Suspect History, 1997

Tom Roberts, 1996

Social Sketches of Australia, 1888–1988, 1993

Tokyo World, 1991

Japan to the Rescue, 1991

Suburbs of the Sacred, 1988

Window into Worlds (with Kay Daniels and Bruce Bennet), 1987

Gallipoli to Petrov, 1984

Gone Tomorrow, 1982

The Black Swan of Trespass, 1979

Social Sketches of Australia, 1888–1975, 1978

Australia's Media Monopolies, 1977

Aborigines, Race and Racism, 1974

A New Britannia, 1970, 1976, 1986

TEMPER DEMOCRATIC

How exceptional is Australia?

HUMPHREY McQUEEN



League star to be openly gay. Stereotypes persist, but there is a greater range of them.

It is too easy to forget how much upheaval the Australian-born have had to cope with since the war. Governments congratulate immigrants for the adjustments they have made in coming here, often learning a new language, dealing with discrimination and still contributing to the general welfare. Meanwhile, we fail to realise that staying put has not been an option for those who have since left Ipswich and Kalgoorlie. Cultural immigration occurs in time as well as in space. The present is another country for those born here even forty years ago.

Blasts against political correctness must not cause the left to surrender the intellectual insights it has gained from feminists or from anti-colonialist authors such as Edward Said. Nor will the fights have been won until women, ethnics and Aborigines are represented throughout our society in proportion to their deserts and desires. The barriers before us are a tangle of gender, class and ethnic practices, each of which has to be given its due weight in each situation.

Class has been so disparaged as a social category that it is rarely raised by either side of the divide in the political correctness debate. Its disappearance from scholarship portends the fate in store for feminism and anti-racism if we allow their informing categories to be rendered ridiculous or monopolised by experts.



Multiplying multiculturalism

Twenty years of official multiculturalism have enriched the understandings that we Anglo-Celtic Australians hold of ourselves. Loss of exclusiveness has helped us rejoice in multiplicities long buried beneath the myth of being 98 per cent British. We now see that Celts are not just the Irish but also the Welsh, the Cornish and the Scots. The next task is to extend the unravelling of chauvinisms to other ethnic groups. Gravy for the Anglo-Celtic goose should be marinade for the Mediterranean cock. Inadequacies in the current practices of multiculturalism must not deny Italians, Greeks, Croats, Irish, Jews or Aborigines the satisfaction of abandoning their self-delusions.

A danger from the backlash against multiculturalism is that the need to defend the principle will prevent its extension into minority communities. One Nation rallies have exposed Mediterranean dislike of Asians as small-business competitors. Italian community organisations should put some of the taxes they receive to break down prejudice inside their own groupings. Being a victim of Anglo-Saxon racism is not a licence to beat up on its other victims.

Of late Franca Arena has become less strident in her claims that

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down as wogs. But the notion that before 1947 Australia was terra nullius for art was as untrue as the Britishers' conviction that Italians were cowards. Moreover, few of the Italians selected as suitable for factory work were opera-goers or visual artists. Nor did they smuggle coffee. The challenge to the primacy of tea came courtesy of Nestlé and Maxwell House. The changes that overtook post-war Australia came out of a tangle of causes in which non-

British immigration was as much an effect as the prime mover. Irish-Australians too need to be shied off their perch. Some Irish descendants still assume 'Celts' to mean themselves alone. Some object to having 'Celt' affixed to 'Anglo' and thus being made to share the responsibility for the destruction of Aboriginal societies. Although Anglo-Saxons and Scots dominated the power structures and boardrooms, the influence of the Irish, Protestant as much as Catholic, was hardly less repressive. No ethnic group contributed more to male chauvinism in Australia. Desk sergeants knew that virgins did not get raped. One advantage of an Australian republic will be to disconnect Australian nationalism from the negativity of an exiled Irishness. Severing ties with the British Crown should also weaken the colonial cringe of Bloomsday among the literati.

The Irish are no longer a biddable electoral block in the way that Greeks are perceived to be. Politicians can tell a vote-winning Greek from an election-losing Macedonian, and are unlikely to challenge Great Hellenic chauvinism. Evidence is not likely to enhance understanding, since few of the principals feel bound by the intricacies of history or social theory. Victorian Premier Kennett's partisanship for the Greek cause shows that he recognises where the Greek communities are around Melbourne and knows the year for his next State elections. It is less certain that he could point to Macedonia on a map or state in which century Alexander flourished.

Propagandists among Greek-Australians present themselves as

the Greeks had been under dictatorships on and off since the re-establishment of their nation under British auspices in 1833. Modern Greek oppressors had no more in common with the slave-owners of the Athenian democracy than today's democracy owes its existence to Pericles. The best idea in Plato was the one that Greek men have been loath to implement, to wit, equality of the sexes.¹

A statement by 300 Greek intellectuals punctured what one of their number called 'shallow patriotism, hollow rhetoric and romantic bombast'. Greek chauvinists have been reduced to boasting because their more recent forebears could contribute almost nothing to Western civilisation after the loss of Constantinople in 1453. Much Greek culture is no older than that of settler Australia. For more than a hundred years after Greece gained independence from the Ottomans in 1822–23, Greeks could not agree on which form of their language to write. Only 160 years ago, Athens was a swamp with some 6000 inhabitants, many of them Albanians. The Greek authorities imported two teenagers to reign over them. The first was Otto from Bavaria, who changed his name to Othon and sported one of the local costumes. In gratitude, his subjects adopted the Bavarian state colours of light blue and white for their flag. After 1863 they brought in a Danish princeling.²

Fantasies about the classical legacies would not matter if they were open to challenge in the way that the bush and Anzac legends have become. The inculcating of traditions is, as ever, part of current political campaigns which deny the principles of multiculturalism. After-school ethnic classrooms can be as one-eyed as Bruce Ruxton and Pauline Hanson want all Australian education to be again. Teachers and students must be confronted by the critical standards and pluralism that now apply to the teaching of Australian history. Just as it was proper to ridicule Wayne Goss for censoring a teachers' resource book that described the arrival of Europeans in Australia as an 'invasion'. so it is time

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Multiplying multiculturalism

Greeks, Turks, Kurds and Armenians should accept responsibility for their crimes against humanity and apologise, just as so many Australians—Anglo-Celtic and Mediterranean alike—have done in regard to Aborigines.

Miseducation sustains a political agenda. At the peak of the conflict between Greeks and Macedonians, a spokesperson for Greek organisations in Melbourne was quoted as saying: 'We have power. We can use it on behalf of Greece. That is what a diaspora should do.'³ Extension into Australia of the front line of a dispute between Athens and Skopje denies that multiculturalism can prevent struggles elsewhere in the world from splitting our polity.

The invention of traditions is as crucial to Greek and Macedonian chauvinisms as to our own. On the question of whether Phillip of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great were Greeks, disinterested scholars observe that neither Alexander's household nor his Greek contemporaries perceived him as one. Not until centuries later, when both groups were under threat from the Romans, did Greeks accept Macedonians as marginal Greeks.

Macedonian nationalism emerged last century, not merely since 1944, as Greek ideologues maintain. Although Macedonian extremists want to claim Alexander as their ancestor, most see themselves as deriving from a migration some 1400 years ago. The US-based anthropologist Loring M. Danforth is unimpressed by that ancestry. He emphasises instead Greek persecution throughout this century as the trigger for Macedonian consciousness, pointing to intensified repression under the Metaxos dictatorship of 1936–40 as decisive for Macedonian separatism.⁴

Danforth offends all nationalists by rejecting two standard explanations for why someone is, for instance, Macedonian and not Greek, or Polish and not Lithuanian. The first basis is 'blood' or some innate essence, which is a nonsense. Folk dancing is not in the blood. If the *tsamiko* originates anywhere it must be in the genes, and even patent-holding professors in the genome industry

to dismiss. Why is it wrong to say that people are members of ethnic or national groups because they share language, religion and legends? That criterion is as spongy as most other social determinants. Of course, if such characteristics are treated not as cultural creations but as manifestations of some national type, then they are no more than a sophistication of the blood-soil-folk mischief.

Danforth accepts that nationality and ethnicity are self-ascribed. Hence, for him, someone is Greek if they say they are, and if most other people, including lots of Greeks, accept them as such. The difficulty in that model is that it is a special case of the shared cultural traits approach, but with self-definition and group acceptance replacing linguistic and belief systems.

The battle for Macedonia cut through Australian families and sporting clubs, as Danforth has detailed in the case of Ted Yannas. Yannas was born in northern Greece in 1949 and raised as a Greek, but married a Macedonian in Melbourne and came to consider himself Macedonian. His brother and sister no longer speak to him. His response is to ask: 'Do real Greeks have grandparents who didn't speak Greek?' The turning point for Yannas came in 1979 when the Greek Consul offered to cover a \$10,000 fine for the Heidelberg Alexander soccer club if it refused to play against Preston Makedonia. Yannas switched teams in protest, and Heidelberg erased his name from its honour board. ⁵ If Anglo-Celts behaved towards Greeks in the way that Greeks and Macedonians behave towards each other we would be sued before the Anti-Discrimination Boards, and rightly so.

Soccer grounds have been a battlefield also for the young Croatians known as BBB (Bad Blue Boys). They are supporters of Sydney United, known as Sydney Croatia until all clubs were required to shed ethnic labels. Giving Nazi salutes and calling out 'Kill the Serbs' cannot be justified on the grounds that such activities are part of Croat traditions and therefore protected by

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Another hard case for pluralists to crack open will be the Jews, both because their propaganda machines are well primed and because every criticism is received through the Holocaust. Conflict blazed in 1995–96 when the mayor of Woollahra, Neville Gruzman, made two statements that Jewish councillors considered offensive. His conversion to Anglicanism did not help. That Gruzman had been born into a Jewish family need not preclude his becoming anti-Semitic. Self-loathing is a response to persecution among many groups—women, gays and blacks, as well as Jews. More pertinent was that the abuse of Gruzman flared after his team dislodged a group which had run the municipality for twenty-three years.

First, Gruzman's refusal to risk a third heart attack by taking on any more Jewish clients in his architectural practice was offered as evidence of his anti-Semitism, although it could have been the synopsis for an episode of *Seinfeld*.

Secondly, Gruzman claimed that Jews had no aesthetic sense. Was that racist? Yes, but not in the way alleged. The paradox is that, in order to refine the allegation so that it becomes accurate, it would be necessary to make his remarks even more offensive to those who grizzle about political correctness. As an architect, Gruzman cannot be expected to know any history or sociology. (joke) When he used the undifferentiated category 'Jews', he was referring only to those with whom he had most contact in his work. Moreover, in saying that Jews had no aesthetic sense, he was using the exaggeration that many of us employ to dismiss preferences that do not agree with our own. Gruzman's comments about the taste of Jews were no different from his twenty-five years of criticism of most Sydney buildings.⁸

To what designs did Gruzman object? The style he disparaged is known around Melbourne as Jewish Baroque. Its elaborate decorations resemble those in late South German Baroque, a style adopted around 1900 by an *arriviste* middle class in Vienna. There

those from certain regions of Europe, and then not even to all of them. Gruzman had failed to recognise a plurality of Jewishnesses. Yet to insert such multiplicities is to be ridiculed as politically correct. Any talk of class as a determinant of aesthetics would be dismissed as the worst kind of cultural theorising. Had Gruzman added class, regional and temporal aspects to his opinion he would have had no media attention, not because he was being more precise, but because such exactitude has no place in head-lines.

Conversion of Aborigines to multiculturalism about themselves will also be difficult because they are so divided and so disappointed. One area to open up to debate is art-making, which has outdistanced sport as a means of gaining recognition from whites. Imagery is now a way of manifesting one's Aboriginality, no matter how remote the painters have been from their culture.

The challenge to black chauvinism is to accept that paintings and sculptures by Aborigines are no better or worse than most art objects being made these days. Not all Aboriginal images are created equally spiritual. Curators who once knew better nowadays pronounce that Aboriginal art is the only truly Australian image-making and that its practitioners are far and away our finest painters. A handful of Aboriginal works are superb by the criteria of European aesthetics, but most are no better on those terms than the daubs from last year's art-school graduates or the gems strung along St Kilda Esplanade every Sunday.

Two criteria favoured by Aborigines in the evaluation of their image-making no longer hold sway in Western criticism. First, a storytelling aspect is usually crucial to Aboriginal painting, whereas the European avant-garde prizes medium above message. Secondly, the status of the Aboriginal narrator invests a work with some of its quality. This emphasis on authority contrasts with a Western art scene where the newest is the best, with the 'adventurous' exalted above the wisdom guarded by elders. Aboriginal

galleries. The precision of the Aborigines' dots mattered more to the followers of certain New York trends than to the peoples rounded up at Papunya.

By whose standards are non-Aborigines to rate products from Aboriginal cultures? Would other Aborigines agree when a white curator described Matthew Gill Tjupurrula as 'technically the most proficient of all Balgo artists and the most adventurous in his approach'? These are the values championed by the European avant-garde, but would other Balgo painters consider these qualities as praise?

Moreover, Aborigines started to make Art with a capital A probably no more than seventy years ago. As late as 1983 a Warlpiri man announced:

We will never put this kind of painting onto canvas or onto art board or onto any permanent medium. The permanence of these images is in our minds. We do not need museums or books to remind us of our traditions. We are forever renewing and recreating these traditions in our ceremonies. We are not and do not ever want to become professional painters.

Two years later he changed his mind because those images could form political statements, just as other groups of Aborigines had produced artefacts for missionaries or dealers.¹⁰

Although Aborigines have made rock carvings and sand paintings for thousands of years, it is unhelpful to describe such practices as Art in that word's contemporary Western sense. Raymond Williams traced the meanings of 'art' to show how, by the late nineteenth century, it had moved from describing skill in any field towards a notion of Fine Art. ¹¹ To say that the images made by pre-contact Aborigines need to be treated as a version of our conception of art in order to have value is to impose a colonising

a professional or academic discipline, history is barely two hundred years old, and in that time its practices have undergone qualitative changes. History then is not detachable from literacy. Oral historians publish. To subsume pre-contact Aboriginal experiences within capital-H History is to devalue their ways of living.

Whether indigenous people thought of their activities in terms of small-h history before Western contact is more difficult to determine. Their creation stories have their worlds started by nonhuman beings, outside human history. Yet the responsibilities that each generation bears in keeping stories about those ancestors alive, and their duties towards country and totemic beings, show that they accept the effect of human agency and do not see their lives as a miraculous gift from the gods. Aborigines such as Marcia Langton challenge the rhetoric of 40,000 and more years of unchanging culture built upon a timeless harmony with nature.

Nonetheless, Aborigines are no more likely to have had any sense of what palaeontologists call deep time in billions of years than did most Europeans before 1800. Both operated in a continuous present, supposing that their cosmos had been created in a very short space of time, perhaps no more than the span of couple of human generations. They learnt of 40,000 years of occupancy during the past forty years because of the work of prehistorians.

Because of childhood abductions, a number did not know of their indigenous ancestry until they were adults, and more had no contact with their ancestral cultures. Understanding but not indulgence should be shown to those who seek to short-circuit the consequences of these dispossessions by asserting that being Aboriginal is innate. Aboriginality cannot be in the genes, still less in the blood.

Tradition becomes a subtle stereotype when it assumes that once Aborigines adapt they cease to be authentic. The reverse is closer to the truth, although care must be taken not to turn adaptability into the new essence for indigenousness. Aborigines assert

painted an earth-coloured landscape on a car door, complete with its glass window. What medium could be more apt for fringe dwellers than a derelict ute?

My unease about how settler arts groups were patronising Aborigines crystallised in 1995 during a sculpture forum at the Canberra School of Art, when I was on a panel which included a young Aboriginal sculptor and a slightly older installation artist from South Africa.

In a room awash with theorising, the Aboriginal panelist underwent the reaction common to practitioners, white or black, and apologised for the simplicity of his presentation. With considerable performance skills, especially a sense of comic timing, he served up one of the standard strategies of a black man before white judges, namely, the comic nigger: don't judge me too harshly because I am only a poor blackfella. He did not have to voice this self-deprecation to receive indulgence from an audience who had brought that attitude with them as part of their liberal conscience. When his slides went awry he reverted to stage type and the audience chuckled along with him. He needed none of these self-defences, either for his commentary or for the quality of the sculpture he showed. But he felt that he did and the audience knew that their duty was to encourage him by finding each stumble entertaining.

The prejudice behind their indulgence was cast into sharper relief when the South African, also male, but white, had his turn. His slides behaved the way that slides always do—some had put themselves out of order and others upended themselves. The audience had exhausted its goodwill on the Aboriginal. The South African's incompetence was not a point for good-natured humour but irritation.

Should we dig in or advance? Audacity will reveal that the enemies of multiculturalism are as plentiful among post-1947

non-Anglo-Celtic Australians to shed their arrogances could divide supporters of multiculturalism at a time when that ideal is under attack from One Nation and the Coalition government.

The burden of clarifying attitudes within the communities that have benefited from multiculturalism and political correctness must fall upon their own members. To leave them with this responsibility reaffirms the principle of self-determination. For instance, opposition to alcohol-related violence within Aboriginal families and settlements became effective when their female members took charge and led marches through Alice Springs. Outside authorities can support such initiatives with resources for refuges and rehabilitation.

Support for self-determination is not an excuse for the rest of us to abandon responsibility. The task is not to overindulge nonsense within any ethnic group. Most importantly, we must oppose the muddle-headedness that prevents Anglo-Australians from criticising Greek or Aboriginal chauvinisms. In the long haul, other cultures need to deflate their superiority just as Anglo-Celts are doing. This spread will require more of the public courtesies that are behind political correctness than I have been able to display in establishing the point. For the next steps to be successful we must not repeat the mistake of driving people on to the defensive in the way that has happened to a segment of Anglo-Celts.

Multiculturalism is not multinationalism. Combinations of culture and politics can be lethal, as is clear from Irish folk songs that glorify death. That volatility is one reason why constitutional lines need to be clarified so that Australia is not treated as a transit lounge. Either immigrants are permanent Australians or they are here on extended working holidays. If the former, then they must remain welcome only if they do not injure those whose sole con-

nation-state, whether Israel or the USA, the IRA or the Royal Navy. If having to be an Australian citizen is good enough for our head of state, then it should be the rule for every citizen. Australian citizens should not be allowed to hold dual nationality or possess more than one passport, not even an EU one. Members of our parliaments should not retain dual nationality.

That newcomers and their children have difficulty in grasping why they should not divide their constitutional loyalties is not surprising. A bad example is still set by Anglo-Celtic monarchists with their adoration of another country's head of state and its flag. With the Anglo-Celtic ascendancy carrying on for 200 years as if its home were elsewhere, why should recent arrivals immediately know how to behave differently? Some of them have assimilated too well the divided loyalties of the Anglo-Celts.



Barbarisms and civilisations

The lines between civilisation and barbarism were feint in August 1940, when the German critic Walter Benjamin killed himself by the border between Vichy France and Franco's Spain. In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Benjamin had pointed out that the 'tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule'.¹ Yet his insight did not depend upon the circumstances of a single human being or the fate of European culture.

Benjamin accepted that the treasures of civilisation had two opposed but interlocking sources: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.' Humane creativity was paid for by dehumanising toil.² The works of Ozymandias were made by his command, not by his hand, design or sweat. His slaves had reason to look upon those monuments with despair long before the desert sands surrounded their 'trunkless legs of stone'. For all of Shelley's sympathy with the oppressed, he imagined history as driven by the fate of dynasts. He mocked Ozymandias because of his hubris, not because his monuments depended upon exploitation.

Simone de Beauvoir gave an example from the Portugal of

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- 7 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 October 1995, p. 8.
- 8 Australian, 6 February 1971, p. 10, and Sydney Morning Herald, 19 November 1983, p. 35.
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- 8 lbid., p. 15
- **9** Exhibition of the Terracotta Figures of Warriors and Horses of the Qing Dynasty of China, Sydney, 1983, pp. 10, 23–4 & 27–8.
- 10 Look, September 1992, pp.12–13. A review of 'Wisdom and Compassion: the Sacred Art of Tibet' at the Royal Academy, Spectator, 26 September 1992, p. 50, disparaged any suggestion that Tibetan Buddhism had an exploitative side. The 'compassion' was not for the slaves and serfs upon whose labour the monks, in their wisdom, depended.
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- 12 Ibid., 20 August 1972, p. 9, and 11 August 1972, p. 11.
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- 14 Carl R. Baldwin, 'Haacke: Refusé in Cologne', Art in America, Nov.—Dec. 1974 pp. 36—37; German Art From Beckmann to Richter, Martin Gropius Haus, Berlin, 1997, pp. 318—19.
- 15 Barnard to Vance Palmer, 21 January & 13 June 1940, NLA MS 1174/1/5690 & 5776
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