

## MAPPING DIFFERENCE: PLACE, CULTURE, AND THE CHARTING OF URBAN HISTORY

### LANDSCAPES OF HOPE: MIGRATION AND PLACE

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De-placing difference is closely aligned with the experience of migration, a phenomenon that is increasingly pertinent at the beginning of the 21st century where changing political structures, terrorism and wars are resulting in the mass movement of people. The history of migration to Australia shows that the concept of an Australian tradition in architecture and landscape design needs to be reconsidered to allow for subtle overlays of all cultures contributing to the contemporary Australian landscape. There are many phenomena resulting in subtle migrant interventions in the urban fabric, some are unselfconscious responses to place and culture, others are driven by the belief that the new land embodies landscapes of hope. This paper suggests that the ways landscapes convey a sense of hope for migrants are closely aligned with the politics of national space and the interplay between local, marginal and imagined space. The paper particularly explores places made by migrants in large Australian cities which were, until recently, seen as benign exemplars of cultural pluralism, despite the history of racism embedded in their formation and the current political attitudes towards new migrants.

The paper is presented in three sections; first a discussion about the politics of space, then how migrant landscapes reflect the reconfiguring of culture and place. Finally, the paper looks at how the concept of the 'urban uncanny' can inform new landscapes of hope for 21<sup>st</sup> century multicultural Australia.

#### **Landscapes of Hope and the Politics of Space**

The act of traveling to a new place can be filled with both excitement and dread. For migrants, particularly the migrants who came to Australia in the 1950s after World War II and in the 1970s after the civil wars in Lebanon and Vietnam, traveling towards the unknown landscape of Australia was filled with hope. For many, Australia was an unknown entity; merely a safe refuge. There are, however, many different forms of safety. There is the obvious safety of finding freedom from the terror of war, but there is also the safety to be oneself, to be safe to live in an unselfconscious way, going about one's everyday life in relative anonymity.

In the 1950s, Australia was free of the terrors of war, but was it a safe place to be different? Who was allowed to come into Australian national space and what were the rules about occupying this space?

North America and Australia have both been considered successful receiving countries for migrants but there are interesting contrasts in the way each country has accepted and assimilated the cultural differences associated with such people. Perhaps the most significant contrast is the geographic distance involved in migrating to Australia. Until the recent ease of air travel, migration to Australia meant a dramatic severance from the country of origin.

The relative lack of productivity of the Australian landscape is another important difference. It resulted in vast pastoral holdings owned by an elite minority (Thorpe,1996). Such a situation

acted against migrants replicating their former land husbandry practices in small rural enclaves. Instead migrants tended to settle in towns or major cities, moving from a rural way of life to an urban existence, and in the process creating urban landscapes that were new to them. This is in strong contrast to North America where, because of the general productivity of the land, there has been an opportunity for small land holdings, thus enabling the continuity of European and Asian land husbandry traditions.

A further point of relevance to the political landscape, were the differing ideological constructs about migration between North America and Australia. Many migrants were drawn to North America because of its ideological position that there would be no restrictions to entry based on race or religion. In Australia until the 1960s, national identity was commonly seen as a derivation of British identity. As a result, there was a clear preference for British migrants in the belief that this would create a 'culturally superior' country (Murphy, 1993).

The concept of New World 'national space' reflects Bhabha's (1990) argument that histories of national identities are transitional and responsive to the larger context preceding new nations or nation-states. This was particularly true for the colonial enterprise. Initially settlers in the New World could only occupy 'marginal space' because the 'national space' was always in Europe. Over time there was a growth in nationalism in New World countries. Nationalism in North America was underpinned by a willingness to accept all newcomers; an ideology which was seen as a '*shining beacon of democracy*' (Freeman and Jupp,1992:15). In contrast, Australian 'national space' was exclusive. Migrants were only acceptable if they had the capacity to be absorbed into the Anglo-Celtic culture and all migrants were expected to relinquish their former culture. Australia developed a highly selective concept of 'national space,' embodied in the policy known as 'White Australia'. Thus notions of 'marginal space' and 'national space' have played a central role in the Australian landscapes of migration

### **Australian Urban Identity: from 'White Australia' to Cultural Pluralism**

It is clear that the lack of land ownership in the 19<sup>th</sup> century rural population resulted in urban working class solidarity and a complex relationship between the Australian labour movement and immigration policies (Freeman and Jupp,1992). Because of the anxiety about Chinese workers, it was a racist agenda rather than independence from Britain that characterized the climate immediately preceding the federation of separate colonial States. This established the basis for the politics of race and class, so fundamental to the Australian landscape of migration.

