

Australia: Transnational or Transnation?

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In his examination of world literature, 'National Literatures, Scale and the Problem of the World,' Robert Dixon borrows the concept of scale from geography and asks, 'What *is* the appropriate scale for the study of literature?' (Dixon, 'National' 1). Once we introduce the concept of scale into literary studies other questions arise. Is it inevitable to think of Australian literature at the scale of the nation? At what scale does an Australian novel ask to be read? Part of the problem here is the assumption that space itself is a given, something that is 'simply there,' when in fact, space is constructed epistemologically by social actors. Referring to geographer Neil Brenner, who critiques both nation-centred theories and the theories of globalisation, Dixon repeats Brenner's exposure of three implicit scalar assumptions in the epistemology of state or nation-centrism, 'each of which is a fallacy':

(a) [that] space [i]s a static platform of social action that is not itself constituted or modified socially; (b) . . . that social relations are organized within territorially self-enclosed spatial containers; and (c) . . . that social relations are organized at a national scale . . . (Brenner 3)

These assumptions result in *spatial fetishism*, *methodological territorialism* and *methodological nationalism*. They hinge upon the fallacy of spatial containment and in so doing underpin the organisation of the disciplines: 'These principles, which naturalise the state's territorial forms and jurisdictions, underpinned the modern development of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences' (Dixon, 'National' 2).

These assumptions appear no matter what the scale, whether nation or world. Interestingly, the scale of literary study can provide us with ways to think about the scale of social action. The most significant implication of this is the fallacy that social action occurs within enclosed spatial containers such as nation, location or region. So the question arises: at what scale should we consider the social and cultural activities of national populations? And is this scale simply a matter of space or is it also a matter of time and movement?

The nation has a large footprint in this discussion. It has been the paramount structural effect of the modern social world since the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648 formalised the relation between nation-states. But while the system of international relations has been the chief concern of those considering the functioning of nations it is the internal control, what may be called the 'bordering practices' of the state, that police these ontological assumptions, the discourses that generate them and the populations they affect. As Timothy Mitchell puts it: 'The boundary of the state never marks a real exterior . . . It is a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained' (Mitchell 90).

These bordering practices—such as rules, laws, restrictions, surveillance, and more subtle forms of pressure to conform—operate within as well as around the nation state. In Australia the most obvious bordering practices are exerted by the Border Force itself, which sees the border as a 'complex continuum.'¹ But subtle and unrelenting bordering practices are

generated by the nation's ideological hegemony. The forces of nationalism, patriotism, national mythologies and social pressure place insidious and constant pressure on individuals to conform. These pressures are perpetrated not only by state organs, but also by the media, which occupy parochial and ideological spaces as well as that of the nation. Added to this, the worldwide increase in states' surveillance of their populations has infected Australia as well. It is these bordering practices, rather than physical borders, around which national populations circulate.

The scale of Australian literary studies can be global, as evidenced by the 'transnational turn' (Jacklin) and the location of Australian literature in international contexts (Dixon, 'Boundary'; 'Australian'). But I want to suggest that the bordering practices of the state introduce a different way of conceiving the transitivity of the nation, in the concept of the *transnation*. This is not to deny the transnational networks in which Australia is located. Australia is an immigrant nation stolen from its Indigenous owners, ninety-eight per cent of its population having migrated here from other places. In this respect it may be regarded as 'transnational' if we take that term to describe an inward as well as outward movement of people and institutions across borders. The world is more mobile than it has ever been and in many different fields, most notably literary studies, this has led to a growing, and now well established interest in cultural and ethnic mobility, diaspora, transnational and cosmopolitan interactions (Appadurai; Breckenridge et al.; Gikandi; Gilroy; Hannerz; Robbins). This rise in global mobility at the same time as state borders have become ever more hysterically protected, has interested cultural critics for some time. The 'transnational' character of the Australian population may be supported by its diverse origins, its propensity to travel, by its government's necessary engagement both with countries in the Asia-Pacific region and those powerful states whose relationship must be carefully balanced.

However, mobility is not just geographical, but can be sociopolitical, a function of epistemological construction, social movement and cultural memory. In this respect the term 'transnation' (Ashcroft, 'Transnation'; 'Australian') may be a more appropriate description of national populations. This term refers to much more than 'the international,' or 'the transnational,' which might rather be conceived as a relation between states, a crossing of borders or a cultural or political interplay between national cultures. It is also distinct from the categories of 'diaspora' and 'cosmopolitanism' which fail, on the whole, to account for subjects who may at various times identify with the nation, ethnicity, religion, family or tribe, and who may never move beyond the borders of the nation. Transnation refers to the political, social and cultural movement of peoples within the nation.

While distinct from the transnational, the transnation is also quite distinct from the structures of the nation-state. It describes the fluid movement *within* the nation that occurs 'outside' or around the bordering practices of the state by which social life is organised. The transnation is thus a way of talking about subjects in their ordinary lives, subjects who live in between the categories by which subjectivity is normally constituted. The transnation exists within, beyond and between nation states. It is a collectivity comprising communities who may be drawn in one way or another to the myth of a particular nation-state, but who draw away perpetually into the liberating region of what Homi K. Bhabha calls 'representational undecidability' (Bhabha 35). But it also reminds us that despite this, one of the most persistent categories with which people must negotiate is the nation.

Postcolonial theory has a particular perspective on this. For colonised peoples the formation of the independent state is itself the core of the problem. The nation state has been a common

target for postcolonial studies as an exclusionary, rather than inclusive political formation because newly independent nations have, with numbing regularity, perpetuated colonial power by reinstating the administrative structures of imperial control. As Wole Soyinka put it, the colonial powers carved up the African continent ‘like some demented tailor who paid no attention to the fabric, colour or pattern of the quilt he was patching together’ (Soyinka 31). None of the newly independent states showed any inclination to re-stitch the cloak of colonisation by re-drawing those borders. The progress of Australia from a collection of colonies to a nation shows a trajectory perpetuating the structures, institutions and mythology of imperial rule. In both art and literature we find, time after time, that the civilising dynamic establishes nationalism as a continuation of the imperial mission.

Indeed, Imperialism’s major export may have been the very idea of national identity. According to J. A. Hobson, ‘Colonialism, in its best sense,’ by which he meant the settler colonies, ‘is a natural overflow of nationality,’ but ‘When a State advances beyond the limits of nationality its power becomes precarious and artificial’ (6). Hobson saw that empire-bred nationalism undermined the possibility of a true internationalism. Partha Chatterjee, on the other hand, sees nationalism as a blow against true decolonisation, because former colonies, particularly in Africa and South Asia, are forced to adopt a ‘national form’ that is hostile to their own cultures in order to fight against the western nationalism of the colonial powers (Chatterjee 18). Chatterjee’s astute perception was that nationalist thinking might reverse the *problematic* of Orientalist thought which sees the ‘Oriental’ as a passive subject, but still operate within the Orientalist *thematic*—the post-Enlightenment framework of Knowledge, Science and Reason within which it re-defines that subject. Thus the adoption of a national form is related to the absorption of colonial states into history. National cultures, thus created in (and by) nineteenth-century imperialism arose to manage the contradiction between the imperial and the local. This occurred relatively seamlessly in settler colonies. Australian society united, without apparent demur, a loyalty to empire with a growing nationalism, a union that propelled it into WWI. The state’s role was twofold: on the one hand, it established the difference of the national culture from the cultures beyond it; on the other, it promoted cultural homogeneity inside the national territory.

