trans-local; globalism and changing patterns of 'belonging' (does place still matter?)

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We live in an increasingly globalized world. We are all expected to be 'global citizens'. But to what extent is it still important to be part of 'local communities'? Does the emphasis on being in touch with what's global affect the way we are able to recognise the little idiosyncratic differences of what's right-in-front-of-us in our everyday lives? Where do our relationships to 'place'; to the local, to the here-and-now of community, stand in relation to these changes? Or are these everyday details of our local lives made to seem too small, too local, too trivial to matter? The enormity of global environmental and social problems is presented in the media as beyond the scope of local concerns. But we also know that everything is inter-connected. We understand that the tiny, the specific, the local, the immediate all have implications for what happens elsewhere. To what extent might it be possible to be both global _and_ local?

The topic 'global/local' immediately suggests a raft of questions about the impact of homogenization (i.e. the concerns about 'everything') on diversity (i.e. on the details of the immediate). While the term 'global' suggests _in_clusive and homogeneous tendencies, the term 'local' is associated with ideas about the specificity of places (with their precise conditions and contexts) and the specificity of times (with an understanding that the concept of time is not necessarily universal). A simultaneous apprehension of both these experiences is an important starting place from which to work towards understanding that the world is composed of a conglomerate of inter-linked, diverse, contextually-specific and locally cared-for locales or regions.

Between the concepts of 'global' and 'local', the epithet of 'nation' hovers like a ghost from the past. As globalization advanced, nation-hood was beginning to seem like an out-moded, out-paced way of claiming unified control, communities and culture. However more recently, ideas about the benefits of nation-hood are being revisited:

In his 2011 book The Globalization Paradox, Rodrik concluded that "we cannot simultaneously pursue democracy, national determination, and economic globalisation." The results of the 2016 elections and referendums provide ample testimony of the justness of the thesis, with millions voting to push back, for better or for worse, against the campaigns and institutions that promised more globalisation.[1]

Recent climates of fostered fear have contributed to the emergence of some conservative, controlling iterations of nationhood driven by populist impulses that include "public opposition to mass immigration, cultural liberalization, and the perceived surrender of national sovereignty to distant and unresponsive international bodies."[2] These surges in popularity of authoritarian leaders now threaten the sustainability of the culturally diverse, sustainable and inter-active local and regional communities[3] that were once part of these nations.

regional diversity and the changing iterations of the nation-state

Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson defined a nation as an "imagined community" – a group composed of peoples from a range of cultural, social and ethnic groups who could see past their differences through their embrace of common visual and written languages.[4] Inclusive frameworks of belonging are part of what binds social, economic and cultural diversities into the binding entity of 'nationhood'.

Many of the world's current nation-states emerged as a result of the European colonial period that extended, roughly speaking, from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century[5] when colonies were established in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Pacific. The British invasion of Australia was part of that process. The colonies were bound by trade and the administration of public matters to the colonizing country. The first phase of the creation of national identities through colonial power has been described as follows:

"Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule."[6]

But all hubris has its use-by date; and as the second World War moved the focus of colonial powers to issues of self-preservation 'closer to home', the countries and territories they'd claimed as their colonies seized the opportunity to embark upon the processes of de-colonization. As part of independence, nations embraced self-directed policies that affirmed, enshrined and celebrated their differences instead of having them recognized as second-rate or hybrid or pidgin or creole emulations of their former colonisers.

However, there were still value-systems that ranked the diverse cultural groups included within these new parameters. Recognition and acceptance of intra-national cultural diversity varied from nation to nation; while some nations mandated cohesiveness through restricting recognition of plural identities and expressions; others established tiers of governmental directives that encouraged and protected diversity.[7]

post(?)nationalism, trans-localism and belonging

In the decades following the second world war, the power of nations to control their own destiny, their own boundaries and their own trade legislations was faced with another world order. As inter-dependent trans-national corporations gradually emerged as global controllers of capital, nation-states again were challenged with the need to readjust the parameters of their identity. The move towards trans-global trading softened the rules binding nationally controlled trades and tariffs, weakening the policy-making hold of nations while increasing the power of the trans-national corporations:

Many corporations are richer and more powerful than the states that seek to regulate them. Through mergers and acquisitions corporations have been growing very rapidly and some of the largest TNCs now have annual profits exceeding the GDPs of many low and medium income countries.[8]

Increasingly, we all experience living our lives in a trans-national world, no matter where we live. Whether we are refugees, immigrants or were 'grown here', we're aware of living in at least two places at once: whether in the 'here' of community and the 'there' of the places we have left behind; or the 'here' of the present and the 'there' of our past; or the 'this' and 'that' of our cultural origins. With the emergence of such bifurcated, hyphenated, provisional identities, with the need to build ideas of ourselves that must, of necessity, suture together scraps of experience, memory and belonging, to what extent is it possible to build new connections to place? Because surely, in an era that faces all kinds of global ecological crises, our local connections to place will play pivotal roles in re-thinking ideas about our communal custodianship of land and our relationship with those with whom we share that land. In the short life each of us is given, we have limited time to devote to limited issues; confronted with the tsunami of facts and figures and news stories about the crises of the planet, perhaps for most of the planet, the best way to begin to respond is through a trans-local awareness – a mindfulness that the 'here' we inhabit is given to us by the 'there' of somewhere else – by someone else, sometime else. As temporary custodians each of us is delivered the small but do-able job of making sure we pass somet small plot of local-ness on to someone else after we move on.

instruments of change

The economic trans-nationalism that has been described as the stage of capitalism that fosters the flows of money and goods and people across national boundaries, has resulted in changes in work patterns and workforces, globalized money flow, global information flow and global research cooperation. Two major 'inventions' made all this movement possible: the internet and the shipping container. Internet communication made the offsite organization of the various sequences of this production possible; and containerization for international freight transport significantly reduced the global costs of transportation. While the internet's role in securing global communication is well recognized, there's been less awareness of the pivotal role containerization has played in breaking old cycles of supply and demand.

Shipping containers can be loaded and unloaded, stacked and transported efficiently over long distances, and transferred from one mode of transport to another. Their standardized dimensions mean that they can be transported on specialized container ships, rail carts and semi-trailers, and thus have reduced the number of employees needed for the process. Containerization did away with the spaces needed for the manual sorting of most shipments and reduced the need for warehousing. The use of containers has displaced many thousands of dock workers who formerly handled cargo. Containerization affects our everyday lives in all sorts of ways, including the fact that manufacturing itself has evolved to take advantage of containers: the sizes of some of the objects with which and in which we live are now designed and produced to precisely align with the dimensions of shipping containers.

Globalization's trans-national market penetration through the internet and containerization of goods has brought systematic structural changes to the work forces across the planet as new economic, cultural, and ideological links between industrialized and developing countries produce bridges for international migration. Today migration accounts for three fifths of population growth in western countries as a whole. The development of many of the nations that are inextricably linked into these processes of exchange is dependent upon the economic activities of their respective diasporas. Diasporas by their very nature are founded on experiences of 'here' and 'there' – of 'before' and 'now'. They are communities-in-transition. They are communities who live within the awareness of contingency – that what happens in one locale directly affects others someplace else.

And it's not all 'bad news' - as travel and communication become more affordable, members of diasporas can better afford to keep more closely in touch with their home countries. These immigrants create new 'social fields' that link their original country with their new country or countries of residence; they create new diasporic regions with interconnected economic, socio-political and cultural activities, and transnational socio-cultural activities and transactions through which ideas and meanings are exchanged. The global sharing of values, rules and traditions is exemplified in international sporting competitions like the Olympics, while global celebrations of cultural concerns are epitomized in the biennales, triennales and art fairs.

The global movement of people is much, much larger than the imagined threat of 'refugees from another country'. While the fastest growing tide of international immigration is from the global South to the global North by professionals seeking work, this contributes to forty percent of global migration, while thirty-seven percent migrate within the global South. The impact of these global flows of culture and trans-local, trans-national cultural activities is re-forming the way we see the world.[9]

art and making place in a globalized world

So how have these changes in our relationship to place, communities and notions of belonging affected the way art is produced? The "imagined communities" described by Benedict Anderson are dependent on the imaginary images and words that bind people to people, and people to place, that are formed by artists. Yes, they are also formed by legislation – by rules and templates and boundary lines – but the emotional glue that binds those principles to individuals, and then across to others who respond to, and then share those principles, is provided through the communicative power of art and culture.