By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when migration changed from a continuous but small number to the large influx of migrants after WWII, Australia was a deeply conservative society living out the remnants of a British colonial cultural system. Thus when the government of the day was faced with the need to embark upon such a massive migration program to provide the work-force for its proposed industrial projects, it recognised this inherent cultural conservatism by reassuring voters that most migrants would be British, thus ensuring the continuity of a White Australian 'national space'.

Australia, however, was not the first choice for British migrants, most going to United States or Canada. The government, already heavily committed to the new industrial projects, opened the possibility of accepting migrants from Mediterranean countries and Northern Europe. Within the context of 'White Australia' this was obviously contentious so Australian voters were

reassured that such migrants would become 'Australian' under the policy of 'Assimilation'. To achieve assimilation, no provisions for housing were made on the assumption that migrants would be absorbed into the existing suburbs assisted by a well-meaning, but patronising, organisation, known as the 'Good Neighbour Movement' (Murphy,1993). Inevitably the very policies aimed at ensuring that non-British migrants blended into Australian cities resulted in isolating migrants into marginal landscapes.

This was interesting because at that time Australia, as a nation-state, was marginal both culturally and geographically, a situation which may have contributed to the particular fear of cultural difference. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, much contemporary Australian cultural production is concerned with the problem of a self-defined Australian identity, where until the recent international focus, Australians have tended to see their cultural identity as marginal to Europe and New York.

Despite the patronizing position Australians adopted towards the migrants in the 1950s, there was a heavy investment of hope in the migrants. They were to 'build a nation' and through their hard work, they did. They built the great hydro-electricity schemes, the large steel manufacturing concerns, and they worked in the grueling heat on sugar plantations helping to build the great sugar industry, to name just a few of the many ways the migrants contributed to 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia. Their hard work, willingly done, changed the Australian landscape.

Nevertheless, most migrants found themselves occupying marginal space in cities. Here they created partially concealed places which helped make the unfamiliar qualities of Australian cities feel more familiar. Greek and Maltese men's clubs were hidden above shops. Places of worship were created in old halls. Houses in suburban streets were transformed into another country in the privacy of back gardens. This paper suggests that in this marginal space lay the seeds for future landscapes of hope for the wider Australian community. There are particular qualities within marginal space which can act as a reflective critique of the mainstream culture. This has been explored by Vidler in his study of *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992). To accept the validity of these reflections one needs to understand the cultural richness and intellectual complexity of migrant places.

## **Migrant and Mainstream: Reconfiguring Culture and Place**

### ***Reconfiguring Sense of Place***

Interpreting migrant places employs cultural landscape theory, phenomenological studies and cultural studies to provide insights into subjective human engagement with place (Relph,1976; Seamon,1993; Chambers,1994). This work has proved to be rich and varied because of its particular emphasis on emotional experiences and bonds between people and place.

Cultural landscape studies contribute the proposition that places/landscapes are physical representations of public history awaiting interpretation. Initially anthropological, later scholars, through studies about how customs and ways of life create a sense of place, recognised that landscapes were repositories of signs and symbols about values (Jackson, 1951, 1984, Meinig,1979).

Sense of place and the ways places can become important to communities often relate to the experiences which have occurred there. The environmental psychologist, Robert Riley (1992), suggests that such experiences become embedded in the memory of the place, however one needs to be aware of the slippery role of memory and place, so brilliantly explored by Lowenthal (1985, 1996) in his work on heritage and landscape meanings.

This paper, however, focuses on the work of Relph (1976) and his concept of empathy with place to provide insights into the values migrants attribute to places. Relph was one of the early cultural geographers to incorporate a phenomenological perspective into understanding the concept of sense of place. In seeking to understand why we value certain places, Relph sees the importance of 'existential' or 'lived' space as essential to phenomenological understandings of place. According to Relph, existential space is constantly being made and remade by human activities, evident as unselfconscious patterns and structures in the landscapes. It is this unselfconscious aspect of existential space which results in places being '*centres of meaning*' for insiders (Relph,1976: 22). 'Insideness' is a complex concept in migrant communities. The migrant is caught between different states of 'insideness' in both the original and new country, as a result, interpretations of place values and meanings require processes which facilitate an understanding of a state of being 'between' (Heidegger,1971; Meyer,1994; Soja,1996).

Relph proposes three states of insideness; '*behavioural insideness*' which is being physically present in a place, '*empathetic insideness*' which is the emotional involvement with a place, and '*existential insideness*' which is the complete and unselfconscious commitment to a place (Relph,1976:50). Migrants experience all of these states of 'insideness'. Relph suggests that once a community image of place has been developed, the identity of such a place will be maintained '*so long as it allows acceptable social interaction...*' (Relph,1976:60). This creates problems for migrant groups due to the ephemeral nature of migrant places. Migrant places are in a state of flux because migrants are in a constant state of adapting and 'becoming' (Heidegger,1971). For migrants, both these states are different. Early places associated with migration are expressions of unselfconscious activity (existential insideness), later becoming meaningful as places where an emotional attachment persists (empathetic insideness) (Armstrong, 1993,1997,2000).