The nation state holds great sway because, as George Schmitt (*Political*) points out, ‘all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure’ (36). This is not the only reason that it seems impossible to dislodge the linking of literary production and national identity. It is more deeply dependent on the fact that the literary text is inevitably read as an allegory of the nation and often in the postcolonial case, as a detrimental allegory. Fredric Jameson was vigorously criticised for declaring that all Third World texts are national allegories (69). But the nation is not immanent to the text, it must be read into it, and when texts are read across difference, when they cross into different publics they are, because of the disciplinary structure of literary studies, commonly read as national allegories, whatever their provenance. This has been most evident with postcolonial literatures and is yet one more reason for the postcolonial suspicion of nation because national allegory cannot capture the complex cultural implications of their literatures.

The Australian nation is the direct heir of colonialism, its states occupy colonial boundaries, and it manages to maintain its filiative relationship with Britain, symbolised by the union jack on the flag, while deploying nationalism’s fullest capacity for exclusion, in its institutions, its policies and its white masculinist mythology of national identity. Where the nation might be

the heir of the colony, the transnation, that dynamic circulation of peoples, works to disrupt that colonial heritage. While the term ‘nation-state’ invites us to consider the nation and the state as synonymous, the concept of the transnation rests on the distinction between the *occupants* of the nation-state, the multi-ethnic, heterogeneous cultural complex that we may call the nation, as distinct from the political, geographical, legal *structures* that constitute the state as an object in history. The concept of the transnation exposes the radical distinction between these two entities.

The Space of the Transnation

When considering the ‘space’ of the transnation it is useful to consider the epistemological nature of space of which Robert Dixon reminds us. Human geographers have argued ‘that space, and by implication scale, are both material and discursive categories that are ‘constructed’ or ‘produced’ by social processes and the intervention of human agents’ (Sheppard and McMaster, cited in Dixon, ‘National’ 1–2). Therefore the ‘space’ of the transnation is precisely that produced by these social processes and interventions, occurring within rather than across the geographical borders of the state.

There are several antecedents to theorising this space, and they often find their grounding in the observation of the relation between the physical space of the city and the activity of citizens. Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) demonstrates how the ordinary spatial practices of people walking in the city create a discourse that weaves in and around the apparently impermeable structures of the built environment. De Certeau outlines principles that also characterise the transnation. The language of power is ‘urbanizing’; that is, it corresponds to the hard edges of the built city, what he later calls the ‘concept city,’ which are designed to direct the movement of people. But the city ‘is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power’ (95). This potentially casual and unpredictable movement is fundamentally elusive: ‘Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer’ (95).

We can see how the movement of subjects who ‘combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power,’ who deploy ‘the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity’ (95), occurs on the larger space of the state itself. The nation and national identity are the dominant myths that uphold the language of state power. But what he calls the ‘long poem of walking’ manipulates spatial organisations ‘no matter how panoptic they may be’ (101) just as the longer poem of everyday life manipulates and circumvents the bordering practices of the state. In both cases the movement of people is neither foreign to the structuring organisation of the city or state, nor necessarily in conformity.

‘Everyday Utopianism’: The Street and the Transnation

While de Certeau theorises the individual’s walking through the streets of the city as a species of speech act, the Utopian movement in architecture strove to do away with the street altogether. The acknowledged leader of this movement, Le Corbusier, ‘expressed his contempt for the teeming hubbub that urbanists now esteem’ (Richards 51). For Le Corbusier, explains Fyfe, ‘The corridor street “should be tolerated no longer” because it is full of noise and dust, deprived of light and so “poisons the houses that border it”’ (Fyfe 2).

The reason for such animosity is understandable. The street has represented to Utopian architects like Le Corbusier the confinement and linear regimentation of city populations, and seemed to be antithetical to the free movement of inhabitants. It was seen to be ugly and dangerous, constricting and controlling. The Utopian movement celebrated the calming power of parks, gardens and natural foliage and in this respect subsequent studies have shown the extent to which a view of natural vegetation has an emotional and psychological effect on the city dweller.