Artists – and other cultural workers – create the visual, verbal, auditory and performative templates through which communities can engage in shared discussions about new possibilities of engaging with each other and with the changing world order we live in. But the selection of what knowledge and information gets disbursed is increasingly controlled by global oligarchs collectivized under the appropriately alarming acronym of FAANG (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google). As global entertainment steadily shapes the way we dream and the way we can 'imagination' ourselves into being, to what extent will locally specific and responsive cultural models be able to survive into the future? Some critics, like Professor Julianne Schulz, argue that the juggernaut-flattening of cultural diversity by trans-national cultural conglomerates makes the need to support and generate local and specific cultural even more pressing. She writes,

> In the Age of Fang, we need to find persuasive and creative ways to answer those who argue that the national and local are now irrelevant. In the Age of Fang, we're all global citizens, which threatens to make national cultural institutions both more vulnerable, but also more important than ever.[10]

And sometimes the drive to produce culture from, by and for local and specific communities is capable of enfolding the global and re-presenting it in new ways: back in 1993, the Queensland Art Gallery took the cultural bull of globalization by the horns from the improbable position of a relatively small, regionally-based state art gallery. The audacious punt to host the first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was based on the hunch that somewhere out there in 'the region' made up of countries of the Asia-Pacific – an area we Australians knew very little about at the time – thriving pockets of contemporary art might very possibly exist, fueled by the passion of artists engaged in responses to the 'elsewhere' of globalization while wrestling with the changing traditions of their own cultures.

The hunch proved to be a good one, and the first Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art launched to the world an exhibition that bore witness to the fact that not all modernisms were equal; that tradition was not the antithesis of change; that the cultural diversity of the region was exciting; that Australia *could* (might) play a part in it; and that artists working a long way away from the spotlights of global metropolitan centres were as informed and sophisticated and critically responsive as artists can be anywhere, any time.

The members of the curatorium of that first Triennial were acutely aware of three things: Brisbane's relationship to Australia; Australia's relationship to the Asia-Pacific region; and the region's cultural relationship – at the time – to the rest of the world. The first lay

in the fact that, in terms of the Sydney/Melbourne cultural axis of metropolitan Australia, Brisbane was regarded as a *regional* outpost: the state collection was relatively insubstantial, and the decades of conservative Queensland politics had made sure cultural issues were regarded as of relative insignificance. Secondly, Australia's long-distance cultural focus on the United Kingdom and the United States had blindsided (with the exception of a few visionary artists) the country to the possibility that the *region* in which it was geographically situated might offer lively contemporary cultural counterpoints. And while some northern hemisphere cultural institutions had given attention to cultural production in the region, it had been represented, on the whole, as either ethnographic or exotic in nature.[11] The Director of the Queensland Art Gallery at the time, Doug Hall, was well aware of the importance of recognizing the energy of *regionally based cultural production in Australia*; prior to his role at QAG, he'd worked as the Director of Bendigo Art Gallery between 1980 and 1987. Hall shared, with his curatorium, a conviction that the *regionally-produced art of the Asia-Pacific region* would also generate the kind of energy, vitality and critical responsiveness to the images and issues propagated by the 'international art world' he'd witnessed in regionally based Australian art production. In the first APT catalogue he wrote,

If the regional debate fails to be image-or practice-driven, it can only force or exacerbate the now numbing argument of the centre and the periphery, a self-perpetuating argument destined to reinforce isolation and separation. If art produced in particular areas is regionally specific, relevant to the community in which it exists and is held in high regard by it, it is of no lesser intrinsic value because an urban-based intelligentsia is largely unaware of it.[12]

The first three Triennials were cultural explorations attuned to the specifics of context. More than subsequent Triennials, those first three projects were driven by curiosity about how the artists they included related to their communities, to their place and to the traditions that bound them. The work was, even beyond what had been anticipated, explosively vital and critically challenging, and the popularity of the exhibition was evident both within Australia and beyond. Since those years, many of the artists who had travelled for the first time beyond their own shorelines to make work at the first three Triennials are now international household names in the trans-global art world. Many of them now travel from one international exhibition to the next, as if the trans-national, trans-cultural sites of globalised cultural practice have become their new home.

partnershipping: making place

The parameters of *The Partnershipping Project* share two of the pillars on which globalization relies – digital communication and the shipping container. The success of its proposal was reliant on harnessing funding from national cultural agencies into trans-local, trans-regional directions. Unlike products fitted to the demands of exchange efficiencies and smooth transactions, the project is tailored to the idea that each stop, each iteration of the exhibition, each node of the project will add something more. It shares the conviction of the first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art that regionally specific, locally-conscious art production is vital to developing models of engagement that go beyond tired concepts of metropolitan versus regional or that separate global concerns from those of the local.

The artists participating in *The Partnershipping Project* are each regionally based; but the issues addressed in their work reflect the changing global order. Many of them have come from elsewhere to settle in the regions, others are Indigenous to the region, and others have families who have lived in the region for many generations. And the concerns of the communities they reflect and are part of must be addressed locally as well as globally. Issues to do with the environment; issues related to traditional knowledge and custodianship of the land; issues of gender; issues of immigration and diasporas and the need to keep memories and stories alive for us and for generations to come; issues of mental health and community connectedness; issues related to the necessity of feeling valued, included and capable of making a contribution to local, national and global issues all fill the cargos of the eight 'tenders' – the little wooden boats that carry the artists' work.

Associations with maritime trading provided the historical origins of the term 'partnershipping'. The partnerships developed during medieval Europe provided the framework from which the Commercial Revolution of the European economy evolved in the thirteenth century. From then and right through until the middle of the fifteenth century, the partner-shipping of the Hanseatic League referred literally to the ships that traversed the coastlines of those countries that agreed to share cargos with other members of the League. The association was built on the need to save time and money, but just as importantly, on the recognition that new connections were going to be essential for new futures.[13]

Times pass and global orders change, and as the Age of Discovery brought trade from new, far-flung shorelines into European connections, the partnershipping of the Hanseatic League disintegrated into irrelevance. By the end of the sixteenth century it was moribund.

Each era experiences changing patterns of trade alignments and movements of peoples and ideas, and each needs new ways of re-establishing connections between people and place. This particular iteration of 'partnershipping' was set afloat in the belief that connections to place – and to each other – remain as issues of vital importance in a world absorbed by global problems that include human rights, multiculturalism and trans-culturalism, environmental sustainability, world peace concerns, world famine concerns, global medicine and health concerns. Artists can perform the role of visionaries who suggest new visual languages through which we can simultaneously comprehend the world we now live in as one unified, interconnected system, the future of which relies on transformational approaches that are acutely aware of the trans-local interdependence of our places and communities.

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[1] Saval, Nikil, (14 July 2017) *Globalisation: the rise and fall of an idea that swept the world*, (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/14/globalisation-the-rise-and-fall-of-an-idea-that-swept-the-world_

2 Galston, William A., 2008, The *rise of European populism and the collapse of the centre-left* https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/

[3] Shuster, Simon, *The Populists*, "It is a world where the international agreements of the past are up for renegotiation and the interests of the nation-state are not bound by an established global order." http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-populism/)

[4] Anderson, Benedict, (2016, revised) *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Bloomsbury, London)

[5] Although at this stage of the twenty-first century there are sixty-one countries in the world currently maintained by eight countries.

[6] Osterhammer, Jurgen, trans. Shelly Frisch, (2005) *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Markus Weiner Publishers, p.16.

[7] Stewart, Devin T. 2008, *The Myth of the Nation State*, https://www.globalpolicy.org/nations/state/2008/0902mythstate.htm "The nation-state myth conflates two ideas, one that is concrete, the state, and one that is fuzzy, the nation. The utility of the state is clear. It is a necessary organizing principle that allows people to pool their resources for the common good and mobilize against common threats, whether they are floods or invading armies. The state is also the final arbiter of law. State power is even on the rise, partly as a backlash to globalization and as a result of growing wealth from energy markets. But the nation-state as a basis for statecraft obscures the nature of humanity's greatest threats. Pollution, terrorism, pandemics, and climate change are global phenomena. They do not respect national sovereignty, and, therefore, they necessitate global cooperation."

[8] *Global Policy Forum. Transnational Corporations* https://www.globalpolicy.org/globalization/globalization-of-the-economy-2-1/transnational-corporations-2-6.html

[9] UNESCO, *MIGRATION AS A DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE ANALYSIS OF ROOT CAUSES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS* January 2017, (http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002470/247089E.pdf)

[10] *Schultz, Professor Julianne, May 2, 2016. (an edited version of the Brian Johns lecture, the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University and the Copyright Agency.* https://theconversation.com/australia-must-act-now-to-preserve-its-culture-in-the-face-of-global-tech-giants-58724

[11] *Magiciens de la Terre*, (1989), curated by Jean Hubert Martin, at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette in Paris, was an attempt to challenge the international contemporary art world's representation of non-European art as 'primitive'. However, the exhibition ultimately attracted a great deal of negative criticism for its failure to move sufficiently far away from the exoticization of non-Western artists in the exhibition.

[12] Hall, Doug, 1993, *Tradition and Change*, Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery, p.130.

[13] Hibbert, Arthur Boyd, *Hanseatic League, German Trading Organisation* https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanseatic-Leaguedeed I worked in the cultural sector in Townsville and knew his dad – but we've never crossed paths. Until now.

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