Another important aspect of unselfconscious or existential sense of place is the profound effect that loss of place can have (Altmann & Low,1992; Read,1996). Migrants come to the new country in an existential state of loss. This is often more intense if migrants have left villages where there has been a continuous relationship with the landscape over generations. In the new country, the loss of place generates an urgency to recreate evidence of the former place. This is an act of self-conscious place-making. Relph suggests that places created by pioneers and migrants consciously reflect their hopes and aspirations as well as their commitment to the new country. While acknowledging the power of such hopes and aspirations, this paper argues that the act of creating places which give expression to ways of life and experiences in the former country, although consciously done, is driven by unselfconscious needs and experiences. In arguing for this perspective I am drawing from Henri Lefebvre's (1991:100-101) notions of the importance of everyday life where he states

*...everyday life comprises all that is humble, ordinary, and taken for granted; it is made up of repetitions, of small gestures and insignificant actions in which all the*

*elements relate to each other in such a regular sequence of accepted pattern that their meaning need never be questioned.*

The ways in which migrant places in Australian cities have developed draw from just such repetitions of ordinary events. Migrant places are nevertheless more complicated than mere repetitions of everyday life now undertaken in a new country. Places created in the host country also embody iconic qualities about the migrant's home country blended with hopes and aspirations for the new.

### ***Reconfiguring Iconography of Place***

Theory about the iconography of place draws predominantly from artistic and literary representations of landscapes, seen as vehicles to reveal socio-political signifiers embedded in place (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988). This work has provided important insights into the meanings associated with places through time, particularly Cosgrove's study, *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape* (1986). Cosgrove explores the role of the New World, for him, North America, in fulfilling European aspirations. The ideological role of the New World for migrating Europeans has been one of realising ideals and beliefs. In his analysis of the American landscape, he cites John Stilgoe's (1982:17) claim that North America is the landscape of common knowledge, which is created by

*... a mixture of both the 'little tradition' transmitted by generations of half-literate peasants and the 'great tradition' of the literate, innovative minority of scholars, rulers, and merchants and professional surveyors and architects.*

Thus Cosgrove's 'landscape idea' takes on a particular form in North America shaped by the combination of European ideas, the reality of the American landscape, and the particular social structure in America. In Australia, a similar process has occurred but without the strength of the American ideological underpinning. Instead the British colonial bureaucracy determined much of the character of the urban and rural landscape in Australia, resulting in a remote determinant of cultural form delivered through a bureaucratic system (Armstrong, 1989). Changes brought by subsequent migrant cultures in Australia have continued to be seen against this backdrop. Other writers suggest that a depth of understanding about landscapes requires a '*historical recovery of ideologies*' (Baker & Biger, 1992:3). This poses particular challenges in the Australian context where, unlike North America, ideologies have been less stridently articulated by the mainstream culture. Making manifest ideologies is one of the many contributions of the marginal to the mainstream, again drawing from Vidler's concept of the 'uncanny' (1992).

Cosgrove is interested in the way perceptions of landscape changed in the West from feudalism, which was characterised by a close affinity with the land, to capitalism where the land becomes a commodity for increasing exchange value. New World settlements are the ultimate extension of capitalism's appropriation of land. He suggests the pioneering new settler exemplifies this process. The question arises however, whether there is a difference between migrants and pioneering new settlers? I argue that migrants, despite often seeing themselves as pioneers, always came after the pioneer and so arrive in the New World with received wisdom. In the case of Australia, migrants came to a land which was imbued with the symbolism of an Antipodean Garden of Eden - a tropical paradise of abundance and plenty exemplifying hope for a better life. Clearly the places migrants have created in Australia are hybrids which reflect

elements of their former culture, elements of the existing Australian culture and elements indicating the aspirations or hope for the new place.

Theories informing the ways migrant reconfigure culture and place thus include existential understandings, iconographic interpretations as well as the value of familiar and everyday places. This is a rich palette from which to develop designs for the Australian urban landscape, made even richer in that migrants do not come to Australia as humble innocents. It has consistently been revealed in migrant conversations, that they arrive imbued with all the accumulated wisdom of long established cultures. Lebanese migrants speak of their Phoenician traditions, Italian migrants point out their heritage of high culture and fine design, and Vietnamese migrants describe the ways Taoism and Buddhism inform their way of life. Migrants also arrