to be considered as a determining factor as it constitutes an ‘already given’, the English language of Australian society for example. So the future for people like Nesrin and Tranh is already here in the present as they establish relationships with this language and the wider community. In turn there can be no claim to a purity of tradition from the wider community because the newness that is emerging is no longer commensurate with a
particular version of tradition. I would suggest that a multicultural society should refuse to generalise itself in terms of singular traditions. Individuals and communities should seek to establish relationships that work against the dominance of an already given tradition.

The challenge, as I see it, is to partially accept the pragmatism of a central tradition which can then be partially displaced by being opened to the problematic of the moment: what is to be incorporated, what will be retained, what might be left out. The intention here is not to turn on, or reject tradition by denying its presence - such a process would be a futile gesture, only possible through some systematic forgetting. As one can see in contemporary multicultural Australia, any insistence on forgetting has rebounded, bringing with it a reactivation of memory. Active memories are essential in the definition and redefinition of how this society goes about holding a plurality of identities.

- Diasporas, Trade, Portable Politics and Religions in a Globalised Society

The term ‘diaspora’ has long been associated with the dispersal of the Jews from Palestine, following their defeat by the Romans in AD 70. More recently, the concept has been generalized to refer to any population which migrated from its country of origin and settled in a foreign land but still maintains its continuity as a community. Milton Esman’s\(^{27}\) working definition of diaspora is “a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin.”\(^{28}\) This definition excludes migrants who take over or form a state and become its dominant element, as for example the British here in Australia. It also explicitly excludes ethnic groups whose minority status results not from migration but from conquest, annexation or arbitrary boundary arrangement, as happened to the Aborigines here.

\(^{27}\) Milton Esman is Emeritus Professor of International Studies at Cornell University whose publications include *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World* (1977) *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East* (1979) and *Ethnic Politics* (1994).

William Safran describes diasporas as "expatriate minority communities that are dispersed from an original ‘center’ to at least two ‘peripheral’ places, and that maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland. They also believe they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host country and they see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return. They are committed to financially and intellectually supporting their homeland and their sense of personal and community identity is importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland."29 Neither of these definitions seems to truly identify the contemporary nature of the sprawling cosmopolitan communities which are now associated with the various modern and global diasporas. Such communities today seem to be linked through cultural forms and structures, kinship relations, business circuits, travel trajectories and some sort of loyalty to religious/cultural centres spread around the world.

Van: Yes I am going to marry in Sydney and we will buy a house and things like that. But I love to travel. I'd love to live in other country too, with my brother in Netherlands and cousins in United States. In 1989 I live and work in Hong Kong as a legal interpreter. I find this interesting. I want to learn new cultures. Live there and stay with the people, not just travelling.

Taking Van for example: she is part of the Vietnamese diaspora, but her life is not especially centred on Vietnam. Her sense of community is emerging with its own history and its own stories. It involves the wider Sydney community, her travels and journeys, and her memories and ambitions. And while travel may be important for Van, for many other people migration is a matter of settling down into a new place, without any need to travel of 'go back'. In this new place these people make a home, establishing and maintaining a community.

29 William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and return" in James Clifford, Diasporas (Santa Cruz: University of California, Center for Cultural Studies, 1991) p. 82.
Thanh: When I was a child I can remember every Saturday going off to other people's places. Because every week there was a sort of mass, at people's houses, friends, families, other Vietnamese families. You know, it is very important that we start a new life over here. We still send some money back to grandparents over there. If we have any spare money left, we try to send some money back.

At school I have a lot of friends, some of them are Asian, some of them European and some are African. I have different friends out of school, mostly Vietnamese. I guess they understand, they are from the same background as I am. I have known them since I was five.

On day I will go back to visit my family and relatives there in Vietnam.

The experience of separation and settling again, of living here and remembering or desiring there, seems to be a normal part of the immigration process. "Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together both roots and routes to construct alternate public spheres and forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identification outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. Diaspora cultures are not separatists although they may show only selective accommodation with the political, cultural, commercial and everyday life of the host society."30

Nesrin: Myself, I think I am more a Turk than being an Australian. I could say I value my customs, my background. As well, I do care about Australia as much as I care about Turkey. It's become two nationalities for me. I can stick up for Turkey whenever I need to, and I can also stick up for Australia whenever I need to. I can speak about both countries and defend both countries in every way I need to.

---

30 James Clifford, Diasporas (Santa Cruz: University of California, Center for Cultural Studies, 1991) p. 9.
Nesrin seems to be saying that there are soft boundaries to her sense of nation. She can establish for herself an identity that is both Australian and Turkish. The threat of cultural difference, Homi Bhabha says, is no longer a problem of ‘other’ people; “it has become a question of the otherness of the people-as-one.”\(^{31}\) Nesrin’s experience points to the capacity of memory and cultural allegiance to tie a person strongly to another place. She accepts for herself a marginal integration. In the multicultural experiment this is a factor that has to be allowed for. Many migrants have maintained their ethnic identity and solidarity over long periods through a combination of preference and communal consciousness. Even when this cohesion is strained by intergenerational differences, political differences and so-called western decadence, there remains real active involvement in their home country.

Cung: Well you know, the Vietnamese people, as well as the Asian, we live with our inside, our inner side. We don’t live with our outside, you see. So of course we have in our heart our homeland, the image of a homeland, yes. But so you see, we have here a Vietnamese community. We have Vietnamese music, newspapers and those who contribute, you know in the community. All kinds of problems we write about in the newspapers, in magazines. Of course we write about our country. There is a problem for us, the old people coming here, that is we don’t want our children to forget their own language, their mother language. We don’t want them to forget totally the Vietnamese traditions. Of course we are fortunate, we are living in a multicultural society where all ethnic communities are regarded and respected. So we can adjust to the new way of life. At the same time we can maintain our tradition.

When Edward Said suggests that the question of the nation should be put on the contemporary critical agenda as a hermeneutic of ‘worldliness’, he is offering a recognition that the ‘modern nation’ consists as a “continual

\(^{31}\) Homi Bhabha, p. 301.
displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space"32 and can only be explained as having a limited character. The boundary that marks the nation's selfhood becomes a liminal form of social representation, that may not correspond to the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples. For example, contemporary Vietnamese traditions are now world wide. Such a transformational process involves Cung in a global attachment that makes any national attachment less certain.

So Cung finds himself connected in 'his heart' to a distant homeland, but the transformational process also allows for him to have a Vietnamese community here. This new place of entanglement is demanding; this is a problem for us, we don't want to forget totally the Vietnamese tradition while we adjust to the new way of life. In reaching out from the 'image of a homeland' to become a part of the transformational process of living in a multicultural society, Cung connects the wider Australian community in together with the Vietnamese diaspora. Cung, Nesrin and Tranh provide an alternate example for a way to be Australian; that is to stay and be different, to be Australian and something else. Asian migrants have been participating within, and in relation to the mainstream culture, for a long time, and they have been bringing to it something which was otherwise missing: the Asian migrant's experience of the metropolis and its modernity. They make no extraordinary claims, except that what is actually happening is a part of this society's postwar transformational processes and therefore belongs to Sydney's (Australia's) history.

Of course, the nation takes advantage of the global networks that individuals and ethnic communities maintain. Australian foreign and trade policy mobilizes these different cultural, economic and political possibilities, and one can see this in the way personal, social networks have helped Australia develop and maintain important economic relationships in the Middle East. “The

32 Edward Said in Homi Bhabha, p. 299-300.
Australian connection to the Middle East is spasmodic, frenzied, very personal, punctuated by periods of confusion, but effective, for all of that."\textsuperscript{33} The relationship with the Middle East has inevitably been an inter-action with ethnic politics, driven largely by the Australian Lebanese and Jewish communities. "The size of the Lebanese community in Australia is, for a variety of reasons, difficult to ascertain. Counting first and second generation Lebanese it is probably in excess of 300,000. The Arabic language is the second most common language spoken in Australian homes. At the same time there is a Jewish community in Australia of about 100,000."\textsuperscript{34} Canberra, it has been suggested here, "has been broadly successful in navigating its way through the complexities of Middle East politics, such that trade does not suffer"\textsuperscript{35} because of our ‘national’ network of ‘very personal’ family connections into the region.

In the contemporary world more and more people are able to maintain spatially extended relationships thanks to complex telecommunication networks. Indeed there is some argument that the globalised world is responsible for a wider ‘ethnic revival’, bringing to life, in the various diaspora communities, a "vicarious nationalism."\textsuperscript{36} Places that once separated people geographically and psychologically now become effectively a community through the continuous circulation of money, people, ideas, entertainment, language shifts and information. The significance of this is that people not only ‘keep in touch’, they actively participate and contribute to important family and communal decision-making matters.

Koksal: The last telephone conversation I had with my dad, only recently, he’s not so happy. The reason is that he knows that his kids, which is me and brothers and sisters are in a lot better position than the people in Turkey. We’re living a

\textsuperscript{33} Greg Sheridan, "The Middle East, Immigrant Links" in The Australian (Monday May 12, 1997) p. 15.
\textsuperscript{34} Greg Sheridan, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Greg Sheridan, p. 15.
different life. He’s happy on that, but he misses a lot the family. Sometimes he says he does miss Australia and he wants to come. But other times he says no I better stay up here. Anyhow we all communicate regularly. One of us rings him at least once a week.

Certainly there is a sense, a feeling, that the globalization of economics and culture might reduce some ethnic communities to the folkloric margins, given that the multinationals and mass electronic communications networks seem to have little regard for ethnic and national boundaries. But recent advances in electronic communications and information technology, which can so easily be demonised, also provide these ‘vicarious nations’ with dense cultural material, sustaining an interactive community in which ethnicity and nationalism may not be so easily eroded because of the constantly renewing impact of complex televised interaction.

Mej: There’s a video shop in Auburn, just across from the station. We hire lots of Cantonese videos. In China town too, there is a cinema showing Hong Kong movies.

Julia Kristeva suggests that in contemporary communities people are continually faced with the process of “a double temporality: the process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (what she calls the pedagogical, sic); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative).”37 So people come to a sense of themselves through the accretion of historical stories which are then, in many ways, continually being eroded as they each live through the experience of their ‘social drama’. This can account for the longings, nostalgias, and feelings of loss and uncertainty that people can express: the unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty. This is clearly central to Pauline Hanson’s idea that “to

survive in peace and harmony, united and strong, we must have one people, one nation one flag." In Noelle Janaczewska's play Cold Harvest, two contemporary Sydney families, the Kims and the Koslowskis, are in the process of preparing for a marriage. As the various family rituals and tensions unfold around the celebration, the two daughters interrogate their Korean and Polish traditions to ask where they fit into them, and what it means to be Australian in the 1990s.39

Noelle Janaczewska considers some of the very same issues that Hanson is concerned about. What is tradition? Why is it important? Do new rituals and customs evolve, or are they created? What does it mean when cultural rites are co-opted for commercial purposes? The intelligent power in Janaczewska's play is that before, or rather while this multicultural society may collectively wish for 'peace and harmony' and possibly some sort of unity as a nation, such ideas can only emerge from an on-going experimental process that involves the reconciliation of our various pasts with our contemporary circumstances.

The two central figures in the play, Kasia, a second generation Polish-Australian, and Mi-Kyoung, a second generation Korean-Australian, try to come to terms with that eternal issue of how first and second generation migrants reconcile their differences. The play focuses on these dilemmas, catching one up in the cross-fire between then and now, there and here, us and them. For both Kasia and Mi-Kyoung the journeys back to the country of their parents' birth are important in their search for their Australian identities. For Kasia, who is well-versed in Polish history, it becomes a search for an individual past that has been hidden, while for Mi-Kyoung the situation is the reverse. She knows inside-out her mother's and father's personal stories, but lacks a sense of the broader national history of her parents' homeland. In their attempt to understand the Cold War politics of their parents' generation they

38 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
39 Noelle Janaczewska, p. 63.
must negotiate across cultures, across histories and languages, and in so doing they partially reconcile a polarised past with a culturally diverse present.⁴⁰

Cultural Identity

So what does it mean to be an Australian, to have a sense of patriotism? In what way can there be a unity of purpose, an ‘historic mission’ in the service of the nation, and how does this fit with current ideas about the maintenance of ethnicity? Just as personal identity is never fixed, so too cultural identity is increasingly fluid and can no longer be located around national boundaries. Cultural identity is continually being reconstructed. People can no longer be portrayed as in a static community, an imagined community rooted in language and race. The contemporary situation is a problem defined in terms of the conflicting interests, the goals and needs which ‘identify’ the real multicultural population.

Wissal: Well as I said there’s six of us in the family. Most of the time we see my relatives cause we’re always visiting each other. Even when I go out, the majority is Lebanese. It’s full of Lebanese people. I know my life revolves around Lebanese people you know. I don’t think I could ever lose that culture because I’m always reminded of it. There’s always people there, like my parents to remind me of it.

Wissal thinks of herself as both Lebanese and Australian, and names herself as such. But this identity is very different to that of her parents and almost unrecognisable to them.

Wissal: Yes, I do speak Lebanese, pretty good too. And sometimes, yeah, most of the time I talk Lebanese at home and I would want to, because I wouldn’t want

⁴⁰ Noelle Janaczewska, pp. 63-64.
to lose that, you know. I believe it's part of me. But you know, I don't know much about Lebanon, because I've never been there, you know. I've heard from my parents what Lebanon's like. I've seen videos and you know, most of my relatives have been there. I've got some relatives that live there. But I don't know much about it. My parents tell me stories. I think my parents tell me all these stories about Lebanon so I can tell my children and you know, so the thing could sort of live on, yeah.

Cultural identity is a more complex phenomenon than simply a concern for who lives where. To a large extent we are grounded together in the same place and our shared concerns/interests must override the particular interests; no particular group can present its own interests as the universal interest. I understand this idea raises the question of 'who has the power?' Comprehending one's place, or locality or one's culture is a relative matter today. English is not the prerogative of the people of England, nor Islam the prerogative of Iranian Mullahs. Therefore, whose place and culture is it? How do I address the power of the English language as well as its powerlessness, as I stand before the Turkish and Arabic shop keepers? The complexity of this social ecology is that the shared ground is unruly and asymmetrical. For many migrant communities language and culture are largely lost or radically altered in the first and second generations. This makes the policy, or even the dream, of a cultural pluralism unlikely. But any hope of a seamless assimilation is also unreasonable. The mainstream is continually being hybridised and this forces away certain cultural attributes, changing itself in the process.

Cung: There is a problem for us. We don't want our children to forget totally their own language, their mother tongue. But young people are changing. Because they study in Australian schools and of course they study the way of living here. But when we talk together to each other we sometimes mention something about our country, but we have a problem. We can see that a gap between the old people and the young people. Especially the young who were
born in Australia or came to Australia at an early age. Because the difference in culture creates some kind of confusion, misunderstanding between the two generations.

I have suggested that the relations between individuals, the particular language and cultural customs they know, the larger community, and other less tangible aspects of the environment necessary to the survival of culture, could be thought of as an ecosystem, a complex system of different factors that must interact. This interaction is not static but is continually changing, as do our prejudices about these complex interactions. "The closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one viewpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving."41 Stephen FitzGerald is quite enthusiastic about the way he thinks our contemporary society and culture is changing its historical horizon. He says Australia "is more vibrant than that of almost any other contemporary culture in the Asian region."42 Immigrants have brought over 100 different languages to Australia. This brings great economic and cultural advantages for everyone. The experience of difference in Australia is the experience of actively altering established ways of thinking about identity.

Serkan: I think it is important for me to keep using Turkish. But I will try to learn another language, like Chinese, or Hong Kong, or Japanese, yeah. This is the biggest foreign language. Japanese, they go into markets, like, you know, they own all the markets. Toyota, like all the car factories back in Turkey they own most of the car factories here too. So, I think I will learn Japanese.

41 Hans-Georg Gadamer, In the conference paper "Asian Studies and the Fusion of Horizons" Adrian Snodgrass, Gadamer, Action and Research conference, Sydney University (October 1, 1991) p. 39. Adrian Snodgrass makes the point that 'prejudice' is at the core of Gadamer's thinking. In the sense that prejudice is to be consciously resolved. All matters of prejudice have to be interpreted in a certain context, viewed from a pre-given perspective and conceived in a certain way.
Serkan is an eighteen year old living in Auburn who acknowledges his Turkish heritage, sees no reason to deny it, and who sees his Australianness in an Asian setting. “This is, if you like, the Australian Asian, which has nothing to do with race.”

Gungor: I can tell you, living is good here compare to the other countries. But it is a new country this one. It needs time to settle down. So now what we are getting is every culture. Every culture, good or bad it doesn’t matter they are bringing here and we are right in observing this one. But the time will come, all the bad things will go out probably, good things remain and we will develop some culture here, our new Australian culture. But will take some time this one. Not a few years, maybe hundred years, my opinion.

I suggested earlier that we can think of the broad culture as an ecosystem, a complex system of different factors that must interact, where relationships are structured inside a network of contracts, regulations, expectations, dreams, fantasies, memories and desires. So, at any given moment, the set of strategies available to the individual forms a kind of imaginary culture-scape. As one moves around in this culture-scape one undergoes certain changes, one takes a step from a current strategy to a different strategy, a type of selection occurs. While everyone else is moving around in their culture-scapes, the significant point of a social ecology is that these culture-scapes are not independent, but rather they are connected. So as each individual adapts to their own culture-scape, it changes the culture-scape for everyone. What’s a good strategy for me depends on what you are doing and vice versa.

---

43 Stephen FitzGerald, p. 70.
Communities Change

Narratives, stories and myths leave traces in the world. Most people, I suspect, know that they are somehow ‘made up’, and while they may not take them literally, at the same time, the stories are held very dear. In Australia there are many such stories, constructed around particular motifs: giving a person a fair go, not doffing one’s hat to anyone, playing the game through against the odds and other more pragmatic ones, such as inventing from necessity, taking a risk and avoiding authority. The way these stories function is to construct an aesthetic and psychological order to an otherwise chaotic world. So when a social policy such as multiculturalism becomes entwined in the aesthetic and psychological order, new complications emerge. A first step in understanding this complication, suggests Robert Hughes, is to acknowledge that we are not one big world family, or ever likely to be. “The differences between races, nations, cultures and their various histories are at least as profound and durable as their similarities. In this world and in our immediate future, if you can’t navigate difference and change, you’ve had it.”

A contemporary version of the multicultural story would assert that people with different roots can co-exist, that they can learn to read the image-banks of others, that they can, and should, look across the frontiers of race, language, gender and age without prejudice or illusion, and that they can learn to think against the background of a hybridised society. However, there is also a tendency in any complex system, biological or social, to move towards and prefer stability. So when plans are underway to build a mosque on prime real estate in Campbelltown, or a politician is murdered in Cabramatta, or Arab

---

Australians congregate to make sense of the Gulf War, that is when “multiculturalism is questioned and seen as having ‘gone too far’, ‘pushed the boundaries enough’, ‘gone wrong’. Mainstream society prefers the “palatable and digestible type of multiculturalism - tabouleh, bocconcini, batik, sambal oelek, little pockets of difference.”

Communities emerge, in part, through the stories that are told by the people of the community. In this they are mythic constituencies based on shifting allegiances and modes of identification. When does ‘we’ become ‘them’? Will going to the mosque on Friday become as routine as mass on Sunday? Maturana speaks of co-drifting with the emerging circumstance, where the individual and the community share in a mutual translation of each other’s stories, giving and taking and “undergoing correlative changes in many dimensions at the same time”.

Cung: Because our children, they study in Australian schools, and of course they study the way of living here. But when we talk together, to each other, we sometimes mention something about our country. But we have a problem. We can see that a gap between the old people and the young people, especially the young who were born in Australia, or come to Australia at an early age. Because the difference in culture create some kind of confusion, misunderstanding between the two generations. But not all of them. Because some of our families can maintain the harmony of living in Australia. With Australian culture and promoting our culture at the same time.

Cung’s story takes place in the encounter between communities. This is not simply an encounter between the ‘Vietnamese community’ and ‘mainstream’

---

3 Humberto Maturana & Francisco Varela, p.107-116. Co-drifting refers to changes that occur between organisms and the environment. Changes are not independent but emerge because the whole environment is undergoing correlative changes in many dimensions at the same time.
4 Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varala, p 116.
but also between the old people and the young people, between some of our families and presumably others, all of which create some kind of confusion, and misunderstanding. One cannot see all of the factors involved in these encounters. Maturana and Varela’s idea of co-drifting seems to be a rather haphazard, process, something like Stephen Muecke’s image of a street conjurer who, juggling ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ stories “creates transformations which are offered in love.” Cung’s story is important. It reminds us all that in sustaining the practice of a critical multiculturalism we still must be able to hang on ‘gently’ to the uneasy tension it generates. People can only be active through being interactive and alert for change, being interested and aware of the situation all the time. Cung’s story is about change and the awareness of change; it conjures up the realisation that the community is changing.

Cung: You know, frankly speaking, in psychological aspect, when I came here, as well as many people, you see, we felt happy to leave our country. You may understand that a man, a person who wants to leave his own country, that is a problem. You know, you have your home country and you leave your home country, that is a problem. So when we came here we feel very happy, very unhappy. We try our best to adapt, you know the way of living here, to adjust to the new way of living. To hoping to feeling at home.

Sharing in this story with Cung it is possible to be aware of his world, his ‘lived experience’. Hillman thinks of case histories as fictional biographies. He suggests that if people can redeem their imagination from the constraints of literal understandings then, as in Cung’s situation, our hoping to feel at home here will be comprehensible. Imagination may be regarded as a ‘way of seeing’ and refers to that “unknown component which makes meaning

5 Stephen Muecke, No Road (Bitumen all the way) (Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Press, 1997) p. 160.
possible, turns events into experiences, a sort of deepening of events into experience”\(^6\), what can be called “the imaginative possibility in our nature”\(^7\).

Many interesting things in history and culture happen at the interface between cultures, at the ‘borders’. The edges of ecosystems are always the most diverse and dynamic in terms of species, nutrients and adaptation. Hillman speaks of a polyvalence in our psychic structures too, where the borders are ill-defined, so that flow and interconnection between archetypes\(^8\) and imagery stay open. Archetypes are not isolated from each other but are in a state of contamination, of the most complete mutual interpregnation and interfusion. It is possible then to speculate about these ‘states of contamination’ and, like Cung, imaginatively find our way, as a community, to maintain the harmony of living in Australia, with Australian culture while still promoting one’s own culture at the same time. In this way we are not fixed into some literal concept of an Australian culture because we know that in fact the psychological and cultural borders are co-drifting.

Hillman argues that the process by which imagination constructs a story is the same in the individual as it is in the community. In other words a community continually invents itself from the imagination of the people. What is the nature of this psychic reality which goes on simultaneously in us and in the world? When a society expresses itself in racist and defensive ways, or, for that matter as accommodating and tolerant, where have these attitudes come from?

---


\(^7\) James Hillman p. 66.

\(^8\) Hillman describe archetypes as images, or metaphors; for instance as “patterns of instinctual behaviour like those in animals that direct actions along unswerving paths; the genres and topoi in literature; the recurring typicalities in history; the paradigmatic thought models in science.” These are archetypes in action. The closest Hillman comes to a definition is as “the deepest patterns of psychic functioning, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world. They are axiomatic, self-evident images to which psychic life and our theories about it ever return”. From “Peaks and Vales”.

176
John: I can walk down Auburn Road and feel at home because I know so many of the faces behind the moustaches and the veils. I know they're people just like me, like everyone else. You know, the young girls going to school around here, they come to the library, wearing their head scarf, they come to the front desk and they can be just as cheeky as any other kid. They still want to read 'Girlfriend' magazine and muck around.

You know, I used to think, I couldn't imagine how anybody could want to leave Australia. Because I'm a migrant too. I came from Scotland. Certainly my parents absolutely don't want to go back to Scotland. They think it's a terrible place. They lived through the depression there, and they know that the bagpipes and all that tartan stuff is just nonsense to them. But now when I encounter people that want to go home I sort of see where it comes from. I see the benefits of their culture and their country. Before I just thought Australia was the best place.

In these two stories, John expresses an ambivalence and intellectual uncertainty which has emerged from his everyday experience of the wider community. I used to think, I couldn't imagine how anybody could want to leave Australia. From the outset John is caught by the complexity of a social reality that is not fixed to some literal concept of an Australia as the best place. There are people that want to go home, to the benefits of their culture and their country. John seems to be able to imaginatively surmount the contradictions and hold the process of these complex phenomena together in some meaningful way. So when Angela Chan, commenting on a recent One Nation gathering, speaks of it as a "cancer of good community relations" which has "opened the door for extremists to peddle divisive messages of hate"\(^9\), she is attending only to a part of a 'continuous spectrum' of truth values. The ambivalence and complexity of this emerges when Janet Large, one of a number of people who, listening to Ms. Hanson in the Gulgong CWA Hall said, "Oh she's got me, she is saying

what the people of Australia are thinking and they have not had the opportunity to put into words."\(^{10}\)

Both of these people are expressing the concerns of ‘our community’ and both stress the importance of feeling secure in that community. The feeling of community, Ghassan Hage writes, above all “involves living in a space where one recognises people as ‘one’s own’ and where one feels recognised by them as such. It is crucially a feeling of shared symbolic forms, shared morality, shared values and most importantly perhaps, shared language. It is a space where one knows that at least some people can be morally relied on for help (family and friends).” \(^{11}\)

Nhan: If I go to street I hardly make friends with any, like Turkish or someone. I don’t mean that I am better than them, or that they are better than me. It feel like a little bit like a war between us. Not really a war but something not really comfortable. But like just friendly OK. We can talk for half an hour or whatever OK but like further the relationship I’m not to sure. I use to work with some Lebanese people, and also Arab, here in Bankstown, because I used to work as a street worker, so I knew quite a few of them. They were very friendly. But friendly only when I meet them at work, when I don’t meet them I never miss them. When I meet them we can play pool and talk English, having smoke or whatever, OK everything it seems fine but when we part, that’s it.

• To survive in peace and harmony, united and strong, we must have one people, one nation, one flag (Pauline Hanson)

The public discussions about feeling comfortable and being at home in this country have been part of our search for identity and belonging over many years now. In the 1991 article Ugliculturalism, the economics commentator Alan

---

\(^{10}\) Malcolm Brown, “Way out west they’re just wild about Hanson” in the Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday 23rd August,1997) p. 8.

\(^{11}\) Ghassan Hage, “at home in the entrails of the west” in Helen Grace, etal., eds., Home/World space, community and marginality in Sydney’s West (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1996) p.103.
Wood suggested that as Australia was going through a “difficult and dramatic economic transition, it would need a strong sense of national identity and purpose”. Hanson lately has taken this up and makes the point that “at last people are waking up and taking an interest in their future, for the first time in a long time, Australians are taking an interest in politics. I am going to offer a change. What I am going to get is not going to be a protest vote. It will be a change for us and for our country.”

Geoffrey Blainey in his essay Going Somewhere? has written eloquently about the “need for people to feel they belong to their country and to enjoy a sense of solidarity with their fellow countrymen.” Geoffrey Blainey’s intervention some fifteen years ago in March 1984 was to deliver a speech criticising the high level of Asian immigration and what he saw as the difficulties in assimilation. Although the so-called Blainey debate degenerated into hysterical polemics, it also raised some important issues that should be dispassionately addressed. He suggested that there may be limits to the cultural absorptive capacity of a country, and if the multicultural peace is fragile, then too rapid an intake of multi-ethnic migrants is likely to spark off sectarian explosions. Such a disturbance would threaten the welfare of ethnic migrants already in the country. “On balance,” he thought “it is more important to ensure fair and equitable treatment to those already in than to insist on enlarging their proportion in the face of hostile opposition, even if the opposition is racist and ignorant. No government policy can afford to move too far ahead of grass-roots community attitudes.”

12 Pauline Hanson, from Malcolm Brown, “Way out West they’re just wild about Hanson” in the Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday August 23, 1997) p. 8.
14 Professor Geoffrey Blainey, then the chairman of the Australia-China council, raised doubts about Australia’s immigration policy in November 1983, at the National Press club. His comments drew little response. When he repeated them in a meeting at Warrambool in March 1984 he sparked a national and highly controversial debate. In brief he said that immigration has long been a ‘taboo’ subject and it should not be left only to ‘politicians and bureaucrats and those who scrawl slogans on walls to discuss.’
Brendon: Do you feel a part of this community?

Amber: I don’t feel like I can find my home here now. I can find my work in it and I can find my daughters child care. I’m really happy with that. Probably it’s because I don’t feel safe, that’s the major thing. I feel out numbered yes. I don’t have anything against them I just feel it’s; I can remember coming to Auburn from Birrong, like to shop and it use to be really nice. Now I just feel like a tourist, like when you walk up the street. It’s like it happened in about fifteen years or so. It just seems to have happened really quickly.

Blainey, and of course Hanson, have been quickly identified as racist, but the matter of feeling as if one belongs in a community with a sense of solidarity in that community continues to be an issue of importance for many people like Amber. Richard Basham, speaking on commercial radio, makes the point that when political and intellectual elites try to gag the current immigration debate they are doing a disservice to our national inheritance and our traditions of democracy. The term racist is ‘tossed out all the time’, he says, by well meaning politicians and social commentators to describe the politics and opinions of Pauline Hanson, with the assumption that such a diagnosis should therefore be enough to close the debate down. There is a great defensiveness when it comes to our feelings on matters of race and immigration. This has been evident in the way both major political parties have, up until now, shared a common reluctance to open the debate to the public. Several examples exist of political party elites avoiding debate on the issue. After Geoffrey Blainey raised the issue of Asian immigration in 1984, Michael Hodgeman (Liberal) was removed from the shadow immigration portfolio when it appeared he would take up the issues raised by Blainey. Similarly, when it looked as if Stewart West, then immigration minister (Labour) would also enter the debate he was replaced by Chris Hurford. In their formal policy pronouncements, both political parties

16 Richard Basham, Speaking on the Join Laws Program Radio 2UE, Sydney (Wednesday 27 August, 1997). Richard Basham is currently Professor of Anthropology, Sydney University.
have similarly avoided generating controversy on the issue since multiculturalism became formal government policy in 1973.\textsuperscript{18}

Robert Manne has pointed out that opinion polls over the last twenty years seem to indicate that many Australians have never accepted a non-discriminatory immigration policy. Before the 1970’s immigrants were expected to assimilate into our provincial variant of the British cultural norm, and while the triumph of multiculturalism has allowed Non-British migrants to feel more at home in Australia without being required to assimilate, it has made many ‘old’ Australians feel less securely at home.

Hanson’s appeal is not only that she touches some sort of basic racism. She also generates a powerful sense of cultural loss, as if “the heyday of the simple white folk”\textsuperscript{19} seems to have gone for ever. Her argument has it that the coherent world of ordinary Australians, a world built around work, place, values and opportunity, has gradually been replaced by new institutions that uphold different ideas of what work, place, values and opportunity might be. One has to accept that the confusion caused by the cultural loss of long held values is not something to be dismissed as conversation proceeds. Surely if anything is to be learned from recent events, it must be that to disregard people’s fear and loathing at the loss of cultural coherence will result in a populist revolt.

Manne says that “Hansonism is the expression of Anglo-anxiety in the age of multiculturalism”.\textsuperscript{20} Appreciating the power of the Hanson phenomenon may make us hesitant to search further into the meaning and origin of this anxiety. This reluctance is understandable as almost anything can be read into it, but

\textsuperscript{18} Ian McAllister, p.72.

\textsuperscript{19} Peter Cochrane, “Voices of the past in anglo primal scream” in The Australian (October 10, 1996) p. 11.

\textsuperscript{20} Robert Manne, “Tradition fades in Hanson wake” in the Sydney Morning Herald (Monday September 8, 1997) p. 15.
what will be read into it will depend upon the ‘myth’ or story that dominates for us. It is helpful to be thrown back onto our assumptions - for example that, multiculturalism will be easily implemented - by questioning whatever we have taken for granted. This will not necessarily mean that we establish another truth, but rather, the possibility of opening to new worlds of experience emerges. Hillman describes “this seeing through into an unknown” experience as being made possible by the imaginative way humans have of playing with ideas. “Ideas give the psyche its powers of insight, without ideas one is a victim of the literal and obvious, one has no idea of anything further.”

Generally the response to cultural diversity has been assimilation or exclusion. Yet there have been in history, in different parts of the world, small societies which have emerged and opened to people from outside and welcomed political, intellectual and economic refugees. These societies have mingled commerce and the arts and produced enormous creative energy, economic wealth and cultural originality. The city-states of the European Renaissance are models. Another is the capital of Tang Dynasty China. FitzGerald says that all these communities opened themselves “to ideas and became havens for people of talent, and nurtured that talent into major creativity and great contribution to the advancement of civilisation. They have been trading societies and they have been societies in which many foreign languages have been spoken”. The potential for Australia is clear. Already cities like Sydney and Melbourne are cosmopolitan and sophisticated with very little constraint on intellectual freedom. In short, they are complex adaptive systems and as such they are characterised by perpetual novelty. None the less, in such societies it remains very hard to faithfully represent the values, perceptions and coping strategies of all the people affected by change or risk.

New opportunities are always being created within any complex system. In turn that means it's essentially meaningless to talk about a complex adaptive system being in equilibrium. The society will always be unfolding, always in transition. Individuals and communities can never fully 'optimise' their capacity, the space of possibility is too vast. The most they can ever do is to change and adapt themselves relative to what others are doing. The most appropriate way to engage in this 'perpetual novelty' requires a certain resilience; the primary goal is to maximise flexibility and maintain sufficient 'room to move' for people to respond opportunistically. Opportunism in this sense is not "negatively valued, especially if it contributes to innovativeness and flexibility." It follows that no expert language can adequately express the variety of people's perceptions and assessments within a community. Hanson has to some extent succeeded in challenging certain experts opinion that would "reduce ignorance as much as possible" and subject the society to "a dominant viewpoint which favours a narrow conceptualisation." In this case, I would argue that the agenda of both principle political parties, most academic institutions, most religious organisations and most social commentators has narrowly constrained what can be debated on matters of immigration and multiculturalism.

There is something important to recognise in what Hanson is saying, in particular that "ordinary Australians have been kept out of the debate on immigration and multiculturalism." But it would be seriously wrong if we let go of the achievements this society has made. Officially, and I think, in a generally populist way, this society has been non-discriminatory in its acceptance of people from many different regions who have come to settle permanently here. FitzGerald says that this society is already the most outward looking of all the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and certainly the most

---

25 Michael Smithson, conference paper.
26 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
Chandran Kukathas speaks of a national inheritance, a tradition based, not on characteristics that are either ethnic or emotional, like the little Aussie Battler or the characters of Patterson and Lawson’s poetry, but rather an inheritance that is constituted of and shared by all members of the Australian community. “The notion of a national inheritance here refers to two interrelated things: first, a history; and second, a set of legal and political institutions. To the extent that these things are generally accepted and shared, a political community exists.” This community, then, accepts an ancient Aboriginal inheritance, a history of European, Asian, Oceanic and Middle Eastern colonisation and immigration, a common legal tradition and liberal democratic political institutions. Generally, too, the community accepts that this system has been shaped primarily through British institutions and the English language which bequeaths the legal, political and educational vocabulary in which public affairs are conducted.

Our society is determined fundamentally by membership in a political community and by the nature of the nation’s institutions. One assumes full rights and responsibilities in this community as soon as one decides to join it. As members of this community we come with separate histories, different tastes, beliefs, and temperaments. There can be no doubt that that part of a person’s experience which belongs to their individual life and which is most important to the person self identity will go on being separate. But in choosing to come together we agree to share with one another the other part that is public. We find ourselves living together in this country, at this time, enjoying the same rights as citizens, the same restrictions too. We inherit through these the same history.

People experience the consequences and events of history in different ways, according to where they stand in relation to them and how they have

---

27 Stephen FitzGerald, p. 178.
28 Chandran Kukathas, p. 149.
benefited, or lost out. The events we call history are such a muddle, and this should make us wary of pressing too far the notion of a singleness in any of these areas.

What happened in history exists by report, and the reports differ according to which side or faction is doing the reporting. We have been made sharply aware of this by arguments about what happened when Europeans came to this country, with such contradictory terms as 'settlement' on the one hand and 'invasion' on the other. I think one should be grateful for an awareness of contradiction: it enlarges one's thinking. It is a multiple and contradictory history that is shared and that constitutes the sort of experience that is inescapable in this community. One of our gifts as humans is that we have minds that are flexible. We are capable of holding more than one idea in our heads at the same time, of living with multiple and contradictory views, which do not limit our capacity to speak of our experience as communal and shared.

Gungor: I will tell you this story. Many years ago the Turkish community plan this Mosque and they didn't get the permission. Long time they apply and eventually the plans get accepted. I can say this story too. Sometime I felt I have a cancer, alright. I was driving the car from Silverwater and I was a little upset because oh, I have a cancer or something like that. Then I saw the minaret, I said God, I'm not religious person, but that time I felt funny. You know, I am dying and I am going to God or something and my eyes is watering that time. Can you imagine. So it is good that we get the permission. They build something very nice. The future will look at this because Australia is a mixed country. Australians, they come from any country right, but when they live here we are Australian right.

Kukathus argues that it is a moral inheritance that shapes our community and it is to these moral causes that we must pay attention. "Primacy here is given to history and politics; biology, geography and the natural environment
are regarded as much less important". 29 Such a moral inheritance would seek to develop and maintain institutions that can and will accommodate differing cultural communities. But these institutions would not reshape the various communities in accordance with some specific national ideal. "The development of such national institutions does not require the fostering of a national identity in any strong sense; indeed it is only by not creating too strong a sense of national identity that it will be possible to tolerate a variety of ways of life within the political community." 30 This liberal view of a political community, which eschews emphasising some definitive notion of what Australian society should be like, recognises that individuals have some purposes they alone would pursue, and some they share with others. Moral qualities are reshaped, however, through political dialogue, and in this sense there cannot be a "complete divorce between the public and the private realms. Public norms must always to some extent shape private conduct." 31

Cung: Because, you know, we establish a community. The purpose of the community is to help the Vietnamese people. I think we want to contribute to the bigger community. For example, me, I am the deputy vice president of the Vietnamese - Australian Friendship Association of Fairfield and in charge of our side of the problems. I am deputy president of the Vietnamese Education and Culture Council in NSW, so when I take charge of those positions, of course I have to do something to promote our culture, to get our Australian people to know about our culture. In order to avoid some misunderstandings when we deal with the people outside and to help the Vietnamese people living here. The old as well as the young people. For example, with the old people we organised an association in order for them to come and talk to each other. To exchange their ideas and study English. For entertainments we organise excursions for them to visit different places in Australia. Monthly meetings for them to come together

29 Chandran Kakathus, p. 154.
30 Chandran Kakathus, p. 154.
and we ask people from other agencies to come and talk about some regulations here, to get use to the laws here in Australia. And we have the young people. The young children to study at school, we organise competition about Vietnamese writing and so on.

Speaking of one's experience from within the contradictions may help build a new confidence while experiencing the erosion of old communal ties, bonds and systems of meaning. Often people are able to build new solidities on the ruins of the old ones, but sometimes these new solidities are of a different nature than the older, traditional ones. They may be “less permanent, less total, less based on fixed territories, more dynamic, more provisional, and above all they are often based on the resources offered by global modern culture itself.”

I don’t think this necessarily confirms the argument which suggests “all that is solid melts into air.” Indeed, again as Jen Ang points out, “when we look at what is actually happening in global culture today, we can see that not all that was solid has melted into air: on the contrary, the globalizing force of capitalist modernity has not dissolved the categorical solidities of geography, gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, ideology, and so on, they still have impact on the way in which people experience and interpret the world and create and recreate their cultural communities”.

Modern multicultural societies like ours have to imagine, develop and maintain institutions which allow for a variety of ways that the plurality of interests and values of people are able to create and recreate cultural communities in the wider society. The best prospect for this happening is for institutions to be designed that deal with the plurality of interests and values in society as they are manifested in particular groups or their representatives. At the same time the institutions must uphold particular individual rights and freedoms regardless of the interests or affiliations of particular communities.

---

34 Jen Ang, p.156.
This has the advantage of allowing the private domain to safeguard certain cultural values. If the distinction between the private and the public realms is fully broken down, it may very well be more difficult for some cultural practices to be preserved as distinctive and perhaps valuable in that community. There are of course difficulties in this. Cultural change occurs in response to economic, social and political conditions. The public institutions within the wider society will make demands on individuals and insist that some cultural practices be changed or abandoned. I can think of the legislation prohibiting the mutilation of female genitalia.

Wissal: My friends aren’t just Lebanese. What I do with my friends, you know the outings, we go out together. I guess it’s with lots of people. We go to little places, like we went to Duck Creek, Japanese Gardens, Macdonalds, sometimes the movies in Parramatta, I don’t know. I hear on the radio and what I read in the papers and at school about what’s happening now and what might happen in the future, you know, the history about Australia. Things like that I guess make me an Australian.

If the society has accepted that it is fundamentally a political community that respects certain overarching values and individual rights, by affording public security in the form of equitable law enforcement and access to equal opportunity etc., then the particular interests, expectations and values of ethno-specific organisations can only be partially accepted. Richard Basham makes this point, speaking about the problem of crime facing certain ethnic communities within the larger society. Public institutions, such as the police, or schools, have tended (officially) to recognise pluralist groups and organisations to such an extent that it has become almost impossible to discuss the difficulties faced by individuals. “Racial prejudice against Asians in Australia is real,” he says” but, charges of racism are used as a moral skewer to silence discussion of ethnic-based crime. This is arrogant and ultimately dangerous. All crime has its cultural base and it is foolish to pretend, for example, that Asians don’t
dominate the hard drug trade in Australia. The overwhelming majority of
victims of Asian crime are Asians, yet a lot of decision makers in this state are
intimidated by the issue. Australia’s Asian citizens are currently not receiving
the full benefit of Australian law because the ability of the police and the legal
system to cope with Asian culture is limited. “I think Basham’s argument is
very important, especially in the light of the criticism being articulated by a
revived and confident anti-immigration lobby. For the society to function and
provide the security inherent in its institutions there has to be an open capacity
to criticise and ‘pull into line’ particular and identifiable members of the
society, even when certain antisocial behaviours are culturally based.

When the NSW Police Commissioner, Peter Ryan, recently said that here (in
Sydney) the crime is partly Lebanese-based, partly from the old Soviet Union,
Hong Kong, Vietnam and China, the political response was immediate and
personal. “I am disgusted; I am not happy at all” said Helen Sham-Ho, Liberal
member in the NSW Upper House, and she went on, “for the past eight years,
I’ve been trying to persuade police not to identify even suspects by race.”
Angela Chan, chairwoman of the Ethnic Community Council of NSW, said,
“the commissioner’s comments stereotypes people as criminals on the ground
of race and in today’s climate, with the anti-Asian sentiment and racism debate
going on, it just adds fuel to the fire.” But Basham regards this climate of
censorship as dangerous. “The comfort level for Asian criminals in Sydney is
now very high”; he goes on “it is almost as if they have political protection.
This imposed silence is one of the reasons Australia now has Hanson.”

Gungor: In Auburn, you know, I know the Turkish people, they are still living
in the Turkey. They are living in Turkey still, and most of the time they don’t
speak English. And when I ask them why you don’t learn English they say, ‘we

35 Richard Basham, quoted in Paul Sheehan, “Gang Buster”, in the Sydney Morning Herald
(Saturday August 9, 1997) p. 3s.
36 Helen Sham-Ho, quoted in Paul Sheehan, p. 3s.
37 Angela Chan, quoted in Paul Sheehan, p. 3s.
38 Angela Chan, quoted in Paul Sheehan, p. 3s.
are too old' or 'why we learn this language, it's not necessary'. I said how can you enjoy your life here if you don't understand the music. If you don't understand the television, if you don't understand your neighbour" 'Oht yes, but we have the Turkish friend'. They're going almost every night each others neighbour. Sitting drinking tea and coffee and talking. There is one subject, is workers compensation. How can you get the money from workers compensation, how can they organise this one and the other one.

I can tell you, three and four year old boy or girl is coming to me and complaining backache. Do you believe this one. Okay, you ask them, 'what is workers compo', not workers compensation, you ask the child 'what is compo' and he would show you the back. All of them they know, because they are talking at home all the time these things. Compo is the back pain.

While I don't wish to suggest that the story just told by Gungor represents a 'wave of ethnic crime', it does tell us something about the experience of adaptation and survival. Herein lies the paradox that Basham, on the one hand, and Sham-Ho and Chan on the other, are trying to comprehend. Living in any society involves 'using' the society, taking advantage when the opportunity presents. Like all societies, ours is characterised by a certain 'practicalness', not so much in "the narrowly pragmatical sense of useful but in the broader, folk-philosophical sense of sagacity. To tell someone, 'be sensible', is less to tell them to cling to the utilitarian than to tell them, as we say, to wise up"39 and the prudent will 'wise up'. Gungor's patients mobilise their inherent shrewdness; it helps them survive. To overlook this characteristic in human society is not appropriate, but to target it as indicative of certain stereotypical behaviour is also inappropriate.

I am not intending to undermine the important work of Helen Sham-Ho and Angela Chan, especially their efforts to change stereotypical attitudes. Nor do I

under-estimate the enormous and valuable work done by local government community project officers and non-government ethno-specific project officers in attending to community needs. But, returning to Gungor's lived experience, one should recognise the paradox that exists when 'official' representatives speak on behalf of a supposedly correct and collective position or agenda, and fail to recognise, or acknowledge that people will take advantage of a system over and above their rights.

To contend with Hanson's arguments it is necessary to be pragmatic. It is necessary to acknowledge that in a society like the one emerging here there will continue to be all manner of behaviour and that sometimes there will be an overreaction to issues of racial tolerance or the sorting of the system. Sometimes the obviousness of this is difficult to grasp. Hillman calls these various circumstances, attitudes and opinions that make up the manner of behaviour of a society 'psychic events'. He says they should be considered as "points of view, in that they all have a purpose". What is intriguing in his argument is that 'purpose' is not 'a defined goal' such as persuading police not to 'identify suspects by race' or 'how you can get money from workers compensation.' Rather, in having a sense of purpose about being a member of this society, "one feels 'purposefulness'." As individuals, and as a community we are moving, we are on the way towards a wider society.

No Mistake Mate, It's a Bit Weird

The awakening ceremony to launch the Festival of the Dreaming, the first of the Olympic Arts festivals leading us into Sydney 2000, was designed to bring all the people into relationship with our land. If we consider the story of how the place holds a community, if you like, then different creative possibilities may emerge. We could say a place brings a form into being, that it can call the people, that the place has a power. At Fitzroy Crossing, in the Kimberleys,

---

Stephen Muecke says, "the road and the river cross. It is a place where tourists don't belong, where the words you have brought with you are radically implausible. For example, dotted through this landscape, usually in fairly inaccessible places, are signs designed to protect Aboriginal sites: Sites of Significance, they say. Significance is the wrong word, these sites are not full of meanings, cluttered with signs like a library, ask the locals: something there they will say, it moves, there is a power. But if you put up a sign saying Site of Power, the authorities would laugh: mumbo jumbo they would say. But you have to ask yourself, what has that site been doing over the years, getting people to do things, or producing meaning." \(^{41}\) This story is concerned with the evolution of the land as an energy system that transforms a person's perspective on the processes of living. People do things when their imagination is moved, when something there gets things happening. It is as if the people and the place were progressively unfolding into each other, into a state of participation together.

I am not talking about an escape from the manifestations of contemporary ambivalence. I am talking about something happening ecologically, as when people (re)imagine the myth of their place (The Festival of the Dreaming and the National Sorry Day\(^{42}\) set good examples). Historicism is a form of image work, says Hillman, a genre of fantasy-making. The central idea for Hillman in this is that if history is a process of fantasy-making, then it can be understood as the making of myths. Hillman regards myths as metaphors. They do not provide an exhaustive catalogue of possible behaviour; rather they open one up to imaginative reflection on the questions of one's lived experience, personally and culturally. As Mark Byrne says, "myth is not a way of grounding behaviour in absolute truths, whereby social hierarchies and moral codes are established for all time."\(^{43}\) Myths embody the most popular of ideas

\(^{41}\) Stephen Muecke, p. 35.

\(^{42}\) The National Sorry Day (May 26, 1998). An initiative of the National Reconciliation Council. The council was set up following the handing down of the Human Rights Commission publication Bringing them Back Home, which detailed the various Australian Government policies of Aboriginal family separation.

about natural or social phenomena, and they can change rapidly. Nonetheless, their allegorical power can hold an individual and an entire community in their sway. The task then is to study how mythology functions.

Sema: On Turkish national holiday we usually have like fetes. There’s poems set out and games and things, dancing. Usually I’m just dressed in my jeans. But when I was younger I used to go as a Turkish lady. I would wear the outfit and it’s really good.

Myths may help us explain ourselves to ourselves. There are of course many ways of interpreting and valuing them. For much of this century psychoanalytic explanations have tended to reduce the function of myths to explanations of behaviour in which “myth is nothing but the verbalization of ritual.” For instance, in regarding myth as “cultural reflectors” the anthropologist Franz Boas said that they are social constructions or explanations. Another anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, held that the function of myths was to provide a “social charter for belief by strengthening tradition and tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events”. Structural anthropologists, however, think of myths not only as having a social task - that is externalising group functions and legitimating hierarchies or projecting fundamental human dilemmas onto the cosmic stage - but as being themselves the product of these social forces.

When certain myths take on a life of their own, as products of the social process they become significant, influencing behaviour. The mythical power of a national flag for which people are prepared to die - or run and swim extremely fast - I think serves as an example. Roland Barthes says of myths that they are a “type of speech that involves a false imputation of fact to the

45 Kees Bolle, p. 264.
46 Kees Bolle, p. 264.
process of signification”. And this process is political: the myths of bourgeois ideology have the task of giving a particular history (for example, European Australian history), a natural justification. In other words the historical contingency of colonisation “appears eternal.” As a result of the accidents of history and their consequences, one can comprehend much of the social behaviour in a society like ours as having both a literal and natural reality. This is why so many Australians can justify themselves as being ‘true blue Aussies’, making for a difficult reading of that history.

Sema: when I go home I find that mum has cooked dinner. Then about 6 o’clock, 6.30 we have dinner and then before, about 5.30 I start my homework or watch a bit of telly and then start my homework. If it’s Tuesday we all watch Melrose Place, and Sunday we watch Beverly Hills, and if it’s Saturday night it’s Lois and Clark.

What can be noticed in the light of Hanson’s desire to have ‘one people, one nation, one flag’ is how such a mythical story is widely promoted. People like Hanson live out their private and communal myths in a literal manner because they seem unaware of the metaphorical possibility of a community rich in diversity. For these people the story of an Australia united as a people has to be rediscovered, and not reinvented. They think that the real Australia has somehow been lost into an underworld of cultural miscegenation. Their myth of a united Australian people can only become literalised again by discrediting others who would wish to reinvent the Australian story based, this time, on cultural diversity. An editorial in the Daily Telegraph following the Prime Minister’s speech to the Reconciliation Convention in May 1997 described his address as a “genuine attempt to unite Australia” and those people, according to the editorial, who heckled and booed him, showed little regard for Australia’s future.

---


mythical stories, such as welfare bludgers living in the lap of luxury or Aboriginal and multicultural industry tycoons being funded by tax-payers money, to argue that these phenomenon are ‘unAustralian’. There is no room for self-reflection with Hanson. A self-reflection that would be commensurate with the historical reality of a population now culturally diverse, and to some extent radically and ethnically divided.

Van: I will be getting married at the end of the year, to a Vietnamese-Chinese man from Australia. I think consciously, I mean at the conscious level, I don’t think I deliberately pick Vietnamese or Chinese man. It is not necessarily at the conscious level, no this is not an issue. At the indirect level I think maybe in terms of, you know how we communicate in the same language, maybe it’s easier to facilitate a communication thing.

There is undoubtably a certain impatience, expressed by a lot of people in the wider society, with the insistence of Aboriginal and some ethnic communities on maintaining their distinctive status. This insistence includes their unwillingness to go along with a benign and convenient model of reconciliation and assimilation. I don’t want to lose sight of this impatience but I do want to fold it back into a search for “myth that can carry psychology.”49 By this I mean myth that is not about the meaning of life, as with Jung, or the interpretation of life, as with Freud. Rather the myth would be about the possibility of imagining individual and community life that carries with interest and care the stories and experiences of a culturally diverse and ethnically divided population.

While history may sediment and form layers of coherence, it can also be interpreted quite radically as the experience of living unfolds. Clearly our community is going through a powerful experience as it begins to come to terms with claims to political and proprietary legitimacy made by the

indigenous people of this place. Their lived experience is radically different from that defined by bourgeois ideology, and therefore challenges deeply such a coherence of history. What might be very exciting is that through the sharing of their experience it may be possible to liberate the social imagination of the wider society from the bondage of a literal response to a certain historical process. Sharing their experiences indigenous peoples remind us that they have inhabited this land since before ‘recorded’ history. Now, by asserting their ‘first nationhood’ sovereignty and by stressing the continuity of their habitation, their Aboriginality and their religious process of ‘being of the land’, they offer to us who have arrived by sailing ship, ocean liner, refugee boat or jumbo jet, an extraordinarily generous chance to (re)imagine the way we all ‘carry the psychology’ of this place together.

Neville: It's very hard, you meet up with Asians and they can only speak Asian amongst themselves. And may be only one person being the spokesperson. Yes, but, I mean to say too, after all we are really in a foreign country too. We are speaking English on the Aboriginal land. You know we can look at it that way as well.

There is a particular intellectual laziness in the way people like John Howard and Pauline Hanson call on certain myths to maintain an historical justification for our society. When Hanson spoke of Aborigines now enjoying privileges over other Australians and multiculturalists being funded by ordinary Australian taxpayers, she put it in terms of work and property. “I was born here, and so were my parents and children. I will work beside anyone and they will be my equal but I draw the line when told I must pay and continue paying for something that happened over 200 years ago. Like most Australians, I worked for my land; no-one gave it to me.”\(^50\) By aligning these myths of ‘good honest work and toil’ with the ‘God given right to purchase and own land’, she closes down the possibility of reconsidering the

\(^{50}\) Pauline Hanson, first speech.
accidents and consequences of our shared history. I am not for a moment suggesting that she should give up her land, nor denying the hard work and great toil that she and many other have put in, but we are more aware now of a history not quite honestly told. Any intention to seek a unifying and defining myth without considering the changes which have occurred in historical understanding will fail the very thing desired - a just, harmonious and peaceful future.

Marcia Langton offers another proposition on what it might mean to live together in some form of harmony and peace. What she proposes is that there be no Other: there is only self and self, like a Rastafarian pronoun 'I and I'. Her intersubjectivity involves both the Aboriginal and the non Aboriginal as subjects, not objects, and so a mutual construction of identities would constantly be renegotiated. The implication is that in the "ongoing construction of these relations there is always an effect, a movement and a consequence for the movement." Certainly a close, critical engagement with Aboriginal wisdom and knowledge is essential now if the entire community is to find its way through the reconciliation process. Still, I think there is a need to be cautious about submerging recognition of the other. There is a wonderful strangeness, in terms of seduction, about the other. When one is seduced, one is taken by the unique nature of the other and one would not want the other to be the same. "We can only remember that seduction lies not in reconciling with the Other" says Baudrillard, but "in salvaging the strangeness of the other." In this seduction, one does not want necessarily to be reconciled into a sort of merging with the other.

51 Marcia Langton, appointed Ranger Chair and Professor of the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, at The Northern Territory University, Australia.
52 Marcia Langton, Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1993). In Stephen Muecke, p. 181.
53 Stephen Muecke, p. 181.
Neville: Well I think it had to come. I mean after all, we have got a mosque now in Auburn. And I mean, naturally people who follow the Muslim religion are going to live near by because its near their temple, or whatever, their mosque. I see this is going to be just something that happens now.

Neville’s reflection may provide an entry into the psychology that is necessary for this society to hold its history and its diverse contemporary reality. What is important to understand here is that there can never be an ideal equality in such relations. The relations will not be ‘otherless’ because, if for no other reason, the negotiations always take place in the context of an overarching state power. Within this, of course, an individual or a small community group may force significant change upon the larger community. Building the mosque has changed Auburn. Neville seems prepared to accept and value the strangeness of others.

Nhan: Wow, multiculturalism that’s a big topic. Actually I think like, not many other countries has any thing like multicultural society like Australia. Even the United States, they have something but they didn’t declare their society’s multicultural. Canada is something like in our way, like in Australia. Because I am from Asian background or something, we say the multiculturalism that’s the policy we really like, very happy. It is a good way for us to be part of the bigger society. We can be different too. If like the government did not have this policy we feel isolated or something.

A summary is needed at this point to clarify the nature of the contemporary mythical stories on which our community is reflecting. Hillman suggests that myths allow the individual and the community to ‘see through’ into a different possibility, and Barthes reminds us that myths give to the historical process a justification. In both of these interpretations there is a recognition that the mythologising process is a social function. Hillman goes so far as to suggest
that the myth must carry a psychology which will reorientate personal and communal values towards one's contemporary society.