But the street is an excellent model for the ways in which citizens negotiate the structures of the state as de Certeau has shown. Streets have had a central place in modernist urbanism. In response to Le Corbusier's architectural utopianism, David Pinder invokes Michael Gardiner's concept of 'everyday utopianism' (Pinder, 'Breath' 209–10), to characterise the movements of citizens through urban space. According to Pinder, 'As the terrain of social encounters and political protest, sites of domination and resistance, places of pleasure and anxiety ... they have been continually fought over in architectural planning discourses as well as through political negotiation, contestation and struggle' ('Breath' 203). For Rebecca Solnit the street means 'life in the heady currents of the urban river, in which everyone and everything can mingle.' Furthermore 'it is exactly this social mobility, this lack of compartments and distinctions, that gives the street its danger and its magic, the danger and magic of water in which everything runs together' (Solnit 176). The street becomes a metaphor for the structures of the nation and the spontaneous, unpredictable and potentially insubordinate movement of citizens.

Porosity

In the essay 'Neapel' [Naples] (written in 1924), Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis deploy the term porosity to evoke a sense, not only of the porous borders of the built city, but also of the past haunting the present in cities and places on the verge of disappearing. Porosity is a good example of the social construction of space. The essay describes how many different elements of that city, both spatial and temporal, are porous; its spaces are rich with the intermingling of public and private, exterior and interior, past and present: 'The stamp of the definitive is avoided . . . No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts "thus and not otherwise."' In such corners one can scarcely discern where building is still in progress and where dilapidation has set in. For nothing is concluded' (165–66). For Benjamin and Lacis porosity was an interpenetration of habitation and architecture, public and private, inside and outside, past and present. It is, above all, a function of the social processes and interventions of its inhabitants.

This city provides an example of porosity that may be generalised into several dimensions of everyday life but might also coincide with an understanding of borders as bordering practices. Andrew Benjamin suggests that, 'Reading Benjamin's text today opens up the question of whether "porosity" becomes the concept through which it may be possible to rework the nature of the border' (33). The porosity of borders is something vitally implicated in the movement of the transnation. Rather than simply crossing borders, which may not be physical or geographical, borders themselves may be conceived as porous, indeed, conceived rather as bordering practices, which subjects move through as well as around, regardless of the state's carceral intent.

Porosity, like the concept of the border, hinges on the nature of the performance and movement of subjects. This is where the term 'bordering practices' becomes useful. For those

practices have far reaching effects, but while their lack of rigidity augments their power it also opens the subject to their porosity. As Andrew Benjamin points out, one response to the border is to traverse it. But there is another response,

one that while opening up the singular does it in a way that causes the positing of singularity to become problematic. Two strategies emerge. The first is the border's refusal: traversal as refusal. The second is what can be described as the border's undoing. (37)

We normally think of the border as providing an element of order through enclosure, but for Andrew Benjamin: 'The creation of the arbitrary border constructed as a single line can also be understood as a form of destruction,' a destruction of a complex or plural sense of place. 'Destruction in such a context is the refusal of the border in the name of the open, as though the border's destruction will allow for a sense of the common defined as the open. It is in relation to both of these senses of destruction that the process of "undoing" can have its most exacting effect. Undoing becomes a productive activity' (38).

The concept of borders and their 'refusal' is crucial in understanding the movement of the transnation, because borders are not only set up around the edge of nation states but also operate *within* the state as the state exerts its strategies for the control of citizens. Porosity offers a key to thinking about how subjects navigate the internal legal, moral and psychological borders present in every society. Such borders may be internalised as a feature of the citizen's consent to state dominance. But borders are always open to the process of 'undoing' and as Benjamin rightly notes, such undoing is a productive activity for it actualises the constant potential of the subjects of the transnation to circulate within, around and *through* the bordering practices of state control. This movement, and the porosity it reveals, may occur in various urban, semi-urban and rural spaces and across various ethnicities and classes.

Smooth Space

The distinction between the structures of the state and the interpenetration of the transnation is perhaps best captured by Deleuze and Guattari's comparison between smooth and striated space, which they explain by contrasting woven textile and felt. A textile fabric is composed of interwoven vertical and horizontal components, warp and woof, a delimited and organised structure that Plato used as a paradigm for 'royal science,' 'the art of governing people or operating the state's apparatus' (*Plataeus* 475). Felt, on the other hand is a supple solid, more like an 'anti-fabric.' It is an entanglement of fibres rather than a weave, one obtained by rolling the block of fibres back and forth, entangling rather than weaving them. It is 'smooth' without being 'homogeneous.'

Smooth space, for Deleuze and Guattari, contrasts with 'striated space' or ordered space. Yet, smooth space is not separate from striated space. Smooth space takes form when the striated space of government institutions, fixed concepts and essentialised peoples are broken into their composing forces, caught up in a swirling whirlpool that is capable of mixing these forces in new ways to produce monsters that may *defy* the categorising machines of the institutions of striated space. The smooth space of the transnation operates in, between, around and through the structures of the state. But it is the possibility for the emergence of new and different kinds of subjects and spaces that makes smooth space a space of potentiality, a space where a people and a nation yet to be known may emerge. Like the built spaces of the city the striations of power reflected the operation of the state's control while

smooth space describes the space of the transnation circulating round the striated spaces of the state. All these examples echo what human geographers have argued: that space is dynamic and produced by social processes.

The Subjects of the Transnation

The subjects of the transnation reflect, and in fact generate, the porosity of the spaces they inhabit. Rather than transnational subjects, those who cross national borders, the subjects of the transnation are those moving both within and around the porous borders—the bordering practices—of the state. Significantly, these subjects are not necessarily rebellious or subversive, but their occupation of smooth space comes with the constant *potentiality* of circumvention and avoidance. As Michael Gardiner notes, ‘the everyday is permeated with political and ideological qualities, and constitutes the crucial terrain for both the exercise of domination and resistances to it’ (‘Marxism’ 27). Despite the Australian Government’s mantra of National Security, this ubiquitous potentiality is the deeper and more pervasive threat. When the minister for Home Affairs tries to institute a system of facial recognition for the entire population of Australia we sense that this panopticon on steroids is not a response to terrorists but to the much wider and deeper threat of the unpredictable behaviour of ordinary citizens.

Where Gramsci’s definition of hegemony as dominance by consent is extremely useful in understanding the insidious way in which the state exerts its power, the question remains as to how the subjects of the transnation circulate around the institutions of such dominance. Is consent to dominance inevitable? So what does it mean to be a subject of the transnation in Australia? What does it mean to be Australian? The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s ‘Australia Talks’ national survey found that the most popular identifier of being Australian was ‘Respecting Australia’s institutions and laws’ (Crabb). So rather than fiercely democratic, independent and egalitarian, Australia appears to be a nation of timid conformists. This consent to dominance appears to be the very definition of Gramsci’s idea of hegemony. This raises a particular difficulty in theorising the transnation. For there is a natural leaning towards the idea that the transnation is fundamentally insurgent. Of course this is not necessarily the case. But respondents may tick the laws and institutions box and still pose a threat to the state because of their actual and potential mobility.

We can go deeper into this by thinking about interpellation. For Althusser the subject’s individual self consciousness is constructed by such laws and institutions as are respected by these respondents. For him we are born into ideology, ‘which constitutes concrete individuals as subjects’ (‘Ideology’ 171). But crucially, although ideology serves the interests of the ruling classes, it is not static or irresistible, and its materiality has certain important consequences. For while ideology is dominant, it is also contradictory, fragmentary and inconsistent and does not necessarily or inevitably blindfold the ‘interpellated’ subject to a perception of its operations. In short, the subject may resist interpellation—a fundamental bordering practice—by recognising its operations. The critical feature of the transnation is subjects’ capacity to ignore, avoid, circumvent and countermand interpellation by the state, even while endorsing its laws and institutions. This is the very essence of resistance. It may not even be a conscious act of refusal but occurs by the continual crossing of borders, an activity in which subjects engage every day. Paradoxically this capacity exists *alongside* the insidious pressure of nationalist ideology.

