

July 26, 13:00~14:30: Sophia Symposium, Room 2-1702

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“Media Convergence and New Narratives of Belonging: Transformations in Australian Surf Culture”

Key words

narratives of belonging, multicultural, surf culture, LGBT, new media, beach, active citizenship

Abstract

New media and social media are helping to transform Australia culture and society. Through blogs, websites and Facebook, for example, Australian norms are being challenged as new ways of belonging in the public sphere enable people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds to be active participants in society. Australian scholars Graham Meikle and Sherman Young in their book *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life* (2011) argue how new forms of communication through digital means are playing a decisive role in how everyday narratives of belonging are evolving and being represented as well as contested. In contemporary Australia, this convergence is producing interesting ways for how people from multicultural and socially diverse backgrounds negotiate their place in Australian dominant cultural flows and everyday life.

What is now evident in Australian culture is an intensification of the interpenetration and overlapping of peoples in everyday life. As it has become a multicultural, multi-religious, multi-sexual and multi-ethnic reality – with a much keener sense of its indigenous heart and mind – its public culture has become increasingly defined by intense conversations and inter-epistemic dialogue that are cosmopolitan and potentially decolonising as well as post-homophobic. Getting inside Australian culture for people who belong in the borderlands is a difficult intellectual undertaking and not always easy. And given the enormous complexity of how values have been installed through institutional processes and the narratives of belonging that have developed within Australian public culture around issues such as race, migration, gender and sexuality, the investigation becomes an ethically charged endeavour that requires multiple views and voices. How can Australian culture become more conscious of itself, of the contradictions inherent in a system of values that essentially derive from an ongoing colonial process that is epistemologically constrained and limited? Is the convergence of new media and everyday life providing a means of enabling social and cultural diversity?

Australia has presented itself as a liberal democratic nation whose values are derived from Judeo-Christian and European intellectual traditions. It sees itself as part of western civilization, and as such has defined its past, present and future based on these assumptions through the shaping of its modernity. Australia's self-definition and imagination has been constructed through a process of othering that has been systemic and pervasive in its core institutions. Such othering has been powerful and difficult to negotiate or alter. Australian society is still seen as having strong racial, sexual and gendered markers framed across its key narratives of

belonging.

In my presentation, I want to look at an example of how new media, specifically blogs and websites, together with social media provided by Facebook, are helping to transform one of the iconic cultural imaginaries and cultural sites of Australia. The focus of this paper is on the opening up of mainstream surf culture to alternative sexualities and how this is being done through the work of a French Australian and in a cosmopolitan way.

The beach is perhaps the most significant example of how Australian values are in fact more real, organic and fluid. As a discourse, text, set of symbols and practices, iconography or narrative, the beach has come to represent one of the key ways in which Australia defines itself. As the site of European invasion, of the first encounter between minds that were separated by thousands of years of knowledge, experience and being, the beach in Australia is a powerful symbol of civilisation, its creation and destruction. As the Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe has noted, in the 19th century more than 600,000 pianos were brought to Australia from across the seas, over the beaches, into harbours and ports and into cities, towns, developing suburban landscapes and onto farms, actively enculturating the Australian public sphere.

As the (cutting) edge of the Australian continent, the beach has played a role in the Australian imaginary just as significant as the bush. The beach in the Australian imaginary has held both the conscious and unconscious effects of colonialism. It's the place in the Australian psyche where history and mythology are like oil and water: a crucible for nourishing Australian values; representation of invasion, masculinity, heterosexuality, unity and nationalist ideology; but also, and counter to these effects, a playground of cultural diversity, it's the place of abandonment, re-invention, and surfing. My presentation will focus on the Australian film released in 2014, 'Out in the Line Up,' which provides a useful example of how media convergence and new narratives of belonging can be seen emerging once again at the site of the beach.

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Baden Offord is Professor of Cultural Studies and Human Rights in the School of Arts and Social Sciences, and Co-Director of the Centre for Peace and Social Justice at Southern Cross University, Australia. Recognized as a specialist in sexuality, human rights and culture, in 2012 he was a sponsored speaker to the 14th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in Brussels and conducted a three-week lecture tour of Japan sponsored by the Australian Prime Minister's Educational Assistance Funds post the Great Eastern Tohoku Earthquake in 2011. He has held visiting positions at The University of Barcelona, La Trobe University, Indiana University and Rajghat Education Centre, Varanasi. In 2010-2011 he was Chair (Visiting Professor) in Australian Studies, Centre for Pacific Studies and American Studies, The University of Tokyo. He is the Vice-President (International) of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia and on the board of the International Association of Australian Studies. He is the International Director of Program for Cultural Studies for the International Academic Forum based in Nagoya. His most recent co-authored book is *Inside Australian Culture: Legacies of Enlightenment Values* (Anthem, London: 2014), which Raewyn Connell has remarked is a 'disturbing book, most relevant to our disturbing times.'