There are already many contemporary mythical stories for 'our times': the death of history, catastrophe fantasies, and the meaningfulness of all things in a pluralist world. I think it is these unsettling stories that fuel the anxiety of the likes of Hanson. What she seems to be searching for is a unifying and defining myth in which the oneness of the people will emerge, as the community looks to the nation and to the flag. She is certainly not alone in this. Indeed many people understand these 'mythical' feelings. I certainly feel pride when Kathy Freeman\textsuperscript{55} 'wins for Australia', and upset when the Socceroos\textsuperscript{56} are cruelly eliminated from the World Cup, and I experience a fascination when Andy Thomas "officially goes into space as an Aussie."\textsuperscript{57} But my point all along has been that a diverse and pluralist society is not necessarily meaningless, nor need diversity be cause for anxiety. There are many other mythical stories of unity emerging. As individuals learn to live with the excitement of another person's strangeness new stories, those of Aboriginal people and those of migrant people are able to take their place in our consciousness. Not for a moment am I saying that these will replace the myths like the ones Pauline Hanson favours; but they will be in addition to them.

So how long does it take to become indigenous? A controversial question, one that may be more easily attended to empathetically when one thinks of the Tamils in Sri Lanka or Indians in Fiji. For my friend Ross White, his imaginative response came as he searched out his convict ancestors. His ancestors William Rafter and Anne Entwistle came to Sydney Cove as convicts

\textsuperscript{55} Cathy Freeman is currently the world 400 meter sprint champion and 1998 Australian of the year. She has Aboriginal ancestry.

\textsuperscript{56} Socceroos is the media name given to the Australian soccer team which was defeated by Iran on a goal average count back in the play off for a place in the finals of the 1998 Soccer World Cup.

\textsuperscript{57} Andy Thomas is the first Australian astronaut and cosmonaut. He was flown by the space shuttle 'Endeavour' on January 24, 1998, to take up a four months stay on the Russian space station 'MIR'.
around 1815. They apparently met and married in the colony and eventually were given a land grant in the Castle Hill-Parramatta district. He speaks of how one afternoon he went looking for their grave in the old cemetery of St. Patrick’s church in Parramatta. Walking there, past a large peppercorn tree, he noticed that just to its right was a rather large obelisk surrounded by an iron picket fence. Lo and behold, that was the grave of William and Anne and many of their descendants and relatives! “I was stunned” says Ross, “because of its enormity, and because of what it must have represented in terms of this couple who had arrived as convicts and who must have ‘made good’ in this new land. From that time it seemed to me to be like a sacred site for my family. It is the grand grave of my first ancestors in Australia. It represents something powerfully indigenous for me.”\(^{58}\) The idea that life can be ‘made good’ here is a very important story and many of us have heard it. One can reach for and ground oneself in these stories of making good. One can be surrounded by the feelings that being here is a good thing.

Fatma; We came here, first to Wollongong, living in the hostel. After we went to Shepparton pick up the tomato. And after living there we buy the farm and grow tomatoes, only tomatoes. My friends live here in Auburn. And my friends come to our farm to pick up the tomatoes. After, they come back here. Next year they come again to pick up the tomato and my children go out to them. There not to many Turkish people there in Shepparton, no party, no wedding. The children say ‘we are going to Sydney, many Turkish there, we want to make the music group’. After seven years they play the guitar and piano. And then they all opened businesses in Auburn. Everyone in Auburn now. Everyone make it good.

These 210 years is not such a short history. To call it short, to see it as short, is to miss its crowdedness and to deny the many lives that fill it. Earlier I mentioned Clifford Geertz’s idea that all communities are characterised by a

\(^{58}\) Ross White, “Getting to Know the Country” in Sense of Place Colloquium 11: The interaction Between Aboriginal and Western Senses of Place (Sydney: UWS Hawkesbury, 1997) p.197.
certain 'practicalness'. Communities 'wise up'. Any wise and mutual maintenance of our society will need to adopt a sophisticated understanding of, and approach to, our various lived experiences. Imaginatively 'seeing through' into this complex sophisticated world involves a recognition that cultural and personal myths also mature and evolve, they too 'wise up' and get more sophisticated.
I'll Believe That When I See It

What are some of the conventions of interpretation that accommodate situations at once fluid, plural, uncentred and untidy? For many people a way of thinking about multiculturalism and difference is as a tolerant pluralism, a rather simple juxtaposing of various identities brought together into some structure of equivalence. There is a question as to who in this model is not culturally specific, who is not ethnic and thereby able to see the collection of cultures as a whole? Pluralism assumes that from one's own imagined identity justice will be done to others. Pluralism is about self identity; my particular sense of self in relation to particular cultural signifiers. (age, class, ethnicity, gender, style). A pluralist society is a sort of collective of homogenous cultures. In 1994, before the recent 'race debate', a Saulwick survey found that 65% of respondents believed Australia was a better place to live because of its diverse ethnic base, 73% believed Australia was a tolerant society, and 63% said that if migrants wanted to mix only with themselves they should not be criticised. Paradoxically, in response to questions about multiculturalism and whether migrants should live and behave like the majority of Australians, the overwhelming majority said they did not know what multiculturalism really means and that migrants should live like most other Australians.¹

Audrey: Oh, I don't know really. I suppose I'd like them to act more like Australian families do. But, oh well, you know, the women, I'd like them to have more say in what they do. Be able to dress without all those scarves and long dresses and things.

At the moment, some Anglo-Celtic Australians feel caught in a dilemma. The first horn of this dilemma is born of the desire to continue living in what

¹ A summary of a Irving Saulwick survey 1994 and reported in The Bulletin (August 30, 1994) p. 27.
Howard called this “comfortable and relaxed Australia” while wanting to identify with multiculturalism. Not with a particular culture within it, but rather, to identify with the whole of multiculturalism, as the author and inventor, as the overseer and as the central defining presence. McKenzie Wark calls this the “paradox of a culture attempting to retain its dominance by publically disavowing it.” The other horn is to react totally against multiculturalism and so reject the system around which cultural difference is ordered. Multiculturalism is a bureaucratic invention, and what is often not understood is that the idea of ‘Anglo’ is also an invention. Anglo culture emerged in the process of establishing multicultural principles. Hanson’s voice speaks for the many people who feel as if nobody has listened to their needs and concerns as they adapt to these social expectations.

Audrey: I suppose I’m a bit uncomfortable really. Not actually in the shops. If you go into the shops I think they’re quite nice to you and all that kind of thing. But it’s just the people walking around the streets. You know out in the street. They don’t seem to be friendly or you don’t expect strangers to be friendly. But they’re just different to Australians, I guess.

Multiculturalism is often presented as the way migrants can move successfully into the future, but with the attending implication that the past is best forgotten. The disintegration of Yugoslavia has been used by some politicians as a good example of why it is necessary to foster this forgetfulness. This is especially so when there is a social fear that warring ethnic groups may take up their struggle here. Multiculturalism as a bureaucratic process would encourage people to lose their taste for old ways. National Party MP Bob Katter Junior, himself a Lebanese ‘boy’, describes this as ‘dewoggling’. It was the premier of NSW, Bob Carr, himself an espoused champion of multiculturalism, who called on Yugoslav migrants to loose their taste for old ways; “We will not

---

tolerate these ancient battles. When you come to live in Australia you must accept our laws and our ways and leave your old ways there. One cannot imagine Hanson and Carr being comfortable bed fellows, and yet they are both caught by this story.

But this isn’t how memory works and people do not easily forsake their pasts. Indeed there is obviously a potential in these various stories for amending and illuminating our contemporary present. “The unfinished project of Australian multiculturalism is not just one of those enlightenment projects for the future, it is also a project to do with the unrealised potential of the pasts Australia has acquired, but cannot clearly articulate.” By telling singular stories about places and events, and about institutions, and the many kinds of cultural inheritance that we share in together, we may then begin to accommodate and interpret more clearly this modern nation.

In the film Colour Bars there is a story told by a Lebanese boy as he travels in the back seat of a motor car. The sequence is filmed in the photographic negative making a familiar journey to the beach strange and tense. It is a story about conflict, about Westies coming down to Cronulla and into the surfie world, ‘Skippy territory’. At issue in this story is territory, style, attitude and difference. It’s about identity and the defence of identity, wogs and skips declaring and defending their difference. The film to some extent flattens out difference into a stereotypical city violence scene of police cars, ambulances, train stations, slow moving footage and a narrative over about the fight and how the cops always ‘take the skips story’. But what also gets told is the story about fitting in and feeling the boundary of one’s presence.

---

4 McKenzie Wark, p. 245.
5 Bob Carr is currently the NSW Labor Premier (1995-).
6 McKenzie Wark, p. 251.
7 Mahmoud Yekta, (Director), Colour Bars (Motion picture) (Sydney: Frontyard Films, 1996). This film was shown on SBS and was a finalist in the 1997 AFI Documentary Awards.
8 In the following chapter Enjoy the Difference, I expand on the this film and its relevance to my thesis.
You fuckin' wogs

You dead shit skip

The incorporation of 'the foreign' and 'the ethnic' into the contemporary cosmopolitan character of this country has been relatively successful. Consider the way this was employed with great sophistication when Anita Keating\(^9\) delivered a principal speech, in Dutch, to help sell the "Sydney 2000" Olympic bid. She both embodied and presented an Australia of multicultural diversity and cosmopolitan style on the world scene.\(^10\) Everyone is included in the image of 'family Australia' in all its diversity. But such a contemporary image can seemingly dissolve ethnicity into a 'sea of faces', which is a metaphor so often favoured as the means of representing our multicultural community. Something important has been lost here in the 'official portrait', but so too something else has emerged. There is a sort of confirmation of the adage 'the whole is more complex than the sum of the parts'. The sea of faces metaphor is very similar as an ideal to the desire for a 'global village': both are thoroughly paradoxical. This is because they attempt to unify individuals and communities yet insist on multiplicity; they suggest a totalized structure which remains deeply unstable, and they function as closed and open-ended narratives at the same time. Nonetheless, these fairly grand metaphors provide official multiculturalism with a means to impose some sense of belonging together, and in the sea of faces one might feel contained and integrated into some version of sophisticated bourgeois cosmopolitanism.

Wissal: Yeah, I go to Chinese restaurants. Turkish restaurants, too. I've been to Italian restaurants yeah, and we also cook like, at home. We don't always cook Lebanese food. My mum cooks spaghetti, you know Italian food, Chinese food, Mexican food, sometimes even Ozzie food.

---

\(^9\) Anita Keating is the wife of the then Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating.

The reality is there can be no objective image of our multicultural society. It is not possible to lay claim to a transcendent notion. That would contradict the very image such a society was supposed to represent. One can’t make an image of a reality so diverse and large and do justice to all its aspects. The image at best will always be incomplete, in process, and yet, while it can’t be described, it can be evoked, but not as some ‘grand narrative’ that might credibly hold us together. Nor is it possible to imagine difference from the perspective of an undifferentiated host culture. Telling the stories of institutions, of individuals and of communities may help shift our thinking, making it easier to accept the ‘diversely constructed realities’ in which we are all embedded. The significance in these stories has to do with telling and hearing of the conflicts, the insights and the joys that continually remain part of the responsibility of this multicultural project.

Serkan: The people coming from other countries, you know we get their culture here, their religions, their food, like everything, you learn about them, they learn about you, like it’s both two ways.

But the ground has shifted with recent events, and there has emerged in the community a strong and open articulation of hostility towards unrestrained diversity, together with a desire to mark more precisely what is particular about this society. I think it is timely therefore to revisit and reinvigorate the story of how successful multiculturalism has been. Sometimes visual metaphors are used to describe our multicultural society; a particular favourite is that of the mosaic. In a mosaic each ‘part’ retains its integrity as part of the whole picture. But I think a more interesting metaphor might be the montage as distinct from a collage.11 Although the montaged image does paste together different elements in making a picture, the process offers the possibility of an

11 I prefer the idea of a montage in that this process involves a much wider artistic principle than collage. Indeed it subsumes the collage and includes the possibility of photography and multimedia. Referencing from the Dictionary of Modern Thought Second edition. (London: Fontana Press, 1988) p.144.
experimental structure, a visual strategy whereby the image is not necessarily fixed and there is no limit either materially or artistically as to what the elements in the picture might be. In this way something like the official portrait of 'family Australia' can be seen as part of any emerging image along with graffiti tags, wogs go home, graduation days at the University of Western Sydney and advertisements for Sydney's Carnivale. Then again it can be drawn over with a pencil or texta, splashed and impregnated with colours, marked and scratched or torn and exposed, photographed, photocopied, faxed, put on the net, played with, related and added to all the time.

Serkan: It was quite hard and different when I first came. I couldn't write English, you know journals, I didn't know even what journal means. So it took me a long time. Of course my friends helped me a lot. I think there were some problems like in my family, like social problems you know. They tried to, you know we came to a new country, that is a new life, but they didn't want us to change, you know. They wanted me to stay like, as like in Turkey. As I was in Turkey. Actually I tried to, I didn't want to disappoint them.

A montage image will, more than likely, not look like the picture one had in mind. There is always the element of palimpsest present in the montage; without this layering there can be no process of emergence and change.

John: You know everybody says, oh it's great now because we can eat all this foreign food. But it's more than that, it just makes you feel good when you look around and you see. Really, in a hundred years I think people will look back at Australia and say well, it actually did work here. You know I really think it's great. When you look at it and you look at the overall effort that most people are making, we'll probably say the 'average Australians' were fairly bloody tolerant.

These 'fairly bloody tolerant average Australians' are a diverse mob, a cultural montage, much more than a 'sea of faces'. The palimpsest quality is in
the way the layering and relationship of the parts slightly efface each other, it is what provides the expectancy of something new. It's as if there is a constant becoming, a vague sense that something is about to happen, something is in the air. This flux of uncertainty that permanently opens a free space for change and evolution of human thoughts and feelings, values and beliefs, aspirations and endeavours, is the major propelling force of creativity. Without being supported by uncertainty, creativity withers. Without being supported by creativity, the communication process becomes trivial and meaningless. Creative communication is a complex dynamic process in which the physical, emotional and mental characteristics of all the people involved are inseparably tangled together. This creative tangling together changes things. What Walter Benjamin\textsuperscript{12} calls the 'domain of tradition' is disrupted when 'foreign' ideas, attitudes and processes become part of a functioning situation.

Serkan: You know, many parents want their children to go back to Turkey to marry. I don't like that. I don't like that type of thing. Because when you go back in Turkey, there isn't lots of people who speak English. Yeah and if you go with that girl, you know, meet that girl, she probably doesn't even speak English. And then you try to explain your feelings, like, how I am living, you know like an Australian; well, she was Turkish, there's lots of difference. You can't like express yourself to her. And she can't express herself to you.

Serkan's experience has gradually detached him 'from the domain of tradition' where his parents wanted him to stay like, as like in Turkey. But his experience was you know, I was living like an Australian. His emerging identity was not tied to a particular meaning anymore. Serkan had entered into the world in ways beyond those of his family tradition.

To make sense of this complex dynamic process of creativity, Dimitrov draws on the study of fluid dynamics to show that the "sucking self-organizing

force at the centre of a vortex cannot appear, unless the participating streams (e.g., masses of running water, turbulent airs, etc.) are: (1) permanently in motion, that is, in an ‘out-of-equilibrium’ state, and (2) intensively interacting with each other through various ‘feedback loops.’ He refers to this as a vortex of communication, a ‘self-organising force’ that makes meaning emerge in human relationships. The participating streams of thoughts and feelings, expectations and hopes, intentions and aspirations, which can be expressed in verbal or non-verbal ways, give rise in Dimitrov’s theory to the idea of ‘living meanings.’ These meanings are always emerging from the “dynamics of life. They are not settled once and for ever, not imposed from outside the vortex, but born from within the vortex and impregnated by its whirling energies.”

Geoffrey Blainey, remains, it would seem, cautious about how these ‘whirling energies’ might emerge. Citing the Gulf War, during which, Blainey suggests, there were real issues of social commotion in some Sydney suburbs, he proposes a contentious scenario. What might happen if eventually 10% of Australia’s population and 30% of the people living in one city were Islamic? “Then, unlike today, we will actually have a multicultural society in which real cultures and values are in fierce competition”. To say this is not “to disparage Islam and its moral and spiritual values” says Blainey, “but a rift between secular Australia and dedicated Islam could become deep.” Blainey’s point is well made, and it may yet be tested. But I can only put this scenario into the web of all other possible meanings and point to the words in the song “It ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at.” The sense that seems to come through these lyrics points to experience as lived. It has to do with being a

---

14 Vladimir Dimitrov, unpublished lecture notes.
16 Eric B and Rakim, Hip-Hop artists off their 1987 Album Paid in Full. http://www.igc.apc.org/ollie/asiansh.html - To pick up the microphone is the modern day equivalent of retrieving a thrown gauntlet. In that one moment, who you are, where you’ve been, and what you’ve done doesn’t matter. The clock starts now. The spontaneity of the moment is one of the raw essences of hip-hop. No past. Only the present. From this Rakim coined his classic phrase “It ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at”.
subject of this contemporary culture, rather than being subjected to a meaning derived from some time in the past.

John: You know we’ve had people come into the library who were obviously Muslim refugees from Bosnia. You know there are women who are not with their husbands, they’re joining the library. They don’t have their husbands so you can only try and imagine what they’ve come through or what problems they’ve had. And you know I’ve got the Croatian and the Serbian books side by side on the shelf. I’ve only ever had one person, in the last four years complain, and ask that the Croatian books be moved to another bay.

Relationships Australia

The design structure of a montage image enhances and relates each part of the image to all other parts while at the same time allowing the parts to retain a certain integrity. The aesthetic draws one into the joys and difficulties of the relationships. Relationships that encourage new stories must accommodate a memory. Memory that allows for a “way of remembering and forgetting” that is very local, and very immediate and personal.  

This sort of memory frequently jumps around from one perspective to another, resulting not necessarily in an homogenous relativism, but in a genuine attempt to negotiate diversity.

Today one can’t talk without using the word relationship, which came into English from the word relation, meaning ‘to tell’. The re part of the word is interesting, meaning ‘again’ and ‘back’ as ‘in turning back’. What is important about relationships are the dimensions or facts of returning and repetition which seem to be “integral aspects of the cyclical phenomenology of relationship; that is, always returning to the same place, the same argument,

the same words, the same feelings, the same mistakes. Many of the words used ‘in relationship’ have this re characteristic like reconciliation, respect, reveal, regret, retract. In each case one is brought back, ‘in relationship’ to the same situations, the same problems, the same reflection in the mirror. Successful relationships involve being able to tell another person about the reality of your experience and to tell it in a personal way. Often one hesitates out of fear, because one may not be understood or because one’s understanding of experience may cruelly reflect upon another. Yet the most difficult and crucial problems that stem from the dynamics within relationships seem to come as a result of ‘not telling’.

Relationships that deny any of those involved a chance to tell of the reality of their experience will ultimately break down. Even if there are good reasons for the relationship to work, this failure at communication will pull them into a state of ecological disintegration. The conversation a community is having about the nature of its beliefs, its values and hopes has to be an open one. Difficult thoughts and ideas have to be shared. This, as Bateson says, is how ecosystems flourish, they are informational systems. Australia survived the Second World War with a population of little more that 7 million people, of whom more than 90% were Anglo-Celtic. Of the entire population, 99% were European. In less than three generations the population has increased by 150% and it has radically changed, ethnically and culturally. The country has maintained 50 years of economic growth together with a remarkably stable political system. At times living in this society has been difficult, especially for some migrants, and of course for the indigenous peoples, but to compare the Australia of 1948 with Australia now is to see a most successful cultural transformation.

---

18 Russell Lockhart, Words as Eggs (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1983) p.117. Russell Lockhart was a former Director of Training at the C.G. Jung Institute in Los Angeles. He continues to practice as a Jungian Analyst in the United States.
So how is it that the relationships which brought about this remarkable transformation seem to fail us now? The community, living with bourgeois affluence, seems to have lapsed into a selective view of unattained ambitions and to have turned its gaze away from actual achievement. John Howard successfully used this discontent to help him win the 1996 Federal election, by blaming certain members of the community for their elitist ways of treating the society. He put it like this in a speech to the Liberal party: "There is a new elite in control of this country, and that new elite is as far removed from the people in this room as you can possibly imagine. You represent that grassroots, the mainstream, the backbone of Australian society."\(^{19}\) By targeting this supposedly elite group and calling on mainstream Australians to reject the vision of a successfully diverse Australia Howard, and Hanson too, have attempted to discredit the achievements of the last four decades.

The social conversation seems to be in some disarray. Nonetheless, there remains, I believe, a desire in the society to maintain worthwhile and imaginative relationships across the various communities. 'Being in a relationship' allows for intimacy, insight, health, and creativity, and there is a common currency to these notions which suggest feelings that are 'deep' or significant. But, as Alice noted, going through the mirror creates an other story.

Nesrin: I was feeling very comfortable in Turkey. We were happy. I did not regret moving back to Turkey. We had started a new life, new friends. Of course our relatives were always there. It was going all very well until my sister failed to enter the uni in Ankara. That's when my mother said they come back to Australia for my sister to study. I said, 'well', to my husband, 'why don't we go back there too. Try a new life and you'll get to see Australia.' He was always talking about it. How is it there, how is it like, and things like that. So we had a chance. I had memories too.

As I write, the senate is debating the ‘Wik amendments’ designed according to their proponents, to “clear up the uncertainty,” but the community, and in particular the Aboriginal and certain sections of the farming communities, have been left in an uncertain situation. Alan Ramsey, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald says: “Native title is now as corrosive of community attitudes as it has been, for five years, of political debate.” Rarely does one wish to embrace uncertainty. Mostly people flee from difficulties, from the suffering that uncertainty generates. People attempt to smooth the waters or try to lay off the burden of suffering. Here, however, is the paradox, here the ‘joker in the pack’ must be played. Because the suffering cannot be avoided. “Suffering is the way to relationship, suffering and relationship go together.” Even the words belong together. Relate comes from the Latin word refero, while suffer comes from the Latin suffero. Both words share the same root, fero, which among other things means ‘to bear’, ‘to carry’, ‘to take up’, ‘to endure’, ‘to put up with’. To suffer (L.suffero) means ‘to bear below’, ‘to submit to’, ‘to undergo, ‘to endure’. To relate (L.refero) means ‘to bear back’, ‘to bring back’, ‘to return’, that is, to bear or carry something again. Thus, in relationship and in suffering, something is a burden, and this burden is carried, again and again, until something new is born. Hansonism has forced the wider community to openly take up the burden of culture and identity, to accept that racist attitudes are part of social relationships and that they will endure. They can be endured, put up with, but they can also be transformed in the process of relationship.

Until something is born. “I cannot reconcile myself” says Noel Pearson, “to the idea that the struggle and the suffering has to be perpetual. We have the

---

20 ‘Clearing up the uncertainty’ has become one of the catch phrases used by the Prime Minister, John Howard, the Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fisher and other prominent advocates of the ‘10-point plan for native title’. The matter has generated enormous confusion and disturbance throughout the Australian community.

21 Alan Ramsey, “Howard feels the white heat” in the Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday May 16, 1998) p. 45.


tools and resources to make the struggle come to an end”.

It is as if the nation’s psyche is poised ‘in relationship’ and the only way to overcome the suffering is to consciously endure it, to allow it to give birth to something else.

**Evoking the Multi Cultural**

The nature of conversation is to produce an intelligence, or better, a meaningful experience that can be shared and which was not ‘there’ before the conversation. The stunning diversity and spontaneity of life-events are continuously revealed in conversations. A conversation is like a spoken (possibly written) montage. Certain kinds of meaning emerged in the conversations with people from Auburn: meanings about language, about space, freedom and confinement and containment, about the instability of cultural worlds, about strangeness and about the familiar. Conversations rely on memory. They also offer a way forward, even though it may be uncertain.

Nesrin: Actually my husband is my grandmother’s sister’s son. So my husband is my father’s cousin, the youngest cousin. My father’s aunty’s son. Did you get that! So I got married to him in Turkey, in Ankara. I had a very good job. I was employed as a secretary with the United States Air Force. I worked till the last couple of months in 1991, till October, that’s when I left my work, my job, to come to Australia.

For the first couple of months we thought we could get a job and my mother could look after our children. We could find ourselves a good job and perhaps within a few years we’ll go back to Turkey again. I don’t know, I think I went through the same path as my father did. We wanted perhaps our children to learn to speak English and go to an Australian School, like the way I did. Unfortunately my sister is attending the Bathurst University, she is far away from us and my

---

mother could not leave her alone there. She wanted to support her. To cook, to
clean so she could have the freedom time for her studies. And my husband is
finding it very hard to get a job. You know, he knows how to speak and write
English, but it wasn't sufficient. They say he wasn't fluent enough. At first they
said he have to speak like an Aussie. He had a hard time understanding the way
Australians spoke.

Conversations are a means by which people communicate and negotiate
their way into relationship. Even in people's everyday communications there is
an expression of the deeply rooted experiences that are stored in their memory,
their behavioural patterns, instincts and the various conceptual and emotional
associations they have made. Human experience is individual, but it involves
as well a shared and common memory. Sometimes memories predominate in
such a way that the communication will essentially be about the past, a
nostalgic reflection. Often the communication in this case takes the form of an
anticipation, perhaps making predictions which are extrapolated from past
experiences and projected into the future. By projecting the past into the future
in this way there is a hope that any uncertainty will be reduced; there is an
attempt to secure a future in the style of the past. I think this can be seen in the
way Nesrin holds to the fantasy of her father. She left her work and with her
husband came to Australia. We thought we could get a job and my mother could look
after our children. Perhaps within a few years we'll go back to Turkey again because, I
don't know, I think I went through the same path as my father did. We wanted perhaps
our children to learn English and go to an Australian school, like the way I did. But
their future hasn't turned as planned. Her mother has gone to live in Bathurst
and her husband finds it hard to understand the way Australians speak. In a
very real way this experience of trying to secure the future by avoiding
uncertainty, and then having it turn out differently belongs to all of us.

The very provocative conversation about Australianness that is being
engaged with at present in our society is to a large extent an expression of
emotional associations about a time when Australia was untroubled by
foreignness. Many of those who feel troubled in this way challenge the assumptions of a multicultural society and ask whether immigration and multiculturalism have been nothing more than an extravagant delusion or a failure. In turn there are those who stand by the multicultural experiment, arguing strongly that its social and cultural successes far out weigh any other possible option for a country so linked to human migration. “Immigration has done great things for our country” said Alexander Downer, “It has created modern Australia, a sophisticated multicultural society, which has tremendous diversity and which rejoices in its diversity. There’s nothing more stolid and uninteresting than a monocultural society.”

The story of multiculturalism is about the very sophisticated and vital idea of taking seriously the foreignness of others and wishing to be in an engaged relationship with them. Such an engaged relationship brings together diversity whether one likes it or not, and in this exchange strangers become known to each other.

di: Oh yes, Lebanon is in my blood, (laugh) I love Lebanon. I’m proud to be a Lebanese. The problem is, as much as I love Lebanon I love Australia. Australia is my home. I was brought up here. I went to school here. I had my children here. So I consider this is my home.

Lodi’s story is the one that takes hold of up my imagination. It is the unfolding story of a coherence emerging from the multicultural experiment. In the face of the current furore about too many migrants, unassimilated ghettos and ethnic Mafias, she points to what makes modern Australia a sophisticated society. Her story is part of the achievement of the last fifty years and it has to be proudly proclaimed.

25 Alexander Downer, quoted as leader of the then opposition Liberal party in The Bulletin (August 30, 1994) p. 27.
The interesting and important contribution of Lodi's story is that cultural coherence is built up in suburbs like Auburn. There are new economies and ways of doing things that replace some tired and old fashioned Anglo ways, resulting often in a dynamic cosmopolitan lifestyle. Sure, the people may look different, there are a variety of languages spoken on the street, but the energy is there and Auburn prospers in a totally new way. This isn't to suggest for a moment that the economic downturn and the closing of nearby industry hasn't had a devastating affect on people's lives. One of the issues to emerge with Hansonism has been a much more critical public conversation about the value and worth of globalisation and economic rationalist policies, policies that have seen massive cut backs in social services, employment programmes, English language teaching and legal aid. In this chaotic discussion it is important to remember that the plight of rural and regional Australians is no more disastrous than that of the migrant families who for many years made up the workforce in the factories and warehouses of big city companies. They too have been shafted by rationalist economic ideas about work, place, value and opportunity.

But there is something vital about places like Auburn. The community generates a peculiar prosperity. It is a vitality and prosperity that has no easy explanation in terms of conventional economics or social management theory. What I think happens in local multicultural economies is that they function in the way Dimitrov describes the vortex of communication. They self-organise and are permanently in motion, intensely interactive and always out of equilibrium. There is a creativity that emerges from an intensity coming from within the community. In a very obvious way one can see this on the main street; there is a commercial buzz and an energy to do with people working the market place. The daily business of getting along in these multicultural communities cannot be expected to take familiar forms.
The whole process of arriving in a new country and setting out to make a life there involves a person continually in an uncertain process. I can’t offer an economic or social analysis of the phenomenological peculiarities of such experiences, although these would certainly be very interesting as further research. Given the accusations and counter accusations about graft, corruption and sorting that has accompanied the public discussion about immigration and multiculturalism so far, I have no doubt about the importance of such research. What I think happens is that a crucial exchange of symbolic forms takes place which helps enable this peculiar prosperity to emerge.