The anarchic quotidian space of the transnation resonates with what James Scott calls infra-

politics: the undramatic, everyday and mundane acts of quiet evasion (1990). His examples include things like slowdowns, false compliance, feigned ignorance and sabotage carried out by factory workers—that, when performed by many, change or alter a landscape of power. Such actions may not amount to outright defiance; indeed they can at times appear like compliance. But they operate as a means of self-determination hidden or disguised from those in power (Scott, *Weapons* 38). This disidentification with the state involves a discursive and political mobility that may be shared by migrants, citizens and Indigenous occupants of settler colonies alike. But the transnation exists in the potential of *all* subjects to circumvent the structures of the state. The really difficult thing for human subjects to comprehend, given their entrapment within the discourses of history, nation, race and ethnicity, is that all subjectivity is *difference in its differing*—a dynamic set of relations rather than a passive state. It is this that is normal, not the fixity of cultural or national identity, the conviction of one true, shared, essential being.

Bhabha, following Fanon, writes: ‘the time of liberation is . . . a time of cultural uncertainty, and most crucially, of signifiatory and representational undecidability’ (35). He develops this from what Fanon describes as ‘the zone of occult instability where the people dwell’ (Fanon 182–83), the zone into which they are born—a very different space from Althusser’s ideology. This is ‘a veritable theatre of metamorphoses and permutations,’ says Deleuze, a ‘world *without identity*,’ where everyone is oscillating between the finitude of being and specific times and places, and the infinitude of being’s becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 56). So this ‘zone of occult instability,’ this ‘theatre of metamorphoses,’ this world of betweenness beyond the closure of identity, is the place of the transnation.

Transnation, Cyberspace and the Public Sphere

A distinction has developed in cultural theory between ‘denizens’ who inhabit place precariously, and ‘citizens’ who are free to stay or go (Standing; Paret and Gleeson; Turner; During). Denizens, who are not free to move across borders legitimately, may be just as capable as citizens, perhaps even more so, to circulate around the cultural and political borders of the state. But denizens and citizens are now joined by a different, more numerous and more anarchic group, certainly a group more potentially problematic to the state—‘netizens.’

This concept was introduced by Michael and Ronda Hauben in their 1996 essay ‘What is a Netizen?’ from the book *The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net Has on People’s Lives*. The Haubens are decidedly utopian in their perception of the possibilities of netizens:

Netizens are not just anyone who comes online . . . Rather, they are the people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone’s part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. (‘Netizen’ n.p.)

Needless to say, the Haubens’s view of the role of netizens bears no relation to the toxic, trolling and lie-infested space of the internet as we know it today, leading to what Žižek terms ‘the demise of subjectivisation in the online space’ (196). Nor does it account for the concerted effort of nation states to extend their bordering practices into cyberspace, the most glaring examples being China, which restricts access to the internet, and India where the internet is entirely shut down in regions of Muslim activism and dissent. These examples have been enthusiastically copied by the Australian government—always under the fiction of

‘national security’—a mantra that apparently allows the government a virtually unlimited surveillance of the Australian population (Keane, ‘Ten Things’; Dutton).

But netizens in their broadest sense continue to represent what may be the ultimate cosmopolitanism. Although ‘citizens of the world,’ netizens still may reveal the problems of the term ‘cosmopolitanism,’ since access to the net is limited to a comparative minority of the global population. The Haubens’s optimistic view of netizens is remarkably similar to Habermas’s theory of the public sphere. In its ideal form, the bourgeois public sphere is ‘made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state’ (176). His view of the public sphere was explicitly conceived as a region of engagement with the authorities in a critical-rational discourse negotiated by educated men and women, ‘in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor’ (27).

But Habermas himself believed the bourgeois public sphere didn’t last. Curiously, he defined the public sphere as a virtual or imaginary community that does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space, which is exactly the definition of the transnation. Both the transnation and its most characteristic and potent space—cyberspace—span the public and private spheres, just as it operates within both smooth and striated space. Habermas suggested that the public sphere was ‘a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk’ (Fraser 57). In this respect the public sphere both in its immanent progressive potential and actual regressive outworking is very much like cyberspace, the space of the netizen, because while the transnation in general exists in various modes of border crossing the netizen operates almost exclusively through ‘talk’ and the sharing of talk by circulating posts. But the difference is that Habermas’s public sphere is the historically unrealised space of political participation, while the transnation is the continual oscillation between regimes of control and regimes of freedom. So cyberspace has become the ultimate public sphere, but one that fundamentally circumvents engagement with the state as it circumvents the state’s attempted structures of control. It’s not heroic or necessarily socially cohesive or progressive, and the hope of the 1990s that it would be a space of global liberation is long gone. But despite that, and despite the ubiquitous presence of Google and Facebook, it is democratic in the broadest sense, a frustrating utopia that exists out of reach of the state’s obsessive and unceasing desire for control although not out of reach of giant technology companies.²

What is the Place of Literature in the Transnation?

If the archive of the nation is national history, the archive of the transnation—that proliferation of in-between subjects—is cultural memory, a phenomenon perpetuated in stories. Various forms of story, and various relationships with cultural memory distinguish the transnation from any necessary identification with national history. This is because such memory, although it may overlap historical memory, operates in a very different space from that striated space described as ‘national culture,’ which relies on the order provided by typification. Cultural memory is very often connected to particular visions of the future, a future that transforms the present, a future that exists beyond any notion of national destiny. Different representations in Australian literature: Indigenous, settler sacred, diasporic, gendered and artistic, all committed to some re-vision of place, demonstrate the energy that exists in the smooth space of the transnation.

Notably, these stories may be considered in relation to many of the different scales that Dixon mentions.

Does the new Aboriginal writing, like the novels of Kim Scott and Alexis Wright, belong to a *national* tradition, or is it best located at a more local scale: Scott's novels to the SW of West Australia, Wright's to the Gulf Country? Or yet again, are these very local texts now enjoying such success world wide that they are best considered as part of world literature? (Dixon, 'National' 2)

The simple answer perhaps is that all these scales may legitimately apply. Whereas in literary criticism, interpretation depends on the theoretical context in which the text is read, so the *location* of the text depends on the 'location' of its reading—on the scale of reading. Similarly a text may 'belong' at any scale at which it is read (although it is fascinating to see the absence of Australian and New Zealand literatures from discussions of world literature). This obviously disrupts the idea of national literature as a given but the proliferation of scales of reading frees the text, in a sense allowing it to straddle epistemological borders. This is one dimension of the concept of the postnational (Pease; Breen and O'Neil) and one in which the stories of the transnation may be fruitfully read.

The Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) is by its originating purpose wedded to the idea of a national literature. It was formed during the second period dominated by the epistemology of nation centrism, the period from 1945 to 1988 (Dixon, 'National' 3). When ASAL was conceived in 1977 at a SPACLALS conference in Brisbane the perfectly legitimate question arose: why not a society for the study of Australian literature? Given the dominance in university English departments of British literature this could be seen to be the expression of a *necessary* nationalism. My own interest in Australian literature arose out of the familiarity it engendered—a literature that reflected the images of my place, the sound of the vernacular, a literature written in and about a place where I belong. But literary writing immediately problematises the issue of belonging because it is in the very nature of such writing, the very nature of the imagination, to cross boundaries, to *not* belong.

The transnation is the space of the possible, unconfined by the strictures of national identity, or indeed of identity itself. National identity is rarely a function of literary writing, it is a function of reading and it is in the institutions of reading: the academy, publishing, reviewing and criticism that national identity is formed and framed. ASAL is one of those institutions but it has established its relevance by circumventing, like the transnation, the most insidious hegemony of the state, the mythology of national identity, which is perpetuated through various regimes of reading. Literature, then, is postnational because it is already pre-national. The myth of national identity serves the state. Literature is written in the transnation. The best examples of it are from those who most disidentify with the nation to produce what Richard Flanagan calls Australian writing rather than Australian literature.

I don't believe in national literature per se. I do believe in Australian writing . . . But that's a different matter from a national literature. Nations and nationalisms may use literature, but writing of itself has nothing to do with national anything. National traditions, national organisations, national prizes—all these and more are irrelevant. ('Writing' n.p.)

But failure to see the tendency, even compulsion, of literature to not belong, or more precisely, to 'belong' in the writing itself may lead to such anomalies as the phenomenal

misreading of Tim Winton, who has been habitually miscast as a white masculinist apologist for settler appropriation when his entire body of work is driven by the rhetoric of unbelonging, an unbelonging deeply embedded in his sense of the sacred (McCredden). As Salman Rushdie points out, it is deep in our nature to cross borders, not just those of the nation, but those that offer stages of the journey to who we are becoming. It is not the nature of the boundary that matters, nor the goal of such crossing, but the fact that crossing boundaries is the goal itself, the intimation of ontological possibility, not of belonging but of becoming. And this occurs nowhere better than in literature.

The point about this is that literature of all kinds can pivot on possibility, can speak from 'Nowhere' beyond questions of home and belonging. This is the only place from which ideology can be critiqued, because ideology itself is impossible to escape (Ricoeur 17). And this position nowhere, and thus potentially outside ideology, is crucial to literature. Australian texts have increasingly defied the tendency to read national identity. Identity has always been a fiction, in fact *the* great fiction, and the idea that citizenship conferred by the state can provide a sense of identity is the formal face of this fiction. Indeed any sense of a fixed identity is a fantasy. Texts such as David Malouf's *Harland's Half Acre*, or Kim Mahood's *Craft for a Dry Lake*, or Arnold Zable's *Café Scheherazade* (Ashcroft, 'Australian') demonstrate the way in which the literary works written in the nation not only elude the categorisations of literary history, but tap into memories and project visions of a future that continually cut across simple ideas of a national literature. Many Australian texts, by crossing the boundaries that might frame identity, undermine not only the concept of national identity but of identity itself. Novels such as Sofie Laguna's *The Choke* and Tony Birch's *Common People* or Alex Miller's *Landscape of Farewell* and Peter Carey's *A Long Way From Home*, demonstrate the deep interaction of gender, race and class at levels so far below the national that the nation remains invisible. These texts are postnational because they demonstrate the utterly transitive nature of belonging. They dramatise the fluidity and porous borders of gender, class, race and nation. They frame an apparently oxymoronic postnational belonging because the fluidity of identity subverts the safety of national identity.

So the border crossing dynamic of literature and the transnation are critically important to one another because they both hinge on the possible. The sense of unbelonging is tied to what Ernst Bloch calls the *vorschein*, or anticipatory illumination. The anticipatory illumination is the revelation of the 'possibilities for rearranging social and political relations so that they engender *Heimat*, Bloch's word for the home we have all sensed but never experienced or known. It is *Heimat* as utopia . . . that determines the truth content of a work of art' (Zipes xxxiii). The concept of 'a home we have all sensed but never known' is important when we understand the enormous weight exerted by the concept of 'nation' upon culture, identity and literary criticism. Unlike nationalist optimism, *heimat* lies on the horizon, the 'nowhere' from which the present may be critiqued. *Heimat* dwells in unbelonging because it dwells in the region of possibility and in that possibility lies the strategic dynamic of the transnation.

NOTES

¹ The Australian Border Force makes this bordering function specific on its website: 'We consider the border not to be a purely physical barrier separating nation states,' it said, 'but a complex continuum stretching offshore and onshore, including the overseas, maritime, physical border and domestic dimensions of the border' (Lloyd 2019).

² The idea of the democratic nature of cyberspace may be as overly optimistic as the Haubens's view of netizens, but such democracy does not obviate chaos, confusion and political duplicity. Cyberspace intensifies the anarchic quotidian space of the transnation.

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