Mej: Well, besides speaking English like, I sort of adapt to things around me. I accept the way things are coming. I mean I don’t like to discriminate and say this is Australian, or this is Lebanese. I’m not going to do that just because it’s not part of my culture. Like I’m a Catholic, I’m baptised, although my parents are Buddhists. Firstly I go to a Catholic school and like I had to be baptised to be able to get into this school. But I have a strong belief in God as well. My dad is very strict about upbringing. He wants the best education for us as possible.

Clifford Geertz points out that even though our human capacity to think is spectacularly multiple, and at the same time wondrously singular as a process, people still find themselves confronted by the paradox of communication. The nature of the paradox has “more and more come to be regarded as having to do with puzzles of translation, with how meaning in one system of expression is expressed in another.”26 The practical implications that flow from this, especially for a multicultural community, is in the very ordinary ways people construct suitable and convenient translations of meaning.

Mej’s story is not uncommon. In the Catholic schools around Auburn there are many young people from all sorts of religious and cultural backgrounds, whose families are continually making decisions about the worth and value of

---

the different symbolic forms that are available to them. What Mej’s parents have done, in the best interest of their children’s education, is to make an investment that involves a translation of symbolic forms which serves both their family and the local communities needs. The practical implications, of the translation, for Mej’s family is a ‘speedy’ passage into the institutions that support and sustain the contemporary public sphere. In other words, Mej is taking advantage of the cultural shift that is on its “way to becoming something else.” She picks up on the local opportunities that make the translation of meaning from one system of expression to another possible. Part of the deal is some integration into the mainstream. Mej’s story is a good example of practical experimentation in which the actuality of her family’s decision to enter into a process of cultural and symbolic translation, makes particular what might otherwise be a theoretical discourse about the puzzle of translation. Her story helps make visible what constitutes an essence of these communities.

Clearly it must also be accepted that it would be grossly irresponsible to romanticise communities like Auburn and overlook the poverty and social disadvantage that can easily be identified there. On any demographic analysis of prosperity Auburn performs badly. For example in the article “The New Ghettos of Sydney” Craig McGregor lists Auburn as one of the poorest areas in Sydney. McGregor’s analysis relies heavily on certain expert opinion and is based, not on any qualitative research about the lived experience of this community, but rather more on measures of financial wealth, poverty, (un) employment and social distress. Most of the analysis was taken from census data and reveals, of course, that high unemployment was clearly associated with areas of low socio-economic status. The obviousness of this would be laughable except that it’s the sort of ‘discussion paper’ which confirms the bias that because an area is lowly in matters socio-economic, and therefore large numbers of people will be unemployed, then the consequence can only be that

“bad pathologies will emerge.”

I rang and spoke with Craig McGregor just to find out what sort of experience he’d had of places like Auburn. Had he visited the suburb? Did he know about the mosque and how this extraordinary and working religious monument was built by one of these ‘poor’ communities? Had he eaten in any of the many Turkish or Lebanese restaurants? Had he tried Palestinian pizza? The sad realisation was that the author didn’t even know that there was a mosque in Auburn, let alone ever having visited the place.

I wouldn’t for a moment consider that McGregor was attempting to belittle communities like Auburn. I suspect he thought his intentions were honourable and that indeed his article may stimulate governments to ‘do something about the problems’. But my concern is that, while bringing attention to the so called plight of these communities, one can also undermine the wider community’s confidence in multiculturalism and in localities that grow by embracing it. We have seen this most recently in the ‘attacks’ on Cabramatta, questioning the legitimacy of its wealth and community energy. In a recent ABC Four Corners program on ‘zero tolerance policing’, it was proposed that the ‘drug problem’ in Cabramatta was equivalent to that of New York and that the only way to stem it was with equivalent policing. The foolishness of this is that in actuality Cabramatta is nothing like New York. In my thesis I support the critique that identifies crime as having a cultural base but this journalism plays right into the hands of people like Hanson, who then make political statements that in effect argue communities like Cabramatta are out of control.

---

29 Cabramatta is an outer western suburb of Sydney in the local government area of Fairfield. It has a population of more than 200,000 and over half of these people were born overseas. In recent years many Vietnamese born people have come to settle in the suburb.
30 Mark Davis, “The Gate Keepers” ABC Four Corners Program (Monday July 13, 1998).
31 This discussion is developed in the chapter “One Nation”.

220
What I am trying to get at is - without underestimating the 'drug problem' there (or for that matter in Chatswood or Pymble or Vaucluse) - that multicultural suburbs have a wealth usually generated out of their own internal creative communications. It has something to do with their capacity to exploit their difference and to appear exotic. So a visit to Cabramatta is like a visit to old Saigon, a visit to Auburn is like a visit to a suburb of Ankara. Cabramatta generates nearly all of its wealth from tourists, not from drugs. It has been so successful in this that the neighbouring local government area of Liverpool wants to emulate its prosperity by encouraging multicultural creative enterprise in the business of Liverpool city.

Nhan: I'm from like, Asian background. When we say the multiculturalism, that's the policy of the government, we really happy. All think that's a good way for us to integrate, assimilating to the bigger society. With the support of the government, we feel better. We feel like more comfortable. And also maybe, if like the government did not have a policy, we feel isolated with the bigger community, something like this.

Our multicultural society actually does work, not withstanding the obvious problems. It has provided for a great many people economic and cultural participation in ways that were once not there. Over the last four decades there has been developing in Australia an institutional culture that, through successive governments, has encouraged and refined progressive social policies. The outcome can be shown to have promoted a society in which justice, fairness, civility and decency have encouraged a great deal of social tolerance. This institutional culture has emerged together with the broadening of tertiary education which has graduated a more diverse, worldly and contemporary group of people, people keen to implement and design social policy.
One could not for a moment suggest that there aren’t persistent inequalities in this, especially regarding the access to cultural and economic resources which have so forcefully been decried, with the continued support of One Nation. Multiculturalism has certainly been promoted and pushed through into the policy and planning for modern Australia. But if the word *multiculturalism* deters people from accepting the implications of contemporary history, then it may be better to rephrase it, though I suspect this is happening in and through the public conversation anyhow. ‘Multiculturalism’, like ‘feminism’ and ‘globalisation’ has become part of the pop language that ‘everybody knows’.

Multiculturalism was intended, in part, to do away with the identification of a ‘problem’ group, and the making of an Other. Hanson however, has managed to turn this intention back onto the institution itself, by identifying multiculturalist as the Other. She says that by “abolishing the policy of multiculturalism we will save billions of dollars and allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia, paving the way to a strong, united country.”\(^{32}\) The policy of multiculturalism is clearly up for re-evaluation. Labor opposition spokesperson on immigration, Martin Ferguson, has insisted that his shadow portfolio drops the name multiculturalism, and he seems quite comfortable with many of the changes this current government has made in regards to the implementation of multicultural policy. Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki, in his essay *Towards a Multicultural Society in Australia*, asks whether “the continued use of the term multiculturalism is not a deterrent to the acceptance of an ideology that seeks the pursuit of justice, fairness, civility and decency for all Australians.”\(^{33}\) It may be that the ‘artifice of multiculturalism’ needs revision because it has tended, at least in the public perception of the

---

32 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
33 Jerzy Zubrzycki, “Towards a Multicultural Society in Australia” in *Australia 2000: the ethnic impact* ed., M. Bowen (Armida: University of New England, 1977) Jerzy Zubrzycki was Emeritus Professor at ANU (Australian National University) and a long time advocate of a multicultural policy for Australia.
institution, to mask a simplistic biculturalism, in the form of an Anglo/non-
Anglo divide. The complexity of the interactions that take place between
people and communities in this society cannot be apprehended in this way.
Such a simple interpretation of multiculturalism has made it possible for
extreme passions, at either end of the divide to organise, pushing their
intentions onto the wider community.

The Conversation the Nation Had to Have

In the end it is a matter of conviction. A progressive multicultural society
promotes and encourages people to participate in the peculiar way history has
accumulated and is accumulating here. As enthusiastic as I am, I acknowledge
that the emergence of strident racist, nationalist and class resentments in
Europe, Africa and Asia sound a warning that similar madness can emerge
here too. Such destructive spontaneity follows on from confrontation and
alienation, and it is not too difficult to identify forces that would lead to a
breakdown in communication for us here, in this country, today. The militancy
with which some groups in the society face each other down, especially around
One Nation political rallies, is new and troubling. However, I think that it is
the process that matters, rather than any particular content. That people still
worry and wonder about Australianness means that it is always coming into
existence, even if it is never quite the same for everyone.

Mej: There was a pool party last year, at my Sri Lankan friend's house. I went to
that and then we also had a sleep over. I was allowed to go. You know my friend
doesn't speak Sri Lankan. She speaks only English. She's weird. Well, not weird
but she's not Sri Lankan at all. She's like very Australian. What's weird is some
people think Australians have a pot belly, beer belly, thongs and singlet and
shorts. But I don't think it's really that. I don't think there's a way to describe an
Australian. Because Australia is so multicultural. I mean like it's pretty hard to
define one. But I suppose anyone is an Australian if they live here.
Without hesitation Hanson’s propositions have to be wisely countered. As Malcolm Frazer has said “she is just plain wrong, and wrong in a way that can lead to great evil.” Yet Hanson is a public figure, and what constitutes the value of a public figure is their “unique challenge to our ability to find a way to hear them that moves us closer to the difference they articulate, without losing our grasp on our own experience and judgement.” An interesting feature in the public sphere conversation is that the ‘speaking position’ is no longer occupied solely by intellectual pundits or political leaders. The importance of Hanson herself is proof that traditional hierarchies no longer apply. If this conversation can proceed and not be over simplified through the ‘usual channels’ of being ‘talked down to’ by various interest groups, then possibly appropriate forms of sophisticated politeness may emerge and form the base out of which people’s sympathies can fit together. One can listen in, participate even. It is happening on all the different talk-back radio programs. One can read about it in the weeklies like The Bulletin, and Women’s Day, or watch it on current affairs programs. Despite Howard’s wish for multiculturalism and Aborigines to be off the front pages, they are still there in The Financial Review, The Herald, The Age and The Australian. As a society many of us have become party to this conversation, the conversation the nation had to have. It was time, and it’s clearly very important. It is a feature of television soaps, daytime television and talk back radio. It’s there in advertisements and letters to the editor, in parliamentary debates, the Internet and ‘on the street’, at dinner time and in the work place. This is where it’s at!

Van: You know, before I come to Australia, I want to come. Because I don’t want to live in, you know, I feel I was trapped in the system. I am not allowed to think. It’s more about a political thing. But also, besides from political reasons, the other thing is also, I hated the way the Vietnamese culture portrays women. You know

34 Malcolm Frazer, Prime Minister of Australia 1975-83 commenting on Pauline Hanson’s 60 Minutes, interview.
35 McKenzie Wark, p. 264.
the way parents see education different between boys and girls. I think I have better prospect in the new country. I may be able to be educated and to study and find work. In our country, I mean a women marries around 16, 17, 18 years old. But here, I think I can see myself a little bit different. In terms of things I start to know. To see the difference in me. In my country women are generally the one in the kitchen, who prepare the cooking and everything at the function. Also the one who clean up the mess and sometimes live in the kitchen. Definitely I think it is better here, in this regard.

Van can see herself a little bit different in terms of things I start to know, and the possibility of becoming something else takes on a reality. There is a singularity in Van’s story but it is also a fragment of the history of stories that tell of how this place came to be. In this there is also a certain ambiguity, because her story is prophetic. It tells of what our place might be, how we see ourselves a little bit different in terms of things we start to know. To keep a public conversation flowing in ways that enhance our community and provide opportunities for us all to join in involves a gentle nudging along from within the vortex of communication, so that unifying forces gradually become clearer and stronger. A recurring motif in the film Colour Bars is that of the finger print. It is there in the moisture on a Coke can and it is beautifully ‘flagged’ across a desert scene. We are left with questions of identity, with the possibility of leaving our sticky fingerprints on the things of a place richly inhabited.
Enjoy the Difference

A journey on a Sydney train today means travelling in a carriage with people from all corners of the globe. Twenty years ago, this would not have been the situation, and when I was born, just at the conclusion of the Second World War, the people in my suburb, and in my city would have nearly all been Anglo-Celt Australians. When I drop my youngest child off at school, he is greeted by friends whose faces tell of ancestors who lived in the countries of Asia, or middle Europe or the islands of the Pacific. I am never indifferent to this. It strikes me each time, the enormity of the change that has taken place in this society. I notice too that the school routine hasn't changed all that much. The playground is alive with various ball games and clusters of children talking and jibing each other, parents lingering and making arrangements and then slowly leaving the teachers to take care of their kids. This image is possessed with a great familiarity; there is the same old school looking after these children. In this part of the thesis I want to consider the very essence of what it means to be a subject of and participant in the multicultural society which has been emerging and developing in this land for at least two centuries.

There is an expansion in the aesthetic investigation of ourselves as people in a new relationship with each other. I am interested in the recent phenomenon where people who have been kept apart by ancient structures of power, such as religious-tribal-place affiliations or economic deprivation, now find themselves living in a new country with new neighbours and new expectations. Expectations are exciting. As well as holding the great uncertainty that comes with not knowing how things may turn out, there is also no way of foreseeing the quality and characteristics of this great intermixing of people in Australia. For this reason important social matters like: what is the population of
Australia to be? and what might it look and feel like to live in this population? have to be openly discussed. Now that these issues are subjected to a public wary of political cover ups, it is important to make them matters of continued public involvement.

Barry Jones, President of the Australian Labor Party, who, as Paul Sheehan says, let the 'cat out of the bag', said “the handling of immigration by the previous (Labor) government was, I'd have to say, less than distinguished. Partly because, I think, immigration was seen as very important, a tremendously important element, in building up a long-term political constituency. There was a sense that you might get the Greek vote locked up or, you might get the Chinese vote locked up.” Sheehan takes this further by arguing that whenever Labor’s politics were scrutinised, especially in matters to do with funding ethnic communities in certain electorates, the party would resort to accusations of racism and threaten with anti-discrimination prosecution. I have no idea as to whether this is true, but this sort of anecdotal information has become common currency, giving a new latitude to some people to express feelings that had been formerly repressed.

When One Nation spokesperson Robyn Spencer announced at the launch of their policy on matters to do with immigration and population, that currently 70 percent of all migrants coming to live in Australia are from Asian countries, she clearly had her facts wrong. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that the number of Asian migrants into Australia is only about 37 percent of the total. It’s easy and it’s important to point this

---

1 Barry Jones MP, Former Federal Minister and currently President of the Australian Labor Party, speaking at the Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population National Conference, Sydney (30 August, 1997).
4 Migration 1995-96, ABS catalogue No. 3412.0.
discrepancy out, but one must also take into account that even at this rate of immigration, more than a third of the migrants coming into Australia are from Asian countries, making many people feel as if the place is being Asianised, *swamped by Asians*, as Hanson says.

Fatma: *Auburn now, not like before. Auburn before very nice. Now too many different people. Dirty on the road and very cheap, you know cheap things. No find the nice thing, not like before. Maybe too much Chinese thing.*

The LGA of Auburn has the second highest population of NESB residents in the greater Sydney region (44.3%) of which the Vietnamese are currently the largest ethnic community, that is a bit over 7%.\(^5\) What Fatma is responding to is how she feels about her suburb and in particular how she feels, or senses what it's like in certain parts of her suburb. I also suspect she is picking up on popular sentiments that pervade the streets which have something to do with ill-defined resentments and a selective view of her own expectations and prejudices. These sentiments may be fueled by 'off the record' anecdotal information, because most government departments have been discouraged from making any statistical compilation that may breach non-discriminatory policy. All this is by way of saying that when people have tried to understand the implications of contemporary immigration and population strategies there is an unreliable body of knowledge to refer to.

How people participate in the public conversation about our society will involve all their quirks and prejudices, their insights, their compassion, and their ambivalence. These are the human qualities that a socially ecological epistemology must incorporate. When ordinary Australians think about these matters they will take on board that the public politics involved will be versions of what is expedient. What has been revealed about the former Labor

---

government's process around multiculturalism and immigration will, in its own way, be repeated by the Coalition government. Most people will note that population theories are at best unpredictable. And, contrary to 'the facts', people will always have feelings about their locality, based on a mix of memory, gossip and personal experience. Most people too, I suspect, will accept a degree of sorting of the system.

- **From the moment of arrival in a new place, different possibilities emerge**

It is easy to write statements that praise diversity, while condemning xenophobic tendencies in our community. One-dimensionality and uniformity are indeed real dangers and if we are to live together with our differences, then surely praise of diversity is a good way to start. Yet I find myself cautious of diversity that has no regard for common, overarching social values. This caution is heightened when I notice perspectives, like the ones taken by Felix Guattari, which I suspect would add fuel to the fires burning in the community. He argues that the goal of a community like ours is not to arrive at a rough consensus on a few general statements covering the ensemble of current problems, but, on the contrary, to favour what he calls a "culture of dissensus."

Such a culture would strive for a deepening of individual positions and a "resingularisation of individuals and human groups." What folly, he says, to claim that "everyone - immigrants, feminists, rockers, regionalists, pacifists, ecologists and hackers - should agree on a same vision of things! We should not be aiming for a programmatic agreement that erases their difference." Guattari seems to be maintaining that the need to express difference is a sort of eternal truth. For him, one's cultural identity is inscribed in one's being.

---

7 Felix Guattari, p. 114.
He asserts the right to be differentiated as an individual. "There is no reason" he says "to ask immigrants to give up their national affiliations or the cultural traits that cling to their beings." But I would contend that an individual's, or a community's, claim to difference will be both subjected to and implicated in the pause and movement of lived space and time. The more certain and predictable people's particularities are, the less free they become in being able to move and play with the contingencies and uncertainties that emerge from a dynamic society. Presumably they would also be limited in the way they may choose to construct, reconstruct and deconstruct themselves.

Tranh: Well, I've learnt to live with different people you know, so I think of myself most as an Australian. But there is a side of me that is Vietnamese.

What are the cultural traits that cling to the being of Tranh? Has he given anything up?

Tranh: I celebrate New Years Day on January 1 as well as celebrating Chinese New Year a bit later.

There is nothing particularly special about this, now that both celebrations have been transformed into one long hot summer of consumer pleasure in Australia. But Tranh seems to have incorporated himself into the historical contingency that is multicultural Australia. Tranh's way of thinking about himself most as an Australian calls me to reconsider my relationship to ideas of an inherent originality. How does Tranh's history and his incorporation into the social dynamics of Australia alter my sense of being Australian?

Obviously there will be a self-consciousness in any reflection upon how one may respond to these phenomenological changes. When Lyotard poses the
question *what ought we to be?*, he exposes the difficulty this community has in presuming an agreement concerning these things around which we should differ from each other. And of course, just who is this 'we' in the community? "The general feeling is that a discussion (necessarily dialectical in the Kantian sense, that is, without terms, and lacking in proof, since it is a matter of Ideas which cannot be decided upon through recourse to reality) could do no more than put the 'we' back into the question."{9} So the 'we' remains presumed, in this case 'we Australians'. Hanson and others claim to speak for 'ordinary decent Australians'. While arguing that One Nation policy isn't discriminatory, she would prefer that if people come to, and then choose to live in this society, they willingly let go of their former national affiliations and cultural traits. Hanson wants the differences to dissolve into ordinary Australianess. Iris Young says: "Today the Other is not so different from me as to be an object. Discursive consciousness asserts that Blacks, women, homosexuals, and the disabled are like me".{10} Here is the paradox. I do not feel, in my being, such dissolution of difference in day to day experience. Blacks, women, homosexuals and the disabled are not like me. I don't know the uncertainty 'they' know.

I acknowledge that it is important to continually conceptualise difference, and to preserve and rescue notions of difference from the singularising language of 'all mankind'. Equally important is to understand that some European Australians look at and portray their culture as the universal norm, expecting that Aboriginal, Asian and Arabic Australians will conform. Yet I remain doubtful about claims for difference that can be understood as an incontestable reality of human experience. It is not clear to me that our multicultural society will be well served by the valorisation of 'dissensus'. What I want to get at here is that if the cultural traits that 'cling to a being' are fixed and predictable and somehow always in the shadow of a particular

---


conditioning, then individuals and communities will never be able to change, and clearly this is not the case. Dorian Sagan makes the point that a disturbance to a predictable system’s normal ecology does not necessarily signal a problem so much as the emergence of difference and novelty. The implication of this is that even though an individual or a community of people may insist on claiming their cultural and genealogical difference, certain contingencies, such as migration, will always disturb and alter the 'condition of their being'. In other words, a particular genealogical difference partially gives way to difference that emerges with changed circumstances.

Certain contemporary thinking in biology takes as its theoretical sources the Gaia principle, symbiotic evolution and the idea of gene-trading. This thinking challenges the more traditional biological concepts for which the paradigm of individuality is the organizing notion. The individual participates in life, which is thought of as a game where some organisms beat others and win in the way Thomas Huxley referred to life as a 'gladiator's show'. Sagan proposes a way of thinking about life as a montage of various states of symbiosis whereby individuals and the communities they participate in, are continually incorporating change. Such incorporation doesn't automatically imply the dissolving away of uniqueness. What it does imply is rather more like what in the mathematical field of game theory is known as a nonzero-sum game. "A zero-sum game is one like ping-pong or chess, where one player wins at the expense of the opponent. An example of a nonzero-sum game would be children playing house or war: more than one player can 'win' or succeed, and more than one side can lose." Life is really far more a nonzero-sum game because to succeed, a process of cooperation and sharing in the contingencies that emerge, provides the most effective strategy.

12 Quoted in Dorian Sagan, p. 365.
The individual is not a single entity separate from the environment, which is itself alive. The idea of an individual is really something “abstract, a category, a conception”\textsuperscript{14} which functions only minimally in complex biological/social systems. Such systems tend to evolve in ways that are beyond any narrow category or conception of notions like ‘good for the individual’. The history of life seems to be much more a process of symbiotic relationships in which dissimilar individuals or community groups live together in mutual dependence and for mutual benefit while retaining certain endemic characteristics. This is a more appropriate metaphor than hybridity through which to think about the sharing of our differences. Symbiotic relationships are complementary and could include the idea of a merger, or alternatively, an enduring distinctiveness.

Being a ‘member of this society’, a participant in the larger community identity, shouldn’t mean that each individual or community group would share in exactly the same vision of things, or would give up the ‘cultural traits that cling to their being’ and which identify people as Muslims, or Buddhists or gay or what ever. A good example comes from the www Internet site Asians in Hip Hop. Here I read that “at the same time, I also know it’s not necessary for me to wear my ethnicity as a badge when I flip on the mic, that doesn’t mean I forget who I am, ethnic pride is important, but like all things, even that has limits on context. Being Asian in hip hop is no more significant than being Asian in engineering or Asian in banking.”\textsuperscript{15}

Sagan makes the point that the individual body is not one self, determined in its separateness “but a fiction of a self built from a mass of interacting selves. An individual’s capacities are literally the result of what it incorporates, the self

\textsuperscript{14} Margulis and Sagan, p.124.
\textsuperscript{15} “Asians in Hip-Hop” http://www.igc.apc.org/ollie/asianshh.html
is not only corporal but corporate."\textsuperscript{16} The idea of incorporation outlines a complexity particular to the contemporary world. In a sense it can encompass the various themes of integration into social and technical organisations. As well, it might be thought to involve the process of embodiment through which a person engages in the subtle, shifting and often invisible patterns of historical movements. In this way a person’s relationship to the dynamics of a local social system will be interdependent and continually self-updating.

Fatma: Everything I like now. My husband like too. My children like. My son is one that have the computer shop and video shop here in Auburn. That is why we are happy. I didn’t think I was going to be happy first, because no family here to help us understand, no nothing. At that time anyone can become our friend we are glad. But every year now it change and now I’ve got my Turkey here. (laugh)

From the moment of arrival in a new place people encounter an intimation of new possibilities. In a way this helps them feel at home in that place. It’s like an infatuation, being in love, not certain that you have acted wisely but nonetheless you are swept up in the fantasy. In this infatuation it is hard to keep the mind and imagination still; they are always taking new measures, plotting and generally busily working away. There is the possibility of entering into the new place with commitment. The Latin word \textit{committere} means to ‘bring together’ into union, ‘in combination’ and also ‘to connect’. However the root word here, \textit{mitto}, means to ‘send away’, ‘to dispatch’ ‘to realise’. Commitment is a paradoxical word then. A true commitment to another requires letting them go, letting them be themselves. One is bound into a relationship when one allows the other freedom. Commitment is about the bringing together of different entities while at the same time allowing them to be free, to be themselves. So, with commitment there comes responsibility and a trust that out there will be others with whom one might have an open ended

\textsuperscript{16} Dorion Sagan, p. 370.
conversation about the shared experiences of living in this society. In a conversation one must try to make one's meanings and intentions intelligible. This is not necessarily the same thing as the imposition of reason. People can seek meanings together, without assuming or without demanding that these meanings be rational, or context-free, or fixed forever. The essence is to open up, and keep open, possibilities. When one keeps one's imagination open to possibilities, enjoyment can emerge.

That Is Just So Cool, Baby!

According to Terry Eagleton aesthetics is "born as a discourse of the body." Aesthetics have played an important role in modern thought, no doubt in part because of the diverse ways in which the term has been used. "For a notion which is supposed to signify a kind of functionlessness, few ideas can have served so many disparate functions". Aesthetics have figured in the preoccupations of discourse around freedom and legality, spontaneity and necessity, self-determination, autonomy, particularity and universality. If one's cultural traits clinging to one's being, then what is happening for Tranh when he feels the side of him which is Vietnamese, and at the same time thinks of himself as Australian? This is the aesthetic idea I would like to pursue.

In its original formulation the term 'aesthetic' does not refer to art or to the rarefied domain of conceptual thought, but to the whole region of human perception and sensation, as the Greek Aisthesis would suggest. "The world of feelings and sensations involves nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together." The business of affections, diversions and aversions and of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, all take root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our "most banal biological insertion into the

---

18 Terry Eagleton, p. 13.
19 Terry Eagleton, p. 13.
world”. The way people feel about difference and strangeness is often experienced in the body and can be expressed in a great variety of emotional ways. An aesthetics that takes one bodily into the experience of living in a multicultural society, into its sensuous nature, is necessary when the community is asked to consider notions like FitzGerald’s *Is Australia an Asian Country?* or Hanson’s claim that a multicultural country can never be strong or united. People feel and sense something with their bodies when they experience ideas like these.

Narelle: Like if you can’t talk to them, you know, like some gangs you can’t explain to them what you feel because they’re always different. Sort of thing. And they don’t care. They just want to bash people. Like Lebanese verse Turkish, Turkish verse Anglo and Vietnamese verse something else. But a lot of blame is pointed at the white Australians. Like, if the Turkish guy goes something back, you know, slags off, nothing is said. Like they call you a skip, and you know, other things. It’s always about the war, like Gallipoli. Turkish don’t like you because you did this. The Australians killing some Turkish. And if I retaliate then they come back with something else. They’d say something about your mother. Like my parents are divorced and every time I have an argument they always go on about my parents being divorced. Then it goes into racism.

Narelle’s feelings here have to do with frustration at being misunderstood and the confusion that is sensed when something ‘isn’t fair’. She thinks about it, and it concerns her that every time she has an argument with her Turkish friends, they can turn on her and go on about her divorced parents. But she is also in a relationship with her school friends that seems to accommodate her feelings about multiculturalism and difference.

---

20 Terry Eagleton, p. 13.
Narelle: Well, you know, I ask my friends a lot of questions. We do Asian Studies at school and that's like learning about Asian countries. So my friends are basically Asian and Turkish. So I ask them what happens in their countries, you know about commerce and different things like that. I try to improve my knowledge by reading the newspapers and listening to news on the radio and television, and different things like that.

So, the social structure that Narelle is involved with is constantly unfolding and changing, and to a real extent she is caught up bodily in this. The relationship between Narelle and her friends certainly involves a degree of physicality, fights and squabbles, but also alliances are formed which rely upon mutual exchange, a sort of symbiosis of the classroom. In this atmosphere the nature of their shared world unfolds and takes shape. Aristotle described such 'atmospheres' as what one “bodily steps into and what modifies his (sic) disposition”. Or as Eagleton puts it, “the world strikes the body on its sensory surface”, and our bodies respond.

For Aristotle the world is perceived in a bodily sense; one's whole being moves 'over the land' and this process sensuously creates the lifeworld. The lifeworld - with all its shared networks of place, kin and obligation - continually unfolds with a movement that is neither linear or logical. Aesthetics leads us out from the contained space of theoretical discourse and social analysis into the streets, shops, parks, homes and barbeques as well as into the places of worship, providing a new approach to how we see and appreciate ourselves. I am not trying to evoke the sublime, to move beyond the banality of ordinary Australian life. It is this very ordinary life that I am interested in as an aesthetic process.

Koksal: Yes well Auburn is a village to me. And the people in the Turkish

---
21 Terry Eagleton, p.100.
22 Terry Eagleton, p.13.
community, when they talk about it, they say, 'oh look, my village'. I'm not a religious person, but most of the time the Turkish people we tried very hard to build the mosque. And they're still working hard, so it's a small part of Turkey or a part of the Turkish community that contributes to Auburn. It's not just the mosque of the Turkish community. Turkish community has also fought and built the, what do we call it, Australian Turkish Childcare Centre. So during that time I was coming to work, I was bringing my daughter all the way here, so she could learn Turkish. Not forget about it. So really, you can compare Auburn with the mosque, with the childcare centre. Auburn can also be compare with the ANZ bank or Westpac. The reason I'm saying the bank, you know, years ago people leave Auburn, but still live in Sydney, they might live in Penrith, or Blacktown or Katoomba, they still have an account with Auburn ANZ or Westpac. When I am filling out Department of Social Security forms for people, and I ask 'where do you want your payment', and the person lives in Blacktown, 'which account', the account is always in Auburn.

The Aristotelian theory of aesthetics is sometimes called phenomenological because it is about what adheres to the immediately given, what clings to one's being. Such an aesthetic theory is appropriate when asking: what is it like to be a migrant? What is it like to have migrants move into my community? What is like to make friends with new neighbours? There is for me, a pleasure in this aesthetic because of the possibility of surprise. This doesn't for a moment imply a romantic quest for a beautiful life. A multicultural society involves living with the confusion of knowing that people with very different expectations share the same neighborhood. We Australians are engaged in a conversation about how to live together in this society, which means being prepared to accept the messiness and intermingling, the ecology that is generated in what I have called a soulful engagement with the world. To a considerable extent this conversation is difficult and unsettling. This is a particularly good basis for an aesthetic that is social and ecological, in that to engage with commitment to this conversation there is a need to emphasises relationality, or 'being there for the other.'
Speaking after accepting the *Australian of the year* award, Cathy Freeman said “when people see me, often all they see is another Australian athlete having a go. It isn’t until they see the full Cathy Freeman that they realise how proud I am of my ancestry and heritage. I’d like a little more tolerance and acceptance of my culture and all the differing cultures that make up Australia.”\textsuperscript{23} Cathy seems to be offering a new interpretation of how to identify as just *another Australian having a go*, and maybe the story she is telling about difference, especially the one she offered as the person wrapped in both the Aboriginal and National flags, can somehow cut through old categories that identify ‘mainstream Australia’. This story has a certain playfulness, it’s ‘really cool’, while at the same time it offers up to our ordinariness a very serious proposition.

When Cathy ran her victory lap draped in both flags, I sense she stepped *through the looking glass*, and took others of us with her into the realm of imagination. If you recall Alice’s story, she was not content simply to see herself in the mirror, she wondered what the world on the other side of the glass was like. And, in this pretending, this imagining, the solid glass gave way, and she was in that world on the other side of things. In ‘going through’ Alice encounters a very different world. Engaging with one’s imagination is important, it helps one overcome a tendency to want experiences that are determined and normalised. One could imagine Cathy Freeman’s Australia as one that is more tolerant and accepting of her culture and all the differing cultures that make up this place.

The process won’t necessarily be political or even educational. Stories like Cathy Freeman’s Victory Lap can absorb one bodily (and of course intellectually). Trying to live out the golden rule of most moral codes, ‘doing

\textsuperscript{23} Cathy Freeman, in Evans, L & Jamieson, T, "Top Aussie Cathy calls for a fair go" in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, (Monday January 26, 1998). Cathy Freeman is currently the world 200m athletics champion. When she won gold at the 1994 Commonwealth Games, she draped herself in the Aboriginal flag as well as the Australian national flag for her victory lap.
unto others as you would have them do unto you', personalises the experience of difference. If one can imagine what it's like to be in another's shoes, as a personal thing, one may then find access to others with one's heart. Nominalists might disparage this way of expression, "calling it rhetoric with emotive meanings only." But it is this emotional recognition that can shift the discussion. By imagining through and beyond what the eye sees, the ear hears and the tongue speaks, people may 'go through' to connect.

Aliens

Commitment to a society involves us in work. But commitment to society, according to Terry Eagleton, also involves understanding ambivalence by preserving something of the "skeptic stance towards social reality" that is necessary for committed social work to 'be real'. Being committed combines work "with positive belief". There is something of a 'positive belief' in the words that Cathy Freeman used, even though they recognise the difficult and unsettled situation in which we find ourselves as a community. She asks for a commitment to change, that we be 'more tolerant and accepting' of our differences. This signifies a task, something to be achieved rather than received. The commitment will involve the community ethically. Ethics in this sense means being "infinitely interested in existing" together.

Wissal: You know, when I think of Benny Elias, it's like saying you know, we're capable of doing anything, even though we do come from a Lebanese background. It also says that we got rights. You know as any other Australian. Yeah, well it's like our culture and what Australia has provided, and the difference between the way we were brought up and the way my parents were brought up back in Lebanon. Well you know these are things that are happening.

25 Terry Eagleton, p. 176.
It's not only Lebanese it's many other cultures here also. People have to realise that we are all going on. Whenever something bad happens in another country it doesn't mean it's also got to happen here, you know.

The business of sharing histories, respecting differences, and noticing what it is that Australia has provided, requires both body and mind. Sometimes this undertaking will be difficult because it demands engagement in a process of 'endless becoming'. This means there will not be clear resolutions and certainties. In this way it will be difficult. The work involved must, as it were, be taken on trust. Wissal's sense of being Australian involves her fully as part of her identity. She seems to be holding on to a positive belief and is interested in the things that are happening. She knows that there is a dynamic between being Lebanese and what Australia has provided; she knows that her people are capable of doing anything, and she knows that there are many other cultures here also and together we are all going on.

Van: I do not want to confuse you, but I think multiculturalism is work. Work in the sense that it only work when people willing to meet each other, and to have the means to communicate, I mean in terms of language, the time, and the resources, and the willingness. In this sense it is work. But it's not work when the concept become, you know, using for, I mean a token one. For me multicultural mean that you explore to different culture and not afraid of that. Happy to export to other culture. Happy to not afraid of someone invading. I do have a certain level of racist attitude with some people. I can see there is level of racist tension among different groups. Like you know, the sort of slogan; "Asians out" or "Asian people are like this" and "Turks like that". Community workers also take part in you know, how do you call it, keeping the people away from each other.

What is there to find in this conversation with Van? Van speaks of exploring different culture and not afraid of that. Happy to export to other culture. Happy to not
afraid of someone invading. This reviewing of her world in the light of what she sees in others, her willingness to meet each other, and to have the means to communicate and her ‘passionate interestedness’ in not afraid of someone invading is, I suggest, a transformation of her horizons. She opens up to possibility and embraces the unfamiliar. Van is a community worker with the Asian Community Centre where she works to facilitate and ‘bridge the gap’ between her ethno-specific community and the larger community structures of welfare, work and the suburb. Each day she engages in the ‘social drama’ as a lived experience, an aspect of which is the way bureaucratic agencies, like the Asian Community Centre itself, is complex and contradictory about matters of difference.

Quite often these centres encourage their own form of xenophobia. Van explains this xenophobia in this way. While community centres try to maintain good relations with the state and local authorities, by monitoring and promoting various projects, which in turn may provide opportunities for a certain economic independence in the form of funding grants; sometimes, she says, the community workers themselves can hold ‘the community’ back. The community’s particular difference is used keep the people away from each other.

Van: It relates to the state of dependencies. That’s why the worker and also the leader is the one. You know if we have a good worker, a good leader the community is more easy to reach out. If we don’t have a good worker or a good leader they are the one who hold back. Hold back and say, ‘hey don’t move’”.

Not moving provides her community with a form of social pattern, a concept of community- hood, which marks a public identity both contextually and relatively. It does so in terms of tribe, territory, language, religion and family. There is a deep resonance when people interact with one another in terms of categories: we are Asians, we are Vietnamese Catholics, we are refugees. Clifford Geertz questions what this can tell us, ”or could if it were done
adequately, about the ‘others’ point of view.’ Can we know and understand the way a person is defined? “One hops back and forth between the whole, conceived through the parts that actualise it, and the parts, conceived through the whole that motivates them.” This is, of course, much more like the way one perceives lived experience. Difference can disappear or it can be there ‘in your face’.

Audrey: Well actually living here where I am, it hasn’t really affected me much at all. Though, I’m not really keen on having ethnic people all through Australia. I sort of think that, they’re going to more or less take over in a few years to come. Not in my time I suppose. I think we’ve got too many of them. We let too many in especially now, like when jobs are scarce. But then again they create work too. But I’d rather have it without too many of them. But around, just as I say, around here, where we live, there are quite a few ethnic people but they all seem to be very nice. There’s not many Middle Eastern ones. There is a Middle Eastern family a few doors up the street, they’re quiet and very nice, always say hello to us. But I’ve got an idea that the man there has two wives. There’s quite a few children up there. There’s the two ladies and a lot of children. But we’ve only ever seen the one man. So I sort of feel they shouldn’t do that. They don’t seem to be integrating. They’re just staying different.

Aliens 2

Many immigrant families arriving in a new place are deprived of familiar foods, like fruits, vegetables and condiments. Quite often there are creative responses of substitution. Ghassan Hage relates a story from a Lebanese family who lived in Bathurst in the 1940s. This is a story about how tahini would arrive by boat every now and then. “We used to go through long periods without it. Sometimes we used to really crave for tahini dishes. Finally, we

---

28 Clifford Geertz, p. 69.
improvised: either Mum or Dad, I can’t remember, probably inspired by the similarity between the texture of peanut butter and that of tahini, decided to grind some peanut butter with garlic and oil and we used it as a substitute for tahini sauce with grilled fish. Long after, when tahini became always available I used to sometimes crave for peanut sauce.”29

Our Modern era has been characterised by massive displacement of populations, wealth, cultural ideas and identity. We are almost all migrants. Even if we have tried to stay at home, the conditions of life have changed so utterly in this century that we find ourselves strangers in our own land. So, despite the normality of displacement and the relatively successful integration of immigrants, one still finds a yearning for the “purification of racial roots and the extermination of alien elements.”30 Pauline Hanson, who worked as a ‘cocktail waitress’ in the Penthouse Nightclub on the Gold Coast, says the “average Aussie out there is saying, ‘it’s not the Surfers Paradise that we used to know’. People are sort of feeling that they’re losing something that was theirs. Like you’re in your country but it’s another world. By all means allow investment into the country, but I think we’ve got to be selective. If you’re not an Australian citizen I don’t believe you should be able to own property in this country. We’re losing control of this country.”31 The ‘average Aussie’ does know and feel that things have changed and gone from their world. There is a sense in which the appearance of their country is now somewhat alien. While most people accept that communities have become very fluid and flexible and the crossing of all sorts of boundaries is relatively easy, there is still concern about the ‘loss of control of the country’ and a yearning for ‘the extermination of alien elements’. What this seems to point to is that for some people there is a need to re-invent a certain ‘Australian dream’.

31 Pauline Hanson, in David Leser “Pauline Hanson’s bitter harvest” in the Good Weekend, Sydney Morning Herald (November 30, 1996) p. 27.
Such a dream involves a nostalgic journey to a time when everything looked perfect (The Surfers Paradise that we use to know). The belief is that if only the community would still strive towards that dream then everything that is unsettling us today would be resolved. This 'perfection myth' has value in so far as people need to imbue their striving with meaning, to understand their striving as purposeful. But while people may strive for this dream, the dream can have no literal reality. It will remain unfulfilled. The dream is a necessary fiction, pragmatically necessary as a "goal that points beyond". Hillman says of dreams that they are "absolutely necessary for the health of the individual." Hanson, however, imagines quite literally, and clearly, a dream that defines Australianness. The dream seems to have more to do with a time and place when Australian identity had some measurable standards like full employment, when country towns prospered and Australian industries worked to supply a viable local market. Hanson's dream has struck a chord with many people in the community. While it may seem naive, in the glare of a globalised economy, it can't be dismissed along the lines of being electorally unpalatable. So, this gives Hanson the chance to say to "those people from ethnic backgrounds currently living in Australia" that she'd consider them "first-class citizens, provided of course that they give this country their full, undivided loyalty."

I presume Hanson is imagining that anyone can assume an Australian identity and affiliation. That anyone can adopt her dream for themselves. Presumably too, this person - from an ethnic background - would pass through a psychological transformation in which they would acquire loyalty to Australia. But notions like loyalty and an essential Australianness are problematic. In a very real sense what Hanson is advocating must deny the

32 James Hillman, *Healing Fictions* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1983) p.104. Hillman is working with the ideas of Alfred Adler. For Adler, 'the great upward drive', this striving for perfection is a necessary fiction, 'pragmatically necessary', goals are thrown up by the psyche as bait to catch the living fish, fictions to instigate and guide action.
33 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
ambivalent temporality of the contemporary characteristics of Australianness. And this is why her dream will be unfulfilled. Australianness today involves the way Tranh can think of himself mostly as an Australian, while knowing too the side that is Vietnamese. This is such a common story among many of the people I have come to know in Auburn.

To ask of loyalty that it help plot the ‘narrative of this nation’ may provide a useful strategy only if it remains possible to comprehend issues of social cohesion as involving multiple affiliations. Ideas about progressing together cannot be dependent on the sentiment of undivided loyalties. The dream of the many as one has been the touchstone metaphor for social cohesion in modern nation states like Australia. But how does it work? Homi Bhabha speaks of an ‘incommensurable narrative’ amongst the people that suggests “no salvation, but a strange cultural survival of the people.” 34 This is Tranh’s narrative, it is also Wissals; a little bit of this and a little bit of that. It is in the way peanut butter can become tahini, and peanut sauce can become a craving!

We are all living on the borderline of history, at the limits of our differences in language, race, gender; at an historical moment that can translate “the differences between us into a kind of solidarity.” 35 This ‘kind of solidarity’ is a complex idea, not readily explained by those who favour our multicultural society, but nonetheless most of us, despite personal anxiety, live it every day. Solidarity here, does not mean homogeneity.

What kind of metaphor is useful in expressing this solidarity? Walter Benjamin speaks of the “fragments of a vessel” that in order to be “articulated together must follow one another in the smallest details although they need not be like one another.” 36 This is not to say that the fragments constitute a totality. The fragments remain fragments, but in forming something in unison together

34 Homi Bhabha, p. 320.
35 Homi Bhabha, p. 320.
a meaning becomes recognisable that “lovingly and in detail” makes both the fragments and the whole vessel apparent.

Wissal: You know Benny Elias, his actual background was Lebanese. But he was captain of Australia, you know. And captain of Balmain too.

Loyalty can never be guarded as is so often hoped. The crowded secular space that now defines the principle cities of this country implies there can be no singular explanation of an inherent originality. Time, rather than confirming historical certainties, allows only a diversity of interactive dynamics. Various emergent behaviours manifest themselves daily in response to the ever increasingly complex forms of order in the evolving social system. In order to accommodate all our different communities and keep their diversity vital, it is necessary that our ‘sense of purpose’ does not become literalised into a definite goal, such as insisting that our first class citizens be undivided in their loyalties. “Goals, especially the ‘highest’ and ‘finest’, work like overvalued ideas, the roots of delusions that can nourish and shelter paranoia with disastrous effects.”

Alien Resurrection

There have been nearly 4000 episodes of the very successful television soapy Neighbours produced and in all that time, according to the script editor, only two ethnic families have moved into Ramsay Street. An ‘Asian’ family and an Italian family. Both were moved out within 3 months of their coming. Network 10 ‘pulled’ the families when the program’s ratings fell from the usual ‘18’ to the ‘low teens’. The program’s executive producer Stanley Walsh described Neighbours as an ‘institution’ that seeks to promote ‘positive values’. At the end

---

37 James Hillman, p.105.
38 Neighbours is a long running popular television drama based on the fictional lives of families living in Ramsey Street, a typical Australian city suburban street. Neighbours is produced for Network 10 by Grundy Productions, Executive Producer, Stanley Walsh.
of each episode a viewer should come away feeling “positive, enthusiastic and hopeful”. All of the families and characters in Ramsay Street aspire to ‘make the most of their lives’, according to Walsh. Their normal lives are spiked with minor social dramas like family members getting lost, benign issues of sexuality, parent/teacher/child relationships, neighborhood intrigues and social concerns like ecological awareness and prejudice. Over the 13 years of its production, apart from the two ethnic families that lived there for a time, there have been visits to Ramsay Street by Aborigines, Italians, Greeks and Chinese people. However, as the script editor explained, because of the nature of television drama, a visitor (to the script and cast) has to provide a dramatic interest and in the main this means providing something to react against which is often slightly negative. For this reason there have been relatively few encounters with migrants. The producers say they don’t want to cast migrants in ‘this negative way’.

In contrast to Neighbours, I want to consider the short film Colour Bars. The stories in this film are similar to those in Neighbours - family dramas and relationship issues, sexuality, neighborhood intrigues and social concerns. Like Neighbours, Colour Bars is set in the suburbs. In the opening scene we travel on a Sydney train with a young boy and his father. The camera keeps track with the telegraph lines outside the window through which the boy is looking.

Dad where are we going?

The boy asks the questions in English. The father answers in Farsi. In this conversation between the son and his father, the boy asking questions, the father answering, a communication is established which is very familiar to

39 In a telephone conversation with Stanley Walsh, 28 October, 1997.
41 Text from Colour Bars.
42 Farsi is one of the languages spoken by the people of Iran.
people who have been brought up in a multilingual family. But even so, it is a communication in which uncertainty about identity remains as part of the process.

Am I Iranian? 43

The father answers his son again and we hears the father use the words technically no.

What’s technically?

Another explanation by the father after which the son responds with:

Then I am technically Australian! 44

In this film the lives of some people living around Auburn are temporarily brought together into the film maker’s narrative. We only sometimes meet ‘face to face’ with the speaking subject, but the images and the commentary reflect the world in which the speaker lives. These are not just random images. There is an intention implied through the choice of music, image and scene, the voice over, and the camera angle. At times the film is oblique, even alienating in a neo-Brechtian way, whereby the narrative is ‘made strange’ and information about the characters’ lives is given in unorthodox ways. The conversation between the boy and his father is unsettling for a mainstream audience. Sharing in foreignness is precisely about experiencing the strange and the unfamiliar. Mahmoud Yekta, the film’s director, has used certain filmic techniques such as negative photographic imagery, jump cuts and long still shots, speeding up and awkward angles to keep this discomfort experiential. Phenomena throughout

43 Text from Colour Bars.
44 Text from Colour Bars.
the film occur tangentially, but they structure a sequence of everyday experiences that is contemporary. The multicultural experience is contemporary but not necessarily comfortable. People who may think of themselves as part of the mainstream, as well as migrants, can be unsettled by multiculturalism. This discomfort though, is not necessarily unpleasant.

**Neighbours** does not attempt to unsettle the audience. This is a story about a local community. The program's producers would claim that it is a contemporary story. The community is imagined over and over through the perspectives of those who live there. Everything happens in and through this street. There is a feeling of intimate belonging which makes for both a social coherence and a psychological relevance. One can sense a continuity here, the world seems reasonable and reflects 'common sense'. 'Then, now, and forever' remain certain and recognisable for this community.45

Amber: The main thing I can remember from living in Birrong as a kid was the great neighbours. We lived across the road from the school. But we travelled to go to a, like, a Catholic school. But it was safe. We knew everyone around. They were all Australian and had large families. There were seven in my family and six or seven in the two families next door and a big family in one house across the road. Yeah, we had just like people of our own age around all the time. Like our neighbours next door we used to call aunty and uncle. We used to spend a bit of time there.

My parents sold about three years ago. Only two of the neighbours are still there I think. The others have moved out. There's Chinese bought our house and like Australians haven't bought the, you know, the other houses around there. So it's a bit different.
What Amber seems to be wishing for is a time when Birrong too was recognisable and certain. But certainty seems to be an identification with a meaning that is too simple. She seems caught in what Hillman calls ‘the realm of mistakes’.\(^6\) It is not useful to claim a certainty from the past, such as Amber wishes for. Taking up a position of historical finality only serves to isolate one from the emerging multicultural community.

Amber: *I don’t know, just from working with the public in the library there’s like a lot of ethnic background people, like in the community now. Not that I have anything against them. But like I just think there’s too much at the moment. I feel outnumbered yes. I definitely don’t have anything against them. I just feel that it’s, you know. I can remember like coming to Auburn from Birrong like to shop and it used to be really nice. Now I just feel like a tourist, like when you walk up the street.*

Yet one cannot abstract oneself from the general interdependence of the community. The community “lives within us and it endows us with the faculty to feel into and with other human beings.”\(^7\) Living within a community involves all the stories that are out there, including the mistakes, the humour and the disappointments. Merleau-Ponty speaks of being in a community as a ‘diffused voluminosity’ a voluminosity, he suggests, that people experience when they allow themselves simply to be in the community without actively wanting to assume anything about it. In this voluminosity one is often slightly decentred, not certain of how one fits in with everything, but one nevertheless still belongs. “There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if as once again we must eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric,

---

\(^6\) James Hillman, p.109.
\(^7\) James Hillman, p.107.
\(^7\) Alfred Adler, in James Hillman, p. 107.
the one slightly decentred with respect to the other." I don’t really think there are two worlds. It’s only when I look in the mirror, or speak to my grandparents, then I realise the difference. I look different, otherwise I’m typically normal.

Amber: My daughter goes to the Auburn long day care and she has plenty of friends. I think it’s great. The programme that they have, they have things on, you know, everyone’s national day and they celebrate each country’s, you know special day. Yes it’s good. The kids are gorgeous. And yeah, my daughter loves it. She now speaks Turkish, Spanish, she sings in Chinese yeah she loves it. And I love it too.

One may possibly experience this ‘diffused voluminosity’ as a strangeness in the space that was once familiar, like Amber’s remembered Birrong. Nonetheless, one still belongs, even if the space feels decentred. So while Amber feels like a tourist, she still loves the way her child is learning to speak and sing in Chinese and Spanish. The way Amber makes sense of this is to remain equivocal about her assumptions; she cannot take anything for granted.

Cultural Roots Go Deep

The people in Colour Bars are from various ethnic backgrounds, and all think of Auburn as home. The film orientates in such a way as to recognise a phenomenological reality. The various experiences are recalled in the way Van Manen suggests as “possible experiences”, and as such I can understand them as “possible interpretations” of contemporary Sydney. There are ordinary stories about relating to parents, about time, honesty, space, autonomy, dealing with authority; police, teachers, and the wider community; shop keepers, and

49 Text from Colour Bars.
relatives. The film’s narrative is developed around these stories and told by a number of young people. They are stories about making friends, respecting and understanding difference, the future, dealing with parents and shaping their identity. The way my parents have brought me up is in a typical normal Australian way. They haven’t imposed any cultural beliefs or anything like that. The background is there, if I want it. I have a lot of friends, they’re Italian, Greek, Lebanese, all sorts of backgrounds really. I remember, I have this Australian friend, he said, ‘hey Chin, you’re an Ozzie trapped in a Nips body’. 51

Through the fiction of the film I can feel and understand a familiarity that is “self-evident” and “belongs to the sensibility”52 of contemporary Sydney life. I grasp and make real contact with the stories even though they are undercut with the strangeness of what it is like being a wog. The director says it is this very issue of being familiar and unfamiliar at the same time with their identity as ethnics, as wogs, as Australians, that sets the living experience of many migrants apart. I made a comment to my dad which he didn’t like too much. He’s 60 and he came out here when he was 20, and I said ‘your’ve been here for two thirds of your life, your’ve more Australian than Greek’ and that didn’t go down so well. You know something though, I told him that in Greek. 53 Perhaps this suggests that being set apart from the various fantasies of belonging to community, or to a sense of knowing, is generational, and each generation’s experience may not be commensurable with the next. So in addition to ethnicity, age constructs another order of difference.

Not all ethnics get along, My Turkish father hates the Greeks54

In contemporary society a place can be geographical but it can also be an idea, a place that is virtual, as in the television series Neighbours, Home and

51 Text from Colour Bars.
52 Merleau-Ponty, M, in Sue Cataldi, pp.62-63.
53 Text from Colour Bars.
54 Text from Colour Bars.
Away or Heart Break High. Certain cultural theorists such as Frederic Jameson would say that these virtual experiences of locality and community essentially flatten and homogenise a place like ‘contemporary Sydney’. Any attempt to imagine a particular local character will have only a fleeting presence. In the uniformly modern and mechanised world, the experience of cultural difference will principally be a consequence of the video and the television soapy. I accept there is a tendency in contemporary society to flatten out any difference. For example, Colour Bars, while it employs motifs that signify individuality and difference (like the finger print) still ends up being a film about urban young people with the genre overtones of an MTV video clip. Even so, the various scenarios of each person’s experience collectively create and describe a shared narrative which offers the audience a sense of what it means to be NESB migrants. Like when you’re dealing with teachers who see you’ve got an ethnic surname.

The ABC television program Heart Break High treats issues like multiculturalism, racism, living at home, or leaving home, with an intelligence that is particular to the circumstances of contemporary Australian city life. The cast reflects the ethnic mix of most city schools and communities, while the stories acknowledge more fully this wider multicultural society and how it is that people are making life choices about living here. My parents came from Greece in the 1950’s and they stuck to those beliefs. It’s not the same for me. But you know, when I go to church on Easter, or at Christmas, you know they’re all Greek. The same as me. Cultural roots go very deep; memories and histories do matter. It seems to me that in films like Colour Bars and in the television program Heart Break High, only a partial flattening of the ‘social space and experience’ occurs.

55 Home and Away, ATN Seven Network Production.
56 Heart Break High, ABC Production.
58 NESB anagram for non English speaking background.
59 Text from Colour Bars.
60 Text from Colour Bars.
There still remains the lived experience of locality and community, because the places depicted have not become ‘essentially homogenised’. The ‘video and television soapy’ has not eliminated or reduced cultural differences in this community. Jameson’s suggestion misses the living meanings in the ordinary events of everyday life.

The political strategy of One Nation for Australia is for us to pull back from many of our global obligations in terms of finance, markets, treaties and immigration and then attempt to solve our social, financial, industrial, employment, cultural, and population ‘problems’ amongst ourselves. Who would have thought, just a decade ago, that such a scenario would emerge in the social and political space of contemporary Australia? Clearly one cannot predict the moment when new meaning emerges either for the individual or a community - “such moments are the captive of the unknown”.61 Pragmatically though, there is a necessity to be somewhat prepared for the emergence of unpredictable behaviour, and by implication part of the complexity within a system is the capacity to make adjustments. The more flexible and accommodating a system is, the less disturbed it will be by the adjustments.

Amber: My nephew goes to school at Granville. He’s nine. He’s got all ethnic friends and they have always got on with them. They’ve grown up like that. When we like go over to visit my sister, it’s a bit different.

Amber has come back to Auburn after living away from the area for some years. She is now a parent and this has brought with it the need to take on a responsibility of participating in her community. She works in the local library, sends her child to the day care centre and visits her sister who lives locally. In the conversation with Amber I got the feeling that the rapid change in the cultural mix of Auburn has caused her to think carefully about whether she

---

might like to continue living there, or to move again. But she wonders whether there is something interesting happening in the area which may give her daughter, and possibly herself, an exciting and privileged life.

Amber: I didn't have really any high hopes when I was moving back from Queensland to Auburn. I knew that I would feel better with the move. Coming back to here, to my family, that's why I moved. In my first job back here, I worked with a few Croatian girls and they were really nice. Plus we had a lot of casual staff, mainly Lebanese girls and I got on really well too.

You know, I work in the library now, and I see a lot of children coming. Some of them are really aggressive. Some of the ethnic kids seem to have a chip on their shoulder. Like they are looking for a fight.

Even though it's always busy in the streets now, people double parking and everyone trying to work themselves out like that, I think all the shops are interesting and different to when I was young. You know, you get all sorts of different food now. And my daughter, she's got lots of ethnic friends.

In part, Amber's accepts the foreignness that has come into what she had thought of as her community, while at the same time, in her story too, there is the desire for the community to remain somehow the same.

Amber: I get from some of the people in the library, you know, maybe the older ones, that they're feeling strange to live in their own community, like not being able to feel, like comfortable in an area that you've been in for forty or fifty years.

Amber sometimes wants the community to reflect meaning that is recognisable then, now and forever. But social systems are chaotic and nonlinear in character. This means that small or insignificant inputs can cause huge effects. Therefore, an individual, or a community, may be subject to sudden qualitative changes which occur as a result of tiny little changes in the system's characteristic parameters.
Amber: I see the mums in the mornings and afternoons when I go to the day care centre. I also go to their meetings that they have there. You know everyone's invited to birthdays. They have Christmas parties and they have concerts through the year, discos too. So yes I'm there a lot. I talk to the other parents and like we're friends as far as like anything to do in the centre.

Amber's experience describes the way an individual might engage in a process whereby an ecological knowledge emerges from the ordinary events of her everyday life. A simple, insignificant thing like celebrating each country's special day, or noticing how the kids are gorgeous, changes her. I love it too. Perpetual uncertainty is always embodied in the experience of living, in the way one has to struggle with new ideas, with the challenge of accepting and accommodating different views and contrasting attitudes in other people. Ecological knowledge is continually being invented from the imagination of an individual or from within the community they inhabit. This provides another way of thinking about the emergence of everyday phenomenon in human life. When Amber feels like a tourist in her own community - while at the same time is really loving how her daughter's and her nephew's lives have been made richly diverse - she engages in what Maturana and Varala call a 'structural congruence'. This is a recurrent interaction leading to a type of resonance between two (or more) incongruous systems resulting in a necessary and mutual balance of relationship.

One can entertain fantasies about how each of us individually and, as members of a society, may accommodate and interact with uncertainty. Amber's experience makes it possible to understand that while social ambiguity may not be resolved, our multicultural society is evincing a strange capacity for survival. Hopefully, without sounding overly pompous, it's as if Amber has awakened and enlarged the social mind itself by "rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought."62

---

Being Australian

Culture is Always in the Process of Emerging

Auburn is a western Sydney suburb. It is a place that echoes the other side of the world.

Audrey: Oh, I've lived in Auburn for just on forty years. Oh yes, I certainly have noticed the change. Yes, the roads have all improved. When we came here these roads were a new subdivision, just very rough. What else is there, ... we've got new shops. And, of course, there are quite a lot more ethnic people here that we never had when we first came. As I say we used to go shopping at Auburn but Auburn has changed so much. It's, I don't know, it seems to be sort of grubby. There's a lot of foreign shops. They seem to have changed a lot, like the class of shopping I suppose.

In recent times people from different countries have arrived, for a variety of reasons and under different immigration schemes. Turkish people continue to migrate through marriage sponsorships and family reunion programs. The Spanish speaking community, mainly from South American countries, are more likely to have arrived because of humanitarian programs as refugees. Afghans too generally come to Australia as refugees. Filipinos are often independent migrants, while Arabic, Vietnamese and Chinese people arrive, some as refugees, and some taking up family reunion sponsorships.¹

Koksal: For every person who's been in Australia, arrived in Australia before 1980, I would say Auburn is part of their background. Because, what usually happens, when people first thinking of coming up here, before they come up here,

¹ “Settlement needs of NESB Migrants and Refugees in the Auburn Local Government Area.” 
   Auburn Community Development Network Inc (July, 1993) p. 31.
most of them get letters addressed from Auburn. So in Turkey you sort of get used to the name Auburn.

Along the main shopping street there are Turkish and Arabic wholesalers selling nuts, dried fruits, oils, Turkish delight and other wonderful sweets; furniture shops selling gaudy sofas too hard to sit on, and Chinese urns too tall to be stable; there are crowded Chinese grocers, Halal butchers next door to Chinese butchers, Vietnamese bakers, Kebab joints and what seems like an endless variety of ethnic video outlets. The shops announce themselves in a variety of languages. Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese. Arabic women move slowly along, passing by the shops, the prams they are pushing laden down with parcels and baby. ‘Asians’ hurry past, talking to their mobile phones, intent on some goal, while groups of men with thick dark moustaches gather, after morning prayer, to take black coffee.

In an age of proliferating difference and diversity, the notion of hybridity, simply defined as the production of new things composed of different or incongruous kind,\(^2\) has acquired a new political and theoretical salience. Homogenising definitions of society, culture, nation, people, the public, and politics are being challenged. Diversity, heterogeneity and multiplicity are signature terms for what is now called the cultural politics of difference,\(^3\) which, as we near the end of the twentieth century, is no longer so strange. We now live in what is called a multicultural society. However, the dilemma exposed by Pauline Hanson indicates that to ‘live with difference’ has created real tensions and difficulties and thus may signal the precariousness of the notion of a ‘multicultural society’. A multicultural society demands that its citizens abandon marked and clearly hierarchical arrangements of difference based on class, gender, race or ability. How to resolve all these tensions and

---


difficulties? I am asking this question(s) because I sense there is a desire for resolution in the community although I am not personally convinced that it can ultimately be resolved. What can be achieved is a process of negotiation, an acceptance of the precariousness, and a desire to be interested in living with the diversity.

The fashionability of the word ‘multiculturalism’ might soon pass. The issues to which it points however, will not soon fade away. For these issues are manifestations of a much more complicated process, “the decolonisation of global culture.”4 The implications of this are just beginning to be comprehended. The multiplicity of cultures which now contribute to the identity of a large city like Sydney means that uncertainty potentially and continually disturbs the social order. Sydney has become home to many people from former colonies and disrupted countries whose economic and cultural allegiance are both local and global in orientation. This means that economic and cultural wealth will be distributed in different ways around the world.

Mei: We sort of escaped by boat from Vietnam. It was really dangerous thing. Anything could happen to you. Like you could be hijacked on the way or your boat could sink. You could be captured by the army and sent back to Vietnam and put into gaol. So basically that’s about it.

In Vietnam my dad worked for my grandfather. They had a timber factory. And my mum’s side, they, like, had a coffee industry going. Here in Sydney my parents have their own business too. We manufacture clothes, basically briefs, for ladies. Now we are doing fashion as well, cause, like, the season changes. But we mainly specialise in briefs. It is important for my parents to work hard here. They must pay my grandparents some money still. You know, the money to help us escape.

Certain major cities - especially those of Western Europe, North America, Asia and Australia\(^5\) - have become transnational spaces where companies, governments and individuals from many different countries carry out all sorts of transactions. Cities are the places where a multiplicity of cultures come together. They are also the space for the production, supply and marketing of highly specialised services in financial innovations, international accounting, international legal expertise, and global fashions in entertainment and thinking. As a consequence, these global cities have created and now manage borders that are not defined geographically or at least not in terms of a mid twentieth century geographical map. They are somewhat more like McKenzie Wark's notion of a 'vector'. Vectors are technologies that move something from somewhere to somewhere else. They “move physical objects about the place” like consumer goods and international finance, or they may “move only information”\(^6\) like consumer goods and international finance. A map of this world with undefined borders can be instantly and intimately linked into and it is this factor that has so dislocated the experience of cultural identity.

Koksal: Yes, from small towns in Turkey, villages, people migrate to the big cities. For better life conditions, which is education for the kids and government jobs for themselves. That is the reason people migrate from villages and towns to the big cities like Ankara. The same thing played in my family. When my dad decided to come to Australia, he said, 'Look, it would be a lot better to move up there,' and so that was his decision. We couldn't say no. So we find ourselves here in 1970.

\(^5\) Adaption to conditions of constant and unpredictable change has been most apparent during the writing and rewriting of this paper. During the latter months of 1997 and early 1998 we experienced what the media called the 'Asian meltdown' as the 'Asian tiger economies collapsed' with devastating consequences for those communities and, apparently, the world.

Koksal and his family are no longer tied to the experience of a particularity about place, or notions of nationality, ethnicity, locality. Rather the family is 'plugged' into an experience of moving between place, identity, and possibility. "They are part of the most sustained period of mass migration within the west" which is altering millions of people's lives.

Koksal: Well my dad used to work for the government in Turkey. And someone said to him 'look it's a better life conditions in Australia than in Turkey, or somewhere in Europe. They start taking migrants and there's nothing much to be eligible. They're looking for large families which at that stage, I believe my parents, having four kids would be eligible. And he made the application, and we find ourselves here in a short time.

What this can mean for someone like Koksal and his family is that they have been brought into closer proximity with more of the world's resources. Resources that are as much to do with people and cultures as with material wealth. It is this great abundance of resources that changes the social ecology. Ecological epistemology understands that stable ecosystems do not remain stable forever. Eventually the equilibrium is disturbed. Social ecological disturbance is not uniform, rather it is a steady drizzle of change. This means that any closely interacting population will continually 'move' into a "state of self-organised criticality." The multi-ethnic character of a contemporary cultural environment works in this way. The community will continue to grow and function, internal communities will "intricately interlock" and self-organise, reaching a 'steady state' and yet remain barely stable. It is this edge of instability that maintains the conditions of constant change and

---

9 Mitchell Waldrop, p. 305.
unpredictability. The recent ‘race debates’ are examples of what Waldrop calls ‘avalanches’. Knowing that complex systems critically self-organise allows the understanding that avalanches are inevitable. It does not however give us information about any particular avalanche. In this current ‘race debate’ the system (our society) has managed to “rearrange things just enough to keep them poised on the edge”\(^\text{10}\) of stability. Being imaginative in the midst of the avalanche means staying flexible and open to the wider social, historical and political questions that have emerged.

**Australian culture will be constituted inevitably through a mutual translation of foreignness**

So why am I searching in the streets of Auburn? Is it to locate some ancient trace of my father’s family? He grew up here, in what was then a country town. These return journeys seem to be a search for clues to my identity, to the way I might belong in this part of the world. As I have said, I am deeply Protestant, infused with the vapours of a particular kind of English-Australian culture. My learning and study has helped me describe and understand Anglo-Protestant cultural inheritance, both in terms of a psychology and a sociology. It is my particular way of being in the world. My fascination with the multicultural is more recent and is both cerebral and corporeal. I must consciously learn about it and feel my way into its strangeness. I suspect I share this fascination, and a certain anxiety about the strangeness of a multicultural society, with many people. An ecological awareness in the way one experiences community, with all the intricacies of coherence and change, means being aware that the world and one’s complementary relations to it are not separable.

On the cover of the 1996 Australia day Edition of *The Bulletin* we see an eye-catching group photo of about twenty men, women and children, of a variety of

\(^{10}\) Mitchell Waldrop, p. 305.
'races' - Caucasian, Asian, Aboriginal - all stripped down to underpants and with their arms folded on their chests. This mixed group is supposed to represent 'the new Australian race'. The Bulletin writes, "Australia is slowly turning into a nation of hybrids. By the turn of the century, a large proportion of the Australian population will be ethnically mixed as a result of intermarriage between Anglo-Celtic Australians and migrants, or between people from the different ethnic groups."11 Far from being a mixed blessing, this purported hybridisation of the Australian population is presented by The Bulletin as a straightforwardly good thing. A demographer is quoted as saying that the high rate of inter-cultural marriage provides Australia with the best protection against becoming a battleground of 'warring tribes'.12 Stephen FitzGerald, commenting at the launch of his book, Is Australia an Asian Country said, "my concern about Australia's performance in the past is balanced by my belief that this can be Australia's future: the lazy country can be a lovely country and the white society can be a honey-coloured society. The prospects for Australia are exciting beyond imagination."13

The idea of hybridity as expressed in The Bulletin article is in fact quite interesting, certainly in light of the unease about miscegenation and racial interbreeding which some in our society still hold over from the colonial period. It is this unease which informs the racial anxiety expressed by Peter Davis and Pauline Hanson. "If you are a child of mixed race, says Davis, "particularly, if you will, Asian-Caucasian or Aboriginal-white, you are a mongrel and that's what happens when you cross dogs or whatever."14 There has always been a clear cut racial hierarchy here in Australia. The historical implication of hybridity that accompanied the nineteenth century was often

---

12 Vikki Kyriakos Poulos, p.17.
14 Peter Davis, "Mayor's mongrels claim leaves him in a council of one" The Australian (October 23, 1996) p. 5.
that of rape by white colonising men of aboriginal women, or at best abrupt, casual and often coerced sexual unions. Today the situation differs considerably. It is relatively commonplace in our liberal democratic society for people to voluntary arrange cross-racial or cross-ethnic marriages.

Recent figures produced by the Australian Forum for Population Studies show that the rates of out-marriage in second generation Asian immigrants are remarkably high, in the case of Chinese, 78 percent, in the case of Indians, 96 percent.¹⁵ The Bulletin article puts it that “intermarriage is by definition a force of social cohesion.”¹⁶ Hybridity is perceived by some as absorbing the difficulties of difference, a strategy where social cohesion will be born of a different attitude to sexual and cultural blending. It is as if the very opposite of the White Australia policy - where the fear was that inter-racial marriages would result in a proliferation of half-castes and the subsequent degeneration into a social chaos - is being pursued.

The rhetoric of hybridity has been put to use to describe an unavoidable and easily achieved multicultural society in which racial harmony will naturally emerge. The assumption behind this rhetoric is the claim in contemporary cultural theory that all cultures in this modern world are already hybrid, the consequence of a flow of intersecting influences. Ecologically too, hybrids are much more vigorous and often very productive, while at the same time there is the risk of impotence when hybrids emerge. It is a futile enterprise to oppose the cultural and biological hybridity that has become, for better and for worse, a defining feature of contemporary Australia. But the simple conceptual equation that hybridity will bring about reconciliation between the various groups in our community is naive.

---

¹⁶ Trevor Batrouney, from the Bureau of immigration, multicultural and population research, quoted in Vickki Kyriako Poulos, p.17.
Fatma: I have a Polish daughter-in-law, and grand kids. I talk to them English. I talk to my grand daughter in English. But at home, my husband, my son talk together Turkish. My grand daughter, she speaks Turkish, but not so much. Because her mother and father speak English at home.

Brendon: Do you teach your grand daughter Turkish?

Fatma: You know in Turkey there is a saying, one language one person, two language two persons. I like that they speak every language. It means you communicate better.

Brendon: Tell me about your son and his Polish wife. How do you feel about this marriage?

Fatma: I like her, she’s good girl, very nice. I was very much crying at first. Because I didn’t want my son is going to different people to marry. Because different nationality, different culture, different religion, different language, you know, this way. But she is beautiful. I like her very much. But that is why I think it is difficult.

Brendon: So it is not so difficult now?

Fatma: Not much, but not exactly the same if she was Turkish. I can’t speak exactly everything to her. Because she doesn’t understand. She doesn’t want to speak Turkish.

The notion of cultural hybridity is contentious. This multicultural society incorporates and experiences its own strangeness in ways that influence and work differently for each one of us. Ethno-specific communities, for example, do not only function as social structures maintaining specific cultural qualities thereby able to assist immigrants survive in the ‘new’ land. They also become
hybrid social groups themselves. Consider the way ethnic based clubs in Soccer Australia’s National League have changed their names to reflect their Australianness: Sydney Croatia has become Sydney United, Parramatta Melita is now Parramatta Eagles and Pan Hellenic changed to Sydney Olympic. And this is happening not just in the so-called ethnic game of soccer. Take that great Sydney sporting institution, Canterbury-Bankstown Rugby Leagues Club, once the bastion of Western Sydney’s Irish Catholics - it is now the home team for most of Sydney’s Lebanese. In order to attract a multicultural crowd, Lynne Anderson, the marketing manager at Canterbury-Bankstown, has instigated, as part of the club’s promotional activities, extremely successful multicultural events as features at Belmore Park during the football season. The constant exchange of cultural material ultimately and unpredictably changes the structure of all dynamic groups.

Wissal: Yeah, you know, we’re capable of doing anything. Even though we do come from a Lebanese background. And football, like Canterbury also has a lot of Lebanese players and Lebanese supporters. They’ve got lots of Lebanese flags. Yeah, but I don’t support Canterbury, I’m a Parramatta supporter.

If I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country (Pauline Hanson)

When Pauline Hanson makes the claim that if she can “invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country” she seems to be making a false claim to a history of ‘pure origin’ by asserting that her home and country are the same thing and that strangers are not welcome in either. Only Aboriginal people can claim stable roots in this land before 1788. As for the rest of us, our human history would appear to be

---

17 Lex Marcos, “A level playing field” in BIPR Bulletin, Issue 12 (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, 1994). In this interesting article, Lex Marcos, a Sydney based media personality, explores the way different sporting codes have responded to a multicultural audience and player base.
one of movement and migration. The migration into and movement around Australia - this 'modern epic'- is part of modern Western societies' long-time development. This development begins with world exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries by European sailors and merchants. This led to the colonisation of the Americas and the subsequent development of an African slave trade to support that development and expansion. In the 17th and 18th centuries penal colonies were established in the Southern Hemisphere, including here in Australia. This was followed by the mass migrations of this century as people fled major wars and economic turmoil. As a consequence of this history our country is a place around which, as Paul Carter says, "there is a certain 'en-placement' of strangers."  

Olga (translating for Zucini): She gets money from the government. She and her husband are on pensions. If they need more money they get it from their children. They give them money as well, and she says she spends time with her children and grandchildren. The son has a garage here in Auburn. He's a mechanic so her husband spends the day with the son at the garage where Lebanese people come over and talk about things and have coffee. Whenever one of the children need something from the shops they go and get it for them. Yeah, that's how they spend their day. They play with the grandchildren. They also get those Lebanese movies or Arabic movies on video, and watch them.

What does this en-placement mean for me, Olga, Fatma, Gungor, Wissal, Mej and Audrey? At times one feels suspended on the sharp rim of the world with anxiety and excitement projecting into the future. Auburn brings me into relation with my own inner contradictions, where it's hard to possess a 'sureness of self'. I am bound and unbound by this wonderful plurality. There is a sense of being a guest, with the corresponding need to take care in another's place, and there is the knowledge that this is home with the obligations that that entails.

---

Brendon: So a Turkish community begins to grow in Auburn. You are developing a doctor’s surgery at the same time. How did you feel towards the community? Did you feel responsible to the welfare of the Turkish people?

Gungor: If I said responsible, that is a big word. I mean that’s not my concern. But I mean, with the Turkish people when they come this country, at first, they are looking for the ... they don’t speak English, at first they are looking for the facilities. Where is the facilities. Shopping and the doctors and the chemist, everything like that they are looking for. If you go in a country you will go and find some English speaking people, right. If they are living there close, there you will live. Turkish people also doing like that. So if I say ‘I’m responsible’, there is a big word.

In contemporary Sydney one can live with a consciousness of multiculturalism. This consciousness however, has to acknowledge the unconscious way mainstream European Australians, myself included, make a superficial Australian cultural identity central to the multicultural society. Mainstream culture connects with multiculturalism by treating it as a phenomenon unrelated to colonialism, seeing it as something bureaucratically invented and then embraced and used to forge links into the broader sophisticated world of cultural studies, contemporary video and art, pop music, journalism, tourism, and the ‘global economy’. Ghassan Hage says of multiculturalism that it “increasingly refers to an experience of cosmopolitan consumption grounded in a reality largely created by international tourism. Nowhere is it more apparent than in the ethnic eating scene where multiculturalism is defined according to the availability of ethnic restaurants for cosmopolitan consumers.”19 He refers to this as “cosmo-multiculturalism”20 and he thinks that the Anglocentric mainstream considers this justification

20 Ghassan Hage, p. 99.
enough to show how their attitudes of earlier times have been easily shed. However, the very notion of multiculturalism as a recent cultural invention by progressive Western Thought fails to acknowledge that the world has always been multicultural. Indeed, Australia began in a polyglot and diverse way, with people speaking a number of European, Aboriginal and Asian languages.

*Responsibility* is a big word, to pick up on Gungor. Taking on the responsibility of experiencing this dynamic culture, is more like “grasping a proverb, catching an illusion, seeing a joke, than it is like achieving communion.” I cannot deny my ‘sense of identity’ as an Anglo-Saxon Australian, and therefore to resolve this dilemma - between my sense of identity as an Anglo and my identity as part of the complex wider community - by means of an intellectual response alone is not enough. I am implicated in Hanson’s claims, so a considered response to her must involve the combination of perspectives which are theoretical and political, as well as personal considerations. A complex response in this way “is a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation.” Who knows what might emerge from this culture?

Nhan: *Yeah for me multiculturalism is working. But I don’t think I know the whole question yet. Maybe a bit more time for me to think more about it.*

A community is never fully new. There is always a traffic in symbolic forms available to the community; language, art, myth, ritual, technology, law and the conglomerate mix of recipes, prejudices and the plausible stories we sometimes call common sense. The community is a place where these ingredients are thought about, constructed and deconstructed into an agreed representation of

---

“authority”, the local knowledge. This representation includes “the marking of boundaries, the rhetoric of persuasion, the expression of commitment and the registering of dissent.” So, what must happen for a community of strangers to become locals? Well, the stranger must accept that their world is forever changing as a consequence of, and according to the local knowledge. Local knowledge, in this sense, does not mean folklore or indigenous knowledge or even knowledge that is deeply traditional. I am referring to the knowledge of location that grows through everyday experience in a particular place. Knowledge learned on the streets, shared knowledge of place that starts to become communal knowledge. Something new begins when the stranger invests something of their subjectivity into this knowledge, when they have to negotiate, change and learn to belong.

Nhan: For me, I did not have any relatives when I arrived here. So I also tend to stay with either my friends or the people that I know. That's easier for me to do. Like, to establish myself here. And also a better chance for me to look for work or something. Because I have no position when I came here. So like, we did have a Vietnamese community and also some other welfare organisations as well. So if we stay together that's better chance for us to do things. Also we can get together easier.

For Nhan to take up with responsibility a commitment to the local community he needed to share his knowledge slowly through the familiarity and security of his Vietnamese community. Here he finds that, at first, it's easier for him to, like establish myself, and to look for work, a better chance to do things. Nhan has moved into the wider community. He studied and got himself a Bachelors degree in social work and now works as a community liaison officer in the local government area of Bankstown.

23 Clifford Geertz, p.153.
24 Stephen Muecke, No Road (Bitumen all the way) (West Australia: Fremantle Arts Press, 1997) p. 184.
25 Bankstown is the local government area adjacent to Auburn.
Human communities are complex systems in which other complex systems function and operate in the way Maturana and Varala describe as ‘continuous structural coupling’.26 Paradoxically, because of this complexity the system is able to attain an overall meta-balance. For example, a person can survive even after serious damage to parts of their body; in like manner a society too can remain meta stable despite gross acts of intolerance. For stability to function, there has to be the possibility of independence and freedom operating, such that complex and unknowable interactions can emerge. But as in many paradoxical stories, it is this very independence and freedom that also produces a fundamental schizophrenia in the character of complex systems. The doubling, dividing and interchanging nature of its reality means that a complex system can never be complete; there will always be an ‘upwelling of anomalies and slippage from within the system.’27 One may think of this ‘slipping’ balance within complex systems as a messy kind of order in which one can never be safe from the spontaneous emergence of anomalies, because they are an intrinsic part of the system.

Narelle: I think with multiculturalism, you know, individually they’re fine. But when you have a group going to the movies - trouble. When you have a group going to the beach - trouble. When you have a group going anywhere, it’s trouble. It’s a bit like my school we have all the Islanders in groups and if you invade their territory, then it’s trouble. It’s them themselves, they have to stop hanging around in groups. But you can’t just walk up and say ‘don’t hang around in a group’.

26 Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding (Boston: Shambala Press, 1988) p.115. Structural coupling is a dynamic process where-by the interactions between all participants in the biological, chemical and geological environment are continuous and borderless. Maturana refers to all structural organisations, for example: human being; an individual human cell; a Cootamundra Wattle tree, or the geology of the Sydney Basin, as autopoietic unities. In all of the multitude of interactions, reciprocal perturbations trigger changes in the unities, and the result will be a history of mutual congruent structural changes, or structural coupling, as long as the autopoietic unities do not disintegrate.

You can be friends when they’re individual. But like it’s the same with the Lebanese and stuff. If they’re in a group you can never be their friend, because they just ignore you. But when they’re individuals then they’re fine. I have plenty of Islander friends that hang around in groups, but when they’re in their group you just don’t have friends. They’re all enemies.

Helen Cixous imagines a type of community in which “each one would keep the other alive and different”. Here the exchange of difference is not to be effaced and turned into a sameness, the other is maintained in the relation between the self and the other.28 There has been a striking development in our way of thinking about this, despite the current mayhem caused by the reactionary attitudes of One Nation. One can no longer insist, as our immediate forebears so often did, that one must cease to be ‘Black’ or ‘Asian’ or Italian to be part of this Australian community. If we have learned anything about entering into the depth and fullness of self, it’s that one’s ethnic identity is an important part of the community exchange. ‘Fullness of self’ is not the same as the ‘will to self protect’, xenophobia, which is in sharp contrast to being interested and active in making a commitment to this multicultural community. Something new can begin when people start to accept their implication in a network of obligations to a place and to the community that lives there.

Fatma: My husband’s friend says ‘can you go to Australia?’ He read brochure about Australia. Another group of Turkish people are coming to Australia from Turkey. Our friends come here, two years before. They sent a letter for us, can you come here, here Australia very nice country. But we are scared, maybe only Aboriginal people. But my husband said, ‘I don’t think so, its different, they are all living like our way’. Our friends write and say two or three Turkish people live in the flat there, and we say, ‘oh, if Turkish people living there we go’, we are

not scared. After we went, and filled up the form to come over here. Then a letter come for us from the Australian people. They call us to the consulate. We are very happy. After one month we came here, in an aeroplane for just 800 Turkish Lira, for all the family. Very cheap because the government help us here. We came here to Wollongong hostel. My husband and my son went to the city to work. Two sons go to school. I not working because for lady no work.

I have lived most of my life in a city that largely cherishes its multicultural character. Even so Ghassan’s cosmo-multicultural critique as a response to the way mainstream Australia operates in relation to multiculturalism is valid. Stereotypical comments about soccer teams, ethnic gangs and foreign troubles are still heard. One of the women from the Bhanin El-Minieh Association, an Arabic Community Welfare Centre, who helped plan and carry out this research gave a good example. She said when radio commentators like John Laws cover ethnic issues it is usually to ‘put them down’. She remembered the ‘Tempe Riot’ a few years ago when a fight broke out in a public park between some Lebanese families and the police intervened. It was described, in both the newspapers and on radio, as a riot involving thousands of people that left bystanders wondering whether they were in downtown Beirut.29

Knowing how to cut against stereotypical ‘put downs’ is sometimes difficult especially when one may be caught by anxious feelings that stem from circumstances emerging in the community. The unprecedented attack on the Lakemba police station30 in early November 1998 revealed how urgent the issues of ethnicity, identity and community responsibility are. The premier, Bob Carr, and the police commissioner Peter Ryan in a joint statement suggested that the attack was by a Lebanese gang. The comments immediately

29 Taken from my research journal notes, after a conversation in our core group meeting on 13-3-95. The riot happened in Tempe Park, Sydney in October 1993, 16 police officers were reported as injured and 12 patrol cars damaged.
30 On Sunday November 1, 1998 the Lakemba police station was attacked by a group of people with automatic firearms.
drew criticism from the chair of the NSW Ethnic Communities Council, Mr Paul Nicolaou saying "Mr Carr is irresponsible in speaking of the 'ethnic basis of gang operations' and that it is too easy "to point the finger and blame migrants." But the incident has sparked wide community comment, much of it frustrated. This frustration came through in letters such as this one, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in November, 1998. "Lakemba police station shot up by a gang believed to be Lebanese youths: multiculturalism in action." The Mufti of Australia, Taj Al Hilali, warning against linking Lebanese gangs to the shooting before charges have been made, also concedes that the "Islamic community and the Arab community are very confused about what has happened, the attack was against all Australians and is un-Australian."  

I'm Not a Racist  

By focusing on characters or individuals, it is easy to miss the ways in which social institutions and cultural practices blatantly stereotype and misrepresent people and their communities. Government spokespeople and the media have consistently identified Pauline Hanson as an accident, an aberration, and not typical of mainstream attitudes or government policy. The Federal Environment Minister and Government leader in the Senate, Senator Hill, has said, "Pauline Hanson has had an effect on Australian politics in a way that should never have been allowed to happen." The Opposition Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Mr. Laurie Brereton, said of Mr Howard that he "was stating the obvious last week when he labelled Ms Hanson a cheap and nasty populist".  

---

35 Mr. Laurie Brereton, quoted in Bruce Montgomery "Hills alive with sound of hatred" in *The Australian* (Monday May 12, 1997) p. 2.
This sort of approach can allow the mainstream political parties to “lament without irony the cultural stereotyping”\textsuperscript{36} of ethnicity and so avoid attending to their own complicity in the way stereotyping is quietly accepted.

An example of this comes through in the ambivalence some Australians have towards certain migrants, Asians in particular, and in the perception that they ‘do better than us’ in our country, in our home! Asian students apparently dominate maths and science in the education system; they get into our universities while their parents keep businesses and property deals going in the global economy. In quite an explicit way, this reminder that a fixed ‘racial hierarchy’ is no longer in place is partly responsible for generating the anxiety that One Nation has tapped. The world as a European Australian might want to imagine it, formed from the legacy of a European colonial expansion, has really turned out to be a diverse connection of competing interests and tongues. “And I don’t like it.”\textsuperscript{37}

Narelle: Well, I’ll probably be a police officer or a veterinarian. But ‘cause of all the Asians, and that, coming to Australia, it probably will be harder to get jobs. Because the Asians are actually becoming smarter, in their knowledge. Because they learnt things overseas, and things like that. So it probably will be harder to get something that I like.

The cultural practices of a people can be denigrated too, without referring to individuals at all. When situations emerge on the world stage, the local media can sometimes reproduce mainstream views that are stereotypical of a particular cultural community. The Gulf war, for example, triggered many fears of Muslims as fanatics and assassins who would act without reason.

Wissal: In Auburn yeah, it was bad during the Gulf war. It’s because I was still

\textsuperscript{36} E. Shohat and R. Stam, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{37} A catch cry that has become synonymous with Pauline Hanson.
at school, at that time, and we’d have gangs. Like there were Australian gangs, and they might say something and then you know a Lebanese boy might say something back, and they’d go and beat him up. It was like that at that time. There was this lady who had a scarf on and she was walking in Franklins, this was during the Gulf war, and this guy just came and pulled her scarf down and slapped her across the face. And these Lebanese guys chased him and just beat him up. I think that was the only time it was bad. We don’t have that, a lot now. But you do at times. My mum puts on her scarf too and sometimes I’d be in the car with her and you know, a guy might pass, who’s in a car and he might say something to her, but she ignores him. Because she told me, when they first came here it was hard for them. She says, it’s nothing now.

This anxiety produces and sustains ambivalence which in turn gives to stereotypes their currency and ensures their repeatability even in the event of changing historical circumstances. People remain ambivalent because ‘systems of authority’ confirm their fears; the stereotype just might be true. So when, for example, 2KY’s Ron Casey says that Cambodian boat people “will descend on the nation bringing with them all sorts of diseases”\textsuperscript{38}, he continues to construct the stereotypical subject of a diseased and dirty Asian. This ensures that some of us will remain caught in the fantasy of the White Australia Policy and therefore be suspicious of the value of multiculturalism. In quoting Arthur Calwell,\textsuperscript{39} a significant father of the Australian Labor Party, Pauline Hanson claims a certain authority for her stereotyping. She says that people from “Japan, India, Burma, Ceylon and every new African nation are fiercely anti-white and anti one another, do we want or need any of these people here? I am a red-blooded Australian who says no, and who speaks for 90% of Australians.”\textsuperscript{40} Speaking on behalf of the ‘great majority’ of ordinary Australians she promotes the populist

\textsuperscript{38} Ron Casey is a Sydney radio talk-back host for commercial radio station 2KY. The quote is taken from McKenzie Wark’s The Virtual Republic, p. 259.

\textsuperscript{39} Arthur Calwell was Minister for Immigration in the Chifley Labor Government and leader of the Labor opposition from 1954-1960.

\textsuperscript{40} Pauline Hanson, first speech.
notion of a protected Australia. An Australia protected from the diseases of economic and cultural globalisation, an Australia that claims again the legitimacy of the racially hierarchical policy of white Australia.

Mej: I don’t know, I don’t think I have seen racism. Probably like, people see you in the street, like, you may be the only Asian say, like, for example you going to Sizzlers and there are all, like, Western people and you’re the only Asian, then they probably might look at you and go, and think, ‘why don’t you go to a Chinese restaurant’, or something like that. Sometimes I see, when people look at you like that, strangely, I feel something. But then, when I’m in Yum Cha, for example, Chinese restaurant, and I see Western, like Australian people coming in, I think it is good. They are experiencing our culture as well. But it is strange too.

Homi Bhabha suggests that the ideological construction of otherness is dependent on the concept of ‘fixity’. “Fixity, as the sign of cultural, historical, and racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder.”

Stereotyping is a way of confirming this fixed rigidity. It is a strategic form of knowledge that encourages people to identify with what is already in place, already known. It suggests a fear about something that must be anxiously awaited and possibly accepted. Ideas like the duplicity of Asians, for example, or the laziness of the Aborigines and the fanaticism of the Arab all confirm this anxiety.

Sema: Auburn girls, it’s like everybody’s from a different nationality. Like a different nation, it’s good. Like you want to mix in with the others. It’s better than to see all the same nationality all the time. You need a change. Mostly I have Turkish and Lebanese friends. I do have some Chinese friends, but you can’t crack

---

41 Homi K. Bhabha, p. 66.
jokes on all of them, like they're just a little bit, you know, they're mostly serious. They're into work and study and school and you know. So its just about 3 or 4 friends there that you can really joke around with.

Manners Maketh the Person

Fred Chaney, a former Federal Liberal Minister and now Chancellor of Murdoch University, in an interview on ABC radio was asked to comment on the way racism has functioned in our society. "Well, I think it's important to remember" he said, "that racism and very strong xenophobic views have been part of Australia from the very beginning. Over the weekend I read some of the extracts that Manning Clarke drew out of our historical papers, Bulletin extracts in particular, and I mean, the language is violent. The language is very violently anti Black, anti Chinese, it's a sort of shock to read it. Even Henry Lawson, he was one of the worst." Over the years, however, Chaney thinks that this society has learnt to function with a fair degree of tolerance towards the changing nature of the world. "The post war period" he thinks saw growth in "what I would have thought wasn't political correctness, but good manners. You didn't behave rudely, you subdued feelings, and you behaved in a better mannered way towards your fellows. I mean in the matter of living in a peaceful society, it's just part of what you do, no matter what your feelings are. We seem to have let the genie out of the bottle on this, that's why I think we are in such an incredibly dangerous situation at the moment. All of a sudden, one's worst feelings are respectable. Well, my worst feelings aren't respectable, they're something I think I should keep to myself."

Good manners have in part, Chaney says, contributed to making it possible to "absorb a very large migrant population, and here I agree with Professor

---

42 Fred Chaney, Interviewed on “Late Night Live”, ABC Radio National (May 5, 1997). Fred Chaney was the Federal Minister for Aboriginal affairs in the Fraser Liberal Government 1975 - 81.
John Hurst from Victoria, I think that the story of post war immigration in Australia is one of Australia’s triumphs”. Good manners, such a quaint idea, but an idea crucial, I think, to a social ecological perspective. Good manners are an essential part of quality home and community life. In practicing good manners one intends not to act rudely, or not to express certain feelings in the hope that by behaving well towards one’s fellows a peaceful and prosperous society will be maintained. There is a certain pragmatism about good manners: they are intended to overcome barriers and obstacles, they oblige one to function with responsibility towards another. Good manners draw on one’s memory of kindness done, of putting oneself out to make another feel welcome and comfortable, while all the time having an awareness of the changing circumstances in one’s life.

Wissal: My street would be, like, all Lebanese and Turkish. On special occasions like Ramadam, and you know, our feast, we visit each other. Yeah, most I think the majority is Muslim. We’re all Muslim there. But you know, I think I’m lucky, especially what my parents have told me. You know, the way they were brought up in Lebanon, what they could afford, what they could do. I can understand that Australia has done a lot for us. And I’m lucky, you know, being an Australian.

Tony Stephens advocates good manners too, in his article “Try a Little Respect”. Courtesy and respect for others has gradually created a society where the multicultural heritage has taken hold despite misgivings and ignorance. The article describes how Mika Nishimura, her husband Peter Richardson and their son Keita make the best of their shared cultures work for them. Mika says, “most societies are racist, including Australia, but particularly Japan.” She admires the way Australia deals with other cultures: “There could not be an

---

43 Fred Chaney, 1997.
44 Fred Chaney, 1997.
organisation like SBS in Japan, or the United States. I feel comfortable here in Sydney.” She goes on to say “Here I’m Mika first and Japanese second. In Australia you can have both cultures and build a bridge between cultures. That’s a sophisticated society.”

It was good manners, among other things, that helped initiate the Immigration Reform Movement in 1959 which began the process of dismantling the White Australia Policy. Respect for good manners once again has prompted Jamie Mackie to initiate a new group called Racial Respect which he says is being established in part to counter Pauline Hanson’s rudeness. Such a group would also deal more constructively with the problem Hanson identifies when she says that “ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate on immigration and multiculturalism.”

Ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate on immigration and multiculturalism

It’s all very well for people like myself and Fred Chaney, secure in our cultural and intellectual positions, to argue for good manners as a means of accepting and coping with social change. But there are a lot of people who don’t feel at all comfortable with the many changes and who feel very insecure about their position and value in this society. Sometimes this insecurity generates inner fears which can direct a person’s thinking. In which case the doors of their homes can easily shut tight and any expression of good manners

---

46 The Immigration Reform Movement was initiated by Jamie Mackie who together with a group of Australian intellectuals in 1959 began a campaign to put an end to a policy they saw as morally wrong. Nancy Viviani says of the Immigration Reform Movement that ‘they were also trying to recreate Australian society’. The Abolition of the White Australia Policy: The Immigration Reform Movement Revisited (Australia: Centre for Study of Australia-Asia relations, Griffith University, 1992).
47 Racial Respect is to be launched nationally in July 1997. It is concerned with issues relating to immigration and to Aboriginal people and attempts to help the community understand and appreciate the similarities and cease to fear the differences between people.
48 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
cease. The uncertainty that comes upon people when the nature of their world slips into being unrecognisable can make them want someone to blame. It's very easy to start scapegoating and to externalise the problem.

Amber: Well I get from the older Australian generation in the library, you know they're feeling scared to live in their own community. Feeling like, when they're out walking it's not really safe. It's like not being able to feel like comfortable in an area that you've been in for forty, fifty years.

Even though Hanson is politically crude and clearly engendering a politics of division and fear, her cry for a reconsideration of some contemporary planning and thinking is striking a chord with an ever increasing number of Australians. As a consequence, many people who feel this anxiety are now tolerant of some of the extreme options put forward by One Nation. I find myself caught by the recognition that in Hanson's agenda there is a real gut-felt opposition to economic rationalism and cultural re-structuring, an opposition that has stirred many people, who may not otherwise be One Nation supporters, into a sort of reaction.

Nesrin: Another thing I've noticed, there's a high level of unemployment. When you apply for a job they expect a lot of things from you. You have to be perfect. You cannot have anything missing that you do not know about the job. There is less chance of being trained on the job, I think now days. They don't want to spend valuable company time in training someone. My husband has been trying very hard and all the time, his lack of experience in Australia is the problem. This is our home now, we live here. Now he has English, he's got English certificates from TAFE to prove he knows the language. He has been trying very hard to get work.

One of the great virtues of democracy is that people have the freedom to speak their minds. But at the same time, there has to be leadership and some
way of countering ignorance in society, to prevent it from welling up and
destroying us. It is worthwhile to remind ourselves of how Fascism took hold
in similar times of economic and industrial restructuring. Probably the most
productive thing to be doing in Australia in this current environment is to ask,
what are the real causes of discontent, and what if anything, can be done to
address them? Given this messy ambivalence, instead of feeling that we are in
the grip of dark and impersonal forces where nobody gives a damn, I think it is
important to remind ourselves that we “remain one of the most open, tolerant,
free, democratic, humanist and pluralist societies” in the world? In particular
these values of tolerance and democracy have to be held onto and reinvented as
part of the on-going restructuring. Sometimes it is very hard to totally reinvent
or totally interpret social realities, but if nothing else Hansonism has to some
extent galvanised the community into a deep reflection on who and what we
want to be as a society. Her point that “most Australians have been kept out of
any debate on immigration and multiculturalism” has to be acknowledged.
Staying within the mess of ambivalence obviously means that the society has to
endure the tension of awkward and rude attitudes, while still fostering a
willingness to pursue the qualities of an open and tolerant society.

Hanson has taken the debate ‘out there,’ beyond the control of the professors
and politicians. It is spreading widely and transforming things, challenging all
sorts of perceptions of what was thought intolerable. The story that just won’t
go away traces its way into our psyche, and has become sensational. The
narrative around multiculturalism has taken a turn. Hanson’s argument is
sustained by sentiment, a sentiment that is widely felt in Australia. It is the
sentiment that David Marr’s aunt and her friends on Sydney’s North Shore
acknowledge when they say, “yes, but she’s got something”. Sentiment has its

49 Stephen FitzGerald, speaking at the launch of his book Is Australia an Asian Country? in the
Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday May 10, 1997) p. 6.
50 Pauline Hanson, first speech.
51 David Marr, “Primal Fear, Race, Politics and Respectable Australians” in the Sydney Morning
Herald (Saturday May 31, 1997) p. 4.
own logic and usually will not respond to another’s reasoning. Marr’s Aunty and her friends are “good people, perhaps never very keen to absorb the facts” and like, as I suspect, a lot of Australians, fearful of Asianisation. One must remember that it was our official policy, our mythical story, to keep Australia a ‘white nation in a yellow region’ until thirty years ago. There is a history and this history was given further conviction when in March 1997, John Howard, while repeating his election statement that Asia was the focus of his foreign policy said “we” are “not Asian”, nor is Australia “part of Asia”. The fear of Asian hordes has been with us for a long time. The blood of Kokoda and the Pacific campaign, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam helps us know this fear in a deep way.

In his book Is Australia an Asian Country? Stephen Fitzgerald recognises that an independent white (European) Australia is not possible anymore. This is precisely what Hanson and others fear. She would argue that such a white European Australia should be protected through higher tariffs, restricted immigration and a withdrawal from international treaty obligations. Fitzgerald on the other hand sees the inevitability of a massive Asian future which will overrun us, and that unless we join the ‘Asian century’ we will surely be the ‘white trash of Asia’. Part of this inevitability is the historical decline in white supremacy, certainly in our region. Fitzgerald develops this argument in the way he poses the challenge for Australians, and indeed for our various Asian neighbours, as a cultural and intellectual one. To reduce it simply to an economic imperative would fail us, because it is only a cultural harmony that can alleviate our ‘fears’. We have to ‘feel’ as if we belong in this part of the world.

Mej: Well, besides speaking English, like I sort of adapt to things around me and I accept the way things are coming, I mean, I don’t like to discriminate and say,

---

52 Stephen Fitzgerald, p.162.
‘this is Australian, I’m not doing that’, just because it’s not part of my Chinese culture. I won’t do that, I mean, I'm a Catholic, I'm baptised and, like, I accept the Catholic religion although my parents are Buddhist.

Conversations encourage us to talk to each other. The public conversation about multicultural Australia is part of the mainstream community discourse, and even though some people may feel left out or uncomfortable with this, most people, I think, enter into the conversation in order to know more about each other. People cannot function independently; they have to enter into the society and interact with others. Our various ethnic communities cannot function independently of the mainstream either. It is not uncommon now in most Sydney suburban schools to have there newsletters translated into the local ‘community’ languages. There are separate ethno-specific parents evenings, and community languages are generally taught through the K to 6 years. While it is the case that these are the hard won gains of people and lobby groups over many years, the consequence is that all public institutions like schools, libraries and hospitals now consider it part of their corporate culture to be ethnically plural. The public institutions have been changed, they have become ‘something else’.

John: Yes, we've gone out of our way to try and reflect the needs of the community. We provide material in all major community languages. There are five language groups here. We still provide material in English obviously, but we absolutely make it a real priority, particularly now in Indo-Chinese which is the growing language. We have a really good collection of Turkish material, a collection of excellence actually. Probably it's the biggest one in Australia.

Over the last decade or so some churches have set up ministries for the ethnic communities that have moved into their area. Katalina Tahaase

53 Stephen FitzGerald, p.139.
coordinates the cross-cultural ministry and mission for the NSW Synod in the Uniting Church. She says that for many people arriving here, the church is the place they recognise and understand as being ‘able to help’. This may lead the ethnic group to establish their own congregation, which the church then encourages by respecting their particular customs and traditions in church practice. But in a number of instances, Katalina acknowledges, there are difficulties between the older established church congregation and the newer ethnic congregation. This is the tension that comes up when ‘dearly loved traditions and customs’ like those of British Protestantism, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Congregationalists have to be brought into a working relationship with ‘very foreign’ church practices. Katalina also made the point that the dynamic of change is not confined to this difference between the established and the new congregations. The ethnic congregation itself has tensions because some members want to import church practices from their country of origin while others, especially second generation members, struggle with their wish to fit in and their desire to hold onto identifying traditions.

David Malouf discovered when he wrote his first book, "Johnno", that places only become fully real in a book. When the landmarks are enriched with the sort of associations they acquire as they move out of the realm of geography and into the realm of imagination, and so, into the heads of readers. More and more, we are confidently carrying around in our consciousness this iconography of images, these real but re-imagined places. This is what gives us a strong sense of who we are and where we come from and why we belong here. We identify with and are identified by this consciousness. "Australia? He barely knew where it was" writes Malouf in Remembering Babylon. "He had the uneasy feeling that it had just popped into his benefactor's head. Out of one of those letters perhaps, that by some unhappy coincidence lay in a scatter at his

54 Adapted from a telephone conversation with Katalina Tahaase of The Uniting Church in Australia.
elbow. The arbitrariness of it affected George with a kind of hilarity. The laughter that filled him, and threatened to break out and shatter every object in sight, echoed up from the other side of the world.”

I continue to write, to move and think and feel my way into the complexity of our invented society. My feeling is generally positive, I can at times sense the need to identify completely with my multicultural Australianness. What I find interesting too, is how incomplete this multicultural identity is and then how suddenly I feel such an identity is always in a state of flux. I am involved ecologically. The relations and the flows are sometimes more clearly appreciated than any complete sense of a cultural identity.

Lodi: I lived in Lebanon till I was about ten. Then I came to Australia. I lived with my grandparents. Oh, and my father was dead. And then I was put in a boarding school and then came to Australia when I was ten and a half. I lived in Redfern and later Silverwater. It was hard, very, very difficult life.

A truly multicultural country can never be strong (Pauline Hanson)

I love our ‘sunburnt country’. But what stories are we telling ourselves about this new Australia? “Stories after all, are a mechanism for focussing our desires to belong in a community. In a curious way they lead us to say what we are or what we want to be. They intertwine personal and public identities, making Australians of us, for instance: Australian women, Australian men, Aboriginal Australians, Chinese Australian and so on. So identity seems to be both internal and external, subjective and objective, in the domain of the cultural.”

Stephen Muecke suggests there is a surplus of social energy, far more than we need just to survive and so as it spills over it transforms the culture of the country. There is of course a sharp contrast to the encouraging picture of a ‘honey-coloured multicultured society’ spilling over with surplus cultural energy. It is expressed

---

56 Stephen Muecke, p.220.
powerfully by the militant refusal of Ian Anderson, a descendent of Truganini, to acknowledge a hybrid world. As one of the living legacies of enforced miscegenation, Ian Anderson stresses the political and psychological importance of affirming his Aboriginal identity in a context in which non-Aboriginal Australians would often pressure people like him to acknowledge his white ancestry. Anderson articulates his resistance against the disempowering nature of hybridity, "We have no past other than being the dupes of white Australian history, I am no hybrid, I do not experience my body as a fragmented entity of black and white. Even though I sense its transformative potential, and its internal contradictions and conflicts, it is one entity. My body is an Aboriginal body, and could not be otherwise, unless someone cared to dismember my historical consciousness, my experience of family, my experience of being treated as an Aboriginal, and acting in a particular manner because of who I am."  

Historically the subject of an essential Aboriginal identity has arisen together with the circumstance in which hybridity has become an integral part of the wider society’s cultural life. Most Aboriginal people’s lives are to some extent shaped by the ongoing economic, political and ideological parameters set by the larger diverse community. Yet Aboriginal people have more than a legitimate claim to assert their identity in the face of the “European settler nation state,” and so Ian Anderson’s rejection of a white ancestry is part of the coming to terms with our cultural stories. To insist on his endorsement of a hybridity that would colour contemporary Australia as tolerant and forward looking, would serve to undercut the politics of his indigenous identity. Comments often thrown at Aboriginals, especially during the recent Wik and Mabo discussions, such as ‘he’s whiter than my brother’, are an aggressive

attempt to deny the assertion of Aboriginal identity in the name of an assimilatory hybridity.

For Ian Anderson the painful and violent dispossessing in Tasmania is more important in shaping his sense of identity than is his biological heritage. “I fail to feel positive about my white ancestors, and I do not see it as mine, I simply acknowledge its impact”.59 Hybridity does not stand for a happy fusion, but for racial disappearance, for a fatal completeness and the impossibility of Aboriginal survival in Tasmania. It is important to listen to Anderson’s story carefully, to hear it as the story of a contemporary “Aboriginal-being-in-Australia”60; a point of view often not heard in the conversation ‘whites’ have about ‘being in this place’. Instead of retreating from his powerful and active disidentification with the white culture, perhaps we could look at it as one of many examples of Aboriginal renaissance coming into the collective experience over the last three or so decades. This will mean taking seriously the achievements of Aboriginal people, taking their stories seriously and on their own cultural terms and with their singularity. Now, apart from the obvious cultural truth in this, I suggest it would help stop the telling of stories about our cultural lack. “We have to begin to conceive of our place as already full, not lacking anything such that we have to look elsewhere to complete our national psyche.”61

FitzGerald makes the point that by the late 1980’s this society was not only lively, inventive and creative, but also culturally and socially cosmopolitan, and hard working. “It is probably also the most sophisticated, open and tolerant society in matters of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, and basic

59 Ian Anderson, p. 5.
61 Stephen Muecke, p. 225.
freedoms and equity in all the Asia Pacific region."\(^{62}\) So what is in Hanson’s claim that “along with millions of Australians, I am fed up to the back teeth with the inequalities that are being promoted by the government and paid for by the taxpayer under the assumption that Aboriginals (and migrants) are the most disadvantaged people in Australia”?\(^{63}\) This can easily be dismissed as incorrect and inflammatory, but it suggests that a white identity is trying to retain its coherence. John Howard’s promise too of a “relaxed and comfortable”\(^{64}\) society, succeeded in convincing a large number of people that our identity should be something like it was in the 1950-60’s.

The political calculation behind this promise helped secure Howard’s win at the 1996 election. However, psychologically, ecologically and culturally, our society is not relaxed and comfortable. “We now have a situation where a type of reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians” suggests Hanson by those who “promote political correctness and those who control the various taxpayer funded ‘industries’ that flourish in our society servicing Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority groups.”\(^{65}\) Hanson argues that recent governments have been “encouraging separism.”\(^{66}\) The result of this, she says is that minority groups like Aboriginals and multiculturalists are being allowed to flourish at the expense of mainstream Australians.

In May 1988 Stephen FitzGerald delivered *The FitzGerald Report* on Australia’s immigration policies to the Federal Government. In this report he is very critical of some representatives of ethnic communities, for whom separatism was never far from their representations, and whose concept of community seldom mentioned the Australian community. Identity was not a

---

\(^{62}\) Stephen FitzGerald, p. 70.

\(^{63}\) Pauline Hanson, first speech.

\(^{64}\) An election promise by the then opposition leader, John Howard in the lead up to the 1996 Australian Federal Election.

\(^{65}\) Pauline Hanson, first speech.

\(^{66}\) Pauline Hanson, first speech.
matter of what one had in common but what distinguished one from other people living in the same country. They were not Australian voters but 'ethnic' voters, and at the more extreme end there were ethnic leaders who sought separate courts to operate under a separate legal and judicial regime. "Their approach to identity had very little to do with Australia and often disparaged Australia as having no culture, as never having had any sense of family or family values, of being overall an entirely worthless place."67 FitzGerald's concern is that the long term future for Australia is currently hamstrung by sectional multicultural positions which have turned the discussion and debate about identity inwards upon ourselves. There is a narrow self interest on the part of some ethnic leaders, encouraged by some politicians.68 For him multiculturalism is a process on the way to a 'singular Australian identity'. At this time, he fears that multicultural debate has been dominated by doctrinaire groups whose preoccupation is with what divides us from one another instead of what we have in common. His argument is that we have to 'change the culture' of the 'multicultural' to an 'Australia-centric' one which joins the "intellectual and cultural and historical wellsprings of Australia: European, Aboriginal, Asian, into something which is ultimately larger, and which we can unashamedly call Australian".69

In arguing for a return to the social and cultural characteristics of the middle decades of this century, both Hanson and Howard are themselves proposing a type of separatism. Setting aside the silliness of all these separatist ideas and just considering what is being proposed - including of course John Howard's desire for a 'relaxed and comfortable' society - one would have to conclude that they all represent an impossibility. It is wise to signal a caution when it comes to explanations about society that emerge from science, albeit the contemporary science of fuzzy logic and uncertainty theory. However, these ideas of Howard,

67 Stephen FitzGerald, p.128.
68 Stephen FitzGerald, pp. 66, 77, 82, 84, 85, 89, 90, 104, 127-9.
69 Stephen FitzGerald, p. 84.
Hanson and ‘some ethnic leaders’ are good examples of what Dimitrov calls ‘the incoherence principle’\textsuperscript{70}, because they can only be expressed in terms of a language that is approximate at best. Decisions that an individual might make about living in a ‘relaxed and comfortable’ society can only be a fuzzy approximation of how the group thinks and acts on these ideas. Similarly a change to a more compassionate and sustaining society, something that the majority of us might advocate, or a more ethno inclusive society, will not necessarily generate an easier, even kinder form of cultural transformation. The nature of any dynamic system, such as a multicultural society is that it can never reach an equilibrium. It will always be slightly incoherent and in a state of complex interaction. What does seem to be revealed in the words of Howard, Hanson and ‘some ethnic leaders’ however, is that difference has always been hard to live with. This is especially so if the ‘other’, or the previously marginalised, insists on speaking in a politically self-representational mode designed to critically force the mainstream identity to accept its own Blackness, Asianness, or Middle Eastness etc.

Cung: We should help the Australian community to deal with this multicultural society. So in order to do that, we should group the Vietnamese people into an association to help. Australia is a multicultural society. So if you want to deal with that kind of society they need help from ethnic communities. There is a great deal to do in this task.

What is interesting in Cung’s comments is the way he sees our multicultural community. It is something to which he has a responsibility. It is not necessary for him to identify his Vietnameseness only in terms of difference, but also as a participant in a common task.

\textsuperscript{70} Vladamir Dimitrov, Fuzzy Logic seminar (School of Social Ecology, UWSH, 1995).
Cung: Well, when I came here, I should say that I was surprised about the number of different people living here. When I live in Vietnam, we have foreigners living there, but not various ethnic groups, or communities, you see. We have a lot of Chinese living in Vietnam. They live in big groups. When you go to there place, you don’t realise the country is Vietnam. Because around you everything is Chinese, Chinese business. We have some Indians who come to Vietnam to make business. They sell mostly clothes, and silk. But when I came here, I saw that there is a lot of people from other cultures. Ethnic communities. Asian people and people from Europe, from the Middle East.

I want to draw out of Cung’s words the recognition that we do have a culture, rich and diverse, Asian people and people from Europe, from the Middle East, whose living together is working, even though there is a great deal to do in this task. There is so often a wonderful originality and imagination in the discrepancy between the various intentions of different community groups. Cung recognises that if the Vietnamese people form into an association, then they will help both themselves and the Australian community, to deal successfully with multiculturalism. In this we all have a responsibility.

Australians have often been criticised for being too lazy, too laid back, when it came to responsibility. Consider Donald Horne’s famous critique in The Lucky Country and more recently Barry Jones’s Sleepers wake. But being ‘laid back’ is also one of our greatest characteristics, giving us a tolerance so often not acknowledged.

Neville: You know, for the life of me I can’t really think of anything difficult about people from other places. But I mean, they do have their own ways of doing things. I have eaten Vietnamese food, and I would not have known what was in it, still it’s very nice. And also I have had meals at an Asian friend’s house. It’s very difficult because they keep giving me little bowls of food and I think, oh right, that’s the last bowl, so I better eat only a little bit of this and leave some, but it
goes on for ages and ages. And because you don’t eat so much they keep bringing you more.

Now that they’ve shown me the way, what to do and how to eat, it must be an awful lot of washing up at the end of a meal, even though they are small bowls. It was rather difficult for me to understand at first, that the bowls were there with different parts of the meal. But now I feel very comfortable with these friends.

Listening into the public conversation on talkback radio, on both the ABC and commercial stations, and reading editorials and letters to the editor, it would appear that the public has generally accepted the fundamental unease of living with the differences inherent in a pluralist and multicultural society. And yet it also appears that many individuals are still having difficulty coming to terms with changes. Amber’s concerns are typical of comments being expressed about the way this society is going.

Amber: I only know what I see. Like I think the racism that is there now, at the moment is that because there’s so many of them. Like all at once. And people are getting a bit offended I think, you know, put out.

Even so, she is still able to hold the paradox and recognises that when children grow up together with ethnic friends, it is an easy way to achieve multicultural and multiracial harmony. This is where her nephew’s at!

Amber: But my nephew goes to school at Granville. He’s nine, and he’s got all ethnic friends and he has always got on with them. They’ve grown up like that. I think that is a big plus.

“Here’s an Australia day puzzle for you,” Diana Bagnall says in the same Australia Day Bulletin, “Choose the most Australian face from among these four (A selection of four faces on the opposite page sic). If you picked ... Richard
Chee, you would be just as right as if you picked any of the others. They are all Australian born, though maybe Richard Chee Quee has a higher profile than the rest. Chee Quee, 25, has never been to China and speaks only English. To his mates in the NSW cricket team he is ‘Cheeks’, handy with the bat (105 against the West Indies in December) and a good bloke to knock about with.”

There is nothing strange about an Asian playing cricket - India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka spring to mind. Still in sports-mad Australia cricket remains overwhelmingly a traditional Anglo bastion. “But in the big hitting batsman with Chinese features, the Newcastle crowd recognised something true blue in Chee Quee.”

But what exactly was it they saw? Bagnall is saying that Richard Chee Quee has somehow blended into the mainstream and some inherent Australian originality has been maintained. She claims that this original Australianness is most symbolically enunciated when Richard describes the ‘sledging’ he’s had to cop over the years, ‘taking it on the chin’; this for Bagnall is “a true Australian.”

Tied together in ways that give everybody a fair go

The symbolic idea of race is that of a genealogy; the filiation of an individual is transmitted from generation to generation, both biologically and spiritually, thereby inscribing the individual into a ‘kinship’ of community. Just fifty years ago when the Chifley Government of the day introduced mass migration as a national priority, 87.9% of the population of 6 million was of British descent, and understood itself in terms of this kinship. Today, all eighteen million of us are descended from 180 different countries and over 40% of us are of non

72 Diana Bagnall, p.15.
73 ‘Sledging’ is a term used to describe, in sport, the exchange of derogative language aimed at unsettling an opponent.
74 ‘Taking it on the chin’ a term much loved by Australian sports people and politicians to describe their capacity to cope with verbal accusations or slights.
75 Diana Bagnall, p.15.
English speaking backgrounds. No wonder there is ambivalence when it comes to kith, kin and identity.

Narelle: Yes, I do have a boyfriend (laugh), he’s Turkish. He’s fifteen. He goes to Granville Boys and he’s really polite and nice. I met his mum once, but she’s not too nice to me. I ring him up and she says, ‘he’s not here’, and like, I know he’s there. But she doesn’t let me contact him, like to talk to him on the telephone. So I know his family is OK, but his mother is, well I suppose it cause I’m not Turkish. So, I’m Australian and apparently something happened, to do with the war, you know. Some person in the family was killed in the war, or something like that. She hates Australians. But it’s nothing against me, it’s just my culture and things like that. So I’m not worried.

I have no qualms in saying that I too want a comfortable and relaxed place to live, and at times I recognise myself as a liberal pluralist wanting a harmony in the diversity. But to foreclose the debate on important issues about the heterogeneity of Australian society by calling on feelgood phrases like ‘relaxed and comfortable’ that supposedly represent the feelings of mainstream Australia conveniently neglects the specific power relations and historical conditions that have brought on the process of hybridisation. There is no intention in this writing to close down the matter of historical shortcomings and blatant power abuse, and I accept with contrition the refusal of Ian Anderson to acknowledge any white ancestry. From where I stand in the mainstream, I can but notice that what ever the emerging identity might be, it seems to be much stronger than Hanson fears and more contemporary than Howard can imagine.

Narelle’s relationship would appear to embrace many of the apprehensions and anticipations of this society. She and her young boyfriend challenge the community historically and culturally, and whether those involved like it or not, some accommodation of difference is happening. If ever there was a
mythical golden time for mainstream Australia, when Bradman76 was God and every summertime untroubled, it has gone for ever. Over the last thirty years mainstream Australia has changed. Australia is a signatory to a number of international human rights conventions, the High Court has given Aborigines title to land, gays and lesbians are widely accepted, what was once called feminism is part of everyday life for most women, and school children don’t notice that the kid they are sitting next to is a Skippy, a Lebo, a Turk or Chink77.

Hanson’s rise to prominence has coincided with a number of important cultural and social changes: the Mabo and Wik decisions, a change in the Federal Government, the publication of the Stolen Children inquiry, and the eventual recognition on the part of many Australians that we can no longer assume to be primarily a European society. One of John Howard’s pre-election promises was that he would get Aboriginals and multiculturalism off the front pages of the daily newspapers. Far from that, we have seen these issues consistently there and our society has been encouraged to interact, to engage in the conversation. The force that is driving this complexity vortex is coming from within the system.

Ali: I still suffer about something since I come from Iraq. I miss my family, my farm. I have a little problem with money, with the language. But in here I think this country is very very good. Not just to me but to everyone. You must keep this country safe, I think.

And as for the emptiness of Australian space - that Australia of no culture, a soulless and worthless place set on top of a barren landscape - well, we know this version to be not true. If we want to look at images out of our past going back to the beginnings of photography, or consult the documents of our

76 Don Bradman, an Australian cricket player, regarded by many as the greatest player of all times.
77 Various slang terms to identify different racial groups currently used by school children in Sydney school playgrounds.
history, or distinguish the many species of eucalyptus, or study Aboriginal bark paintings or a hundred other aspects of life on this continent, they are there, fully recorded and illustrated and the real objects are there too, farm implements, great houses, exquisite silver work, innovative technologies, all there to be seen. But most of all, 'they' have got into our heads, they have become familiar to us, they are the ground on which our films are set, the ambience for our novels, the style of our aesthetic.

One is wary now of assuming that a landscape is empty because it does not readily reveal its treasures. What so many early migrants saw when they first confronted the landscape of Australia was how much work would have to be done. It was a landscape that in their terms was meaningless and would remain so till they had changed and shaped and humanised it. So long as the place was understood in this way it could not be loved for itself, and maybe more importantly, it could not, in any real sense be seen. Its crowdedness was not apparent. Only recently has the place begun to reveal all of its complexity and variety. To reach into this, new responses have had to be developed. The process has only just begun. It is too early to point to the qualities that may emerge, but a consequence of seeing the land is that one can now see and respect the people who, for so long, have lived here. In developing an eye for the diversity of this place, we have begun to appreciate difference, indeed, to welcome it.

In *No Road*, Stephen Meucke tells a story about an old man, Hobbies, from northern Australia, who has an interesting line on sexual relationships. "We're friends together because we own Australia" he says, "every one of them no matter who, white or black. We come together, join in whether we can you know - take it mijelb (ourselves) love mijelb one another (each other). And crossways marriage, no matter what kind of marriage, we can have them because we
own Australia, today every one of them. That be all right." The whole point of marriage, as a system of accommodation, "is that a new generation shares in the locative identity of both parents. Hobbles asserts that marriage, descent and land ownership can be tied together in ways that give everyone a fair go." Notwithstanding the strong denial of being ‘tied together’, that Ian Anderson expresses, I sense that there is a moving together, a sort of descent into the ‘locative identity’ of Australia. The last two centuries of immigration has ruptured the indigenous cultural systems. At the same time, migration of people from all over the world, has broken various other “chains of connection” and forced us, as a society, to imagine anew how to relink ourselves and the continent into a coherent cultural system. Every culture develops its own manner of fashioning time and space into a social and symbolic configuration. These configurations become part of the implicit ‘common sense’ that structures the social knowledge of a community. “This is what culture does: it transforms the arbitrary and contingent into a system that seems natural and given; social and symbolic configurations become part of that which makes the real real, the normal normal.” I have argued that Australian society refuses to be totally homogenised and that encounters between people as they have attempted to make their homes here cannot be polarised as either all good or, all bad. Nor can it be argued that the way we will make our home here is all over and done with.

---

78 Stephen Muecke, p.102.
79 Stephen Muecke, p.103.
Conclusion

I began this thesis with a story about my neighbours, the people who live on the other side of the paling fence. The old lady lives alone now, and so my family has become a little more important in her life as she negotiates her change of circumstance. We chat more regularly, share more cooking and garden tips, the kids pick up and fetch for some of her needs. There has been a time factor in how this neighbourly relationship has developed. Over time we have become less foreign to each other. When my kids mimic her accent it isn’t with malice, but more in recognition that Australians can speak like that also. We no longer seem strange to one another.

Clifford Geertz points out, that there remains a paradox in communication. This is to do with how meaning in one particular system of expression can be translated into another system. How do we as individuals and as community members construct articulations that allow people to move, thrive and fit in? People are incredibly adaptive. Mej’s story (Chapter 9; Being Australian, p. 289) is so appropriate. She says that she sort of adapts to things around her, and she accepts the way things are coming. I don’t, she says like to discriminate and say, 'this is Australian, I’m not doing that. What is very important also is to realise that the social system which has emerged here in Australia promotes adaption and is itself also, adaptive. An ecological imperative for our society is to encourage the kind of complex adaptive system in which Mej’s life takes shape. Such a system would encourage individuals, like Mej, and the community to be involved in symbiotic relationships that thrive.

A common concern in the public conversation is with the passing of a ‘way of life’. I have concentrated on Pauline Hanson and her expression of this concern, but she is certainly not alone. Hanson’s views are extreme and as such
they have polarised the community, but many less strident voices are regretful too. They are often concealed behind notions of ‘good sense and reason’ and lay claim to honourable agendas like environmentalism, population control, healthy futures, unemployment and of course the lament at the loss of particular characteristics of a place.

Hugh Mackay is wont to tell us, again and again, that Australia is worried.¹ The bleakness of our national mood is perplexing, he tells us, and he goes on to ask why we aren’t more optimistic, more buoyant, more confident about our future? He lists the obvious culprits: a failure of political leadership, uncertainty about long term employment, youth unemployment, nostalgia and of course a loss of faith and identity. “We need something to believe in,” he says “yet faith lies beyond our sceptical grasp and inspiration seems in short supply.”²

In like manner, Leo Schofield laments the passing of old character and charm from our cities and describes their replacement by “a flurry of frock shops and boutiques. It is as if designer label frenzy has seized the world.”³ I don’t want to be dismissive of these concerns. What I want to suggest in this thesis is that the dynamic of change is always upon us, and that we are continually becoming the future. Obvious as this may sound, thoughts about the unease and trouble and the consequent lack of inspiration can turn into an all too common wish to go back to a better time. They are, like Hanson’s ideas, framed too narrowly because they assume that Australian society should have a faith in a quite particular psychological and cultural reality such as ‘nationhood’, or ‘the people’, or ‘a fair go’. The continuing public commentary from people as

¹ Hugh Mackay, “Why Australia is Worried” in the Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday, February 7, 1998) p. 32. Hugh Mackay is a columnist and social researcher.
² Hugh Mackay, p. 32.
disparate as Hanson and Mackay needs to be clearly countered in public conversation.

It is just over a year since my neighbour Mr. Vigerzi died. Tears still come quickly to the eyes of Tina, his wife. Death involves us all in a deep sadness. Yet the depth of feeling that is associated with the loss of the familiar and the quietly cherished can come as a surprise. The process of passing is often long and drawn out, and memory fades at its own pace. Leaving behind 'the old country', watching a neighbourhood change, feeling the loss of a culture, being made redundant, are experiences deeply felt. Then there is Mej's story. It is the other side of the coin of change. She is young and besides speaking English like, sort of adapts to things around her. She is an opportunist shifting in accordance with her changing circumstances.

I am not suggesting that only young people are comfortable and confident with change. This thesis includes many stories from all sorts of people enjoying their changing circumstances. Australian culture, which is built on 212 years of continuous migration, has provided enormous opportunities for people to adapt and to change. This is a primary part of the contemporary Australian story. There is a cultural reservoir of adaption skills that some commentators forget about. If anything, an Australian cultural characteristic has to be an ability to adapt to the place. A consequence of this has been the emergence of an insightful and flexible social system.

My research has made me aware of three important social/cultural ideas. Australia is a country in which 'a society' has developed, taken root, prospered, faltered and invented for itself a 'way of being'. Australia is not the country of 'a people', as one might imagine Vietnam to be the country of the Vietnamese people or England to be the country of the English. And Australia is a modern bourgeois society, continually changing by virtue of being added to through the migration of people, wealth and ideas. Chandran Kukathas argues that the idea of being Australian should not create "too strong a sense of national
identity" because of the possible risk that the society would then not “tolerate a variety of ways of life within the political community.”

My thesis explores ‘conversation’ as a valid way of working through complex, non linear phenomena. Conversations require one’s attention and interest. Being interested in the situation is important. Circumstances can not be taken for granted, and one must assume that ordinary people are intensely interested in what it means to live here and what it means to be a part of this country’s future. The community is engaged in a public conversation in which the media, politicians, family table talk, bar room discussions proceed without coercion or censorship.

Our contemporary society, I contend, is not simply a collection of individualists determined only to satisfy their personal needs, but a society in which an individual can share in the community at no risk to their unique specificity. Such a notion is critiqued generally along the lines that such bourgeois values can only be understood in terms of a possessive and determined individualism, which leaves each one of us abandoned in our own private space. From this space all bonds of care and compassion between people and communities are supposedly dissolved into mutual antagonisms. But I think our culture is not just a complexity based on economics where individuals are isolated and antagonistic, nor is it merely a political structure that governs the abstract rights of individuals. The culture also involves a complexity of ‘aesthetic’ qualities. What I have called soulful qualities. Qualities that embrace the principles of ecology: that is, connectedness and interdependence. An ecological epistemology is best described in terms of an aesthetics firmly tied to the sensory experience of communicative relationships. These manifest as sentiment, affections and spontaneous habitual customs that most of us have come to assume will provide a personal and internalised governance.

---

4 Chandran Kukathas, “The idea of an Australian Identity” developed in Chapter One Nation.
My argument is that we live in a contemporary society in which public governance is a consequence of personal governance. As a society we are able to express sentiment and affection beyond the individual. As a result, I think, our society tends towards a public governance based on consent rather than coercion. "Government by conversation" as Churchill called it. What seems to have secured our social system, giving it an inventive flexibility, is that within the "realm of customary practice" - the ordinary way people live in neighbourhoods and communities, the rule of common law, the embracing nature of education, health and welfare - instinctual sentiment and affection is acknowledged. As our contemporary society has emerged, it has brought with it the legacy of a British colonial history with all the ramifications of British/European modernism, fear of racial miscegenation and an anxiety about Asia. So the emergence of a sophisticated multicultural society which allows for "the living energies and affections" of its people to be invested into it, is a phenomenon worth celebrating. We have managed to make for ourselves a domestic community that is broadly tolerant, politically democratic and stable and culturally diverse.

As individuals living in the Australian society we are able to function as autonomous and self-determining subjects, and in some mysterious fashion this capacity to self govern liberates a social energy which is capable of shaping a harmonious unity out of the potential turbulence of personal appetites and inclinations. Within the community most people tend to accept a cultural aesthetic in which they "in the very act of determining themselves, regulate and in turn are regulated by all other self-determining beings." If anything, our society will use, as a coercive instrument, the customs of compassion which are necessary in every society and which connect us bodily to each other. There is a

7 Terry Eagleton, p. 22.
8 Terry Eagleton, p. 25.
great soulful quality to the idea of ‘compassion’, that of being brought together and into union with our passions. The nett effect is to be there for the other.

The reconciliation convention and the broad ranging conversation that accompanied it are a wonderful example of this ecology of compassion in process. Even though a public apology from the government was not forthcoming, the extent to which people engaged in public/private apology and discussion was extraordinary. It included the established churches, state governments, governmental institutions like education departments and universities, private businesses, numerous private and public citizens, including a personal apology from the Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet and a most outspoken apology and plea for reconciliation from the Governor General. Even some Aborigines like the Rev. Bill Bird⁹ saw fit to concede that they too needed to apologise, they too had to seek reconciliation for certain things in which they were complicit. What seems to have emerged from the intensity of this conversation has been an “imaginative exchange or appropriation of each other’s identity”¹⁰ in a deeply felt way.

Some historical discourse argues that as bourgeois society has developed and defined itself as a universal project, it wilfully asserts its own version of a rational enlightenment tinged with sentimentality. The society then proceeds to assert a hegemonic authority which assumes that all other social and cultural systems will evaporate before this enlightened model. There is truth in these critiques. The obvious historic victory of the bourgeois society in many parts of the world, and certainly here in Australia, confirms this.

But even while our society is based upon these bourgeois traditions of liberty and democracy, we have to face the reality that in the making of this society our institutions have been, and continue in part to be, flawed. The principles by which we live, personally and publically, are marred by human error,

---
⁹ Rev. Bill Bird, a former Minister in the Redfern Anglican Church, NSW. Now referring to himself as Aboriginal Pastor Bill Bird.

---
⁹⁰
misdemeanour and failure. We have just let go of the ‘White Australia policy’ (early 1970’s) and have only relatively recently (1967) acknowledged Aborigines as Australian citizens.

While it cannot be denied that Australia is a bourgeois society, to claim that as citizens we have been homogenised into a globalised subject divorced from locality and community hasn’t really happened. There are, undoubtedly, some unifying tendencies, (flippantly expressed in the idea that everywhere one looks is a Calvin Klein advertisement). In the end a totalising bourgeois culture cannot be identified. In Australia there are quite particular stories that have coalesced, or ‘structurally coupled’, into the ongoing process of our particular cultural evolution. We have developed migration policies that have been flexible and ultimately non-discriminatory. And in recent times more and more people are beginning to see, hear and absorb the knowledge of this place and its indigenous people.

It is easy to be critical of Australia’s shortcomings, and one has to accept that there have been and there still remain many paradoxes in our past and in the present social system. But people recognise something very special too, about Australia, and this is implicit in the attitudes of some of those who come to live here. People ‘turn up’ here when circumstances in their own country force a permanent departure, or for the education of their children, or as a back-up base for their business, or for security in retirement. Many of the stories in the thesis confirm these motives. At times people found it hard to clearly articulate their reasons for coming, but most identified the strong democratic traditions of this society.

Ali: I think Australia really is very good. It is very good to live here. Every people is different, from another country, but they live together. No any problems. In Iraq life is very difficult. I still suffering because I miss my family, my farm.

10 Terry Eagleton, p. 24.
But in here, I think this is very very good. Not just to me but to everyone. You must keep this country safe, I think.

What is there in the practice of everyday life that has made for people like Ali a very good life here? Does the Lucky Country simply run on luck? I have been conscious of the dangers of a right wing populism - one can certainly not assume that this civil bourgeoise society will never turn malicious and trample on the harmony we seem to have achieved. Therefore, as a society, it is important that we preserve and enhance institutions that promote an informed and tolerant public conversation: the ABC and SBS, editorial freedom, a liberal public education system, public service and parliamentary accountability. These institutions have to be free to pursue agendas that promote a praxis whereby the bond between the individual and their world is ceaselessly constituted.

Hanson was able to express her opinions in parliament, in public and through the media. She is a strident critic of certain policy conventions that have emerged in our society over the last thirty years. Her arguments have been taken seriously, reported on, commented upon, satirised, challenged, undermined and in relatively recent times taken into academic discourse as part of the on-going project to name and locate Australian identity. The point I make about the Hanson phenomenon is that it contributes to this interesting, tolerant and flexible society. Her emergence has changed things like, for example the supposedly unquestioned assumptions about ‘political correctness’, and whether or not the society could tolerate such unfashionable opinions. What has happened as a result of Pauline Hanson’s appearance on the social stage has been a greater and more complex discussion about these issues, and racism has been openly considered and discussed.

At times I have used the difficult idea of soul, and what it might mean, as a way of describing the spirit of this place. To live fully in a place, one needs to feel as if there is an enchanted presence about the place. Even though some
migrants come hoping to start over in a place empty of past restraints - a New World still to be made - they bring with them a selection of talismans and mementoes to seed this enchantment. These seeds have taken root, quite literally, in our gardens and farms, in the restaurants, in the architecture, in religion, in our accent and in the social styles. These mementoes and talismans have seeded change. In falling to the ground and taking root they establish the patterns, the aesthetic dimensions, of contemporary Australian culture.

Van: My brother, he mentioned something about different cultures here. He mentioned about in summertime when people go down to the beach with their towel. And I mean easy going, easy lifestyle. Instead of the controversial shooting and things like that, as in Vietnam. And through this picture we can see something different in the way people live.

There is an ease of movement here. We have a pluralist political system and institutions with underlying values informed by humanism, science and reason. I stand by these modernist paradigms of humanism, science and reason, because one cannot underestimate their importance in this community’s culturescape. Australia has always been a modern society. The feudal and class systems of Europe and Asia have never taken hold here. I am not denying the extremely racist and brutal treatment of Aborigines and later Chinese migrants on the gold fields, and recently of Vietnamese and Arabic migrants in the cities - there is no adequate excuse. But as the years have passed, a lot has changed. This is exemplified for me in the different neighbourliness I have found with the old Italian, Catholic lady who lives next door.

As individuals we are bound into the customs of this humanist, modern and rational society and, even in the face of all the critiques that suggest an homogenising modernist agenda, in the end the society cannot determine
totally one’s ‘human experiential space’. Such a space is chaotic and unpredictable, remaining inherently flexible. However, it would seem to me that people always influence their own experiences. We’re not just socially determined beings. Perhaps people’s experience is heightened or enhanced by inspiration which may inject an energy into their lives that brings about change in the patterns of their experience.

Fatma: I born in Turkey. I married when I was fifteen years old. After I got baby. Anyway, after, say ten years we are moving. My husband opened one green grocer shop, good business. But then we hear that in Australia it more nice. So we just come here.

Inspiration gives birth to new ideas; intention then selects the most appropriate course of action. Throughout the thesis I have discussed the importance of chaos and uncertainty in the way complex, dynamic, non-linear systems function. Because social and personal systems are complex, dynamic, nonlinear systems, they can only therefore be partially coherent. “One cannot predict what experiential patterns will emerge in one’s life even in the nearest future.”

Fatma: After we came here, first Wollongong, for three months. After we went to Shepperton. Picking up the tomato for two seasons. After everything moving there we buy the farm. Many friends come to pick up the tomatoes. After they come back next year they come again to pick up the tomato. And my children go out with them. My children have music group, but not many Turkish people there, in Shepperton. No wedding, no party. The children say we are going to Sydney, many Turkish there. Now one son married in Turkey and one married in here, and one married a Polish girl here. I like the Polish girl, she’s good girl, very

---

12 Vladimir Dimitrov.
nice. I was much crying first because I didn’t want my son going to different people to marry.

I set out to write about my experience of living in a multicultural society and to ascertain whether this society allows people to thrive. To thrive means to prosper, flourish and to firmly grasp hold of the circumstances that embrace one. I have argued throughout this thesis that this society encourages the capacity of individuals to thrive. This I think reflects a social ecology which openly communicates and shares knowledge. I have used ideas from ecology as metaphors for a discussion of change in this community. Contemporary ideas about social ecology suggest that an organism and the environment structurally couple and that a complex dynamic relationship is established in which ‘everything’ is changed in the process of adaption. I have used other metaphors too, such as the montaged artwork to describe the mutual process of change. In each case the process of change involves both a maintenance of integrity and a radical alteration in relationship.

The psychological difficulty with coming to this realisation is that even though our lived experience can quite easily accommodate the process of change - the great divide between Protestants and Catholics has all but disappeared in contemporary society; ‘marrying out’ among second generation migrants is now quite fashionable - many of us still think of ourselves in terms of more stable metaphors. The task of building community traditions in which the drama of our changing society is continually refined and talked about will be ongoing and never finished. It is also a ‘bit by bit’ process. But what is essential, and what I contend has made it possible to thrive here, is that anyone who feels responsible, anyone who has an interest, anyone who feels like it, can participate in the society.

Gungor: I said, listen, to them I said I’m explaining everything to life. At first this Australia is greener than the Turkey, and life -wise the cost of living is
cheaper than the Turkey and easier than the Turkey. You know so many things easier here. I mean easier, how can I say: Turkey now is 70 million population, can you imagine, so small area, so many people now. And all the facilities, sometimes in summer time you cannot find the water and winter times maybe cannot get enough gas to heating the house. So many things you know is missing there. The road is not very well, and some winter times everything is mud and cold. This is easy here. So they want to come. I will support them all right, especially my cousin, my aunties.

I suggest that there is an essential humanism in Australian culture that is relatively free of dogma and false claims to righteousness. Pino Saccaro recently visited the village in Sicily where he was born and from where his family migrated to Australia just after the Second World War. “This was the place I was born. My home. Suddenly I realised, at the age of 39, that I was among my family. It all came back and for the first time I realised this is where I began. I realised then how the past shaped my present and how this affected my future.”13 He was writing in The Herald, on Australia Day, January 26, 1998, deciding for the first time in his life to celebrate the day. In the past this day had seemed irrelevant, ‘what was the big deal’. “I was born in Italy but Australia gave me an identity. In the 30 odd years, Australia and myself have made an incredible journey. I feel optimistic for the future. How privileged we are, that this is the country in which the world came to live.”14

14 Pino Saccaro, p. 17.
Selected Bibliography and references

Newspapers, Documents and Other Media

*The Australian*
*Sydney Morning Herald*
*The Daily Telegraph*
*The Bulletin*

*Hansards*, for the Australian House of Representatives. Appropriation Bill No. 1 10th September, 1996.

*Late Night Live*, ABC Radio National.
*Meridian*, ABC Radio National.

*Four Corners* (television current affairs) ABC Television Productions.
*Neighbours* (television drama), Network 10, Grundy Productions.
*The Midday Show* (television, talk/variety entertainment) TCN 9 Productions.

Onar Am, http://www.stud.his.no/~onar/ess/back-to-basics.html

*Smiley*, (motion picture) 35 mm, Director and Producer, Anthony Kimmins, 1956.

*Mad Max, Mad Max 2, Beyond Thunderdome* (motion pictures), 35mm, Director George Miller, Production, Warner/Kennedy - Miller, 1979, 1981, 1986.
*Colour Bars* (motion picture) 16mm, Director, Mahmoud Yekta Produced, Frontyard Films, 1996.

Books


Clarke, Gordon and Forbes, Dean eds., Multiculturalism, difference and postmodernism (Australia: Longman Cheshire, 1993).


Fell, Llyod & Russell, David & Stewart, Alan, eds., Seized by Agreement, Swamped by Understanding (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, 1994).


Flannery, Tim, The Future Eaters (Sydney: Reed Books, 1994).


Muecke, Stephen, *No Road (bitumen all the way)* (Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997).


Russell, David & Stewart, Alan, *Seized by Agreement, Swamped by Understanding (A collection of papers to celebrate the visit to Australia, August 1994, by Humberto Maturana)* (Australia: University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury, 1994).


Thompson, Liz, *From Somewhere Else. People from other countries who have made Australia home.* (Australia: Simon and Schuster, 1993).


Wills, Fred, *Poems and Short Stories of Australia* (Sydney: Self Published, Auburn, 1992).


Articles

Allon, Fiona, “Home as Cultural Translation” in Home, Displacement, Belonging, Communal Plural. No. 5 (Sydney: Research Centre in Intercommunal Studies. UWS Nepean, 1997).


Janaczeewska, Noelle, “eat the table” in Playworks; Telling Time (Sydney: Playworks, 1995).


Rose, Deborah Bird, "Rupture and the Ethics of Care in Colonized Space" in Bonyhady & Griffiths, eds., John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).


Safran, William, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of homeland and return" in Diasporas (Santa Cruz, Centre for Cultural Studies, University of California, 1994).


Thomas, Mandy, “Discordent Dwellings: Australian Houses and the Vietnamese Diaspora” in Home Displacement belonging Communal Plural No. 5 (Sydney: Research Centre in Intercommunal Studies UWS Nepean, 1997).


Lectures and Conference Papers

Ang, Jen, “Beyond Hybridity” presented at (Im)purity; Critical Hybridity and Transculturation conference, Sydney (UWS Nepean, 1996).

Armstrong, Helen, “Multiculturalism and the challenge of cultural continuity in urban places in a multicultural new world” presented at Postmodern Cities Conference, Sydney (University of Sydney, Department of Urban @ Regional planning, April 13-16, 1993).


Noonan, Anne, "Psyche and Environment" presented at Sense of Place: Depth Perspectives on Australian Landscapes and Environmental Values Hawkesbury Colloquium (UWS Hawkesbury, November, 1996).


Smithson, Michael, "Ignorance and Science: Dilemmas, Perspectives and Prospects" presented International Conference of System Science, Sydney: (UWS Hawkesbury July, 1993).


Stewart, Brendon, What are the Cultural Perspectives that inform how 'home' is perceived, imagined and made in a well established multicultural Western Suburb of Sydney? ARC small grant project (UWS Hawkesbury, 1994).

Thompson, S. "Suburbs of opportunity; Power of home for migrant Women" presented at Postmodern Cities Conference, Sydney (University of Sydney, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, April 13 -16, 1993).


White, Ross "Getting to Know the Country" presented at Sense of Place. The Interaction Between Aboriginal and Western Senses of Place Hawkesbury Colloquium (UWS Hawkesbury, August, 1997).

Thesis' and Dissertations


**Selected Journals**


*Social and Demographic Profile(s)* (Sydney: Auburn Municipal Council, 1993 - 1996).

*The People of New South Wales* (Sydney: NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1994).


*Sense of Place: Depth Perspectives on Australian Landscapes and Environmental Values* Colloquium papers, editor John Cameron (Sydney: UWS Hawkesbury, 1996).

*Sense of Place: The Interaction between Aboriginal and Western Senses of Place* Colloquium papers 2, editor John Cameron (Sydney: UWS Hawkesbury and La Trobe University, 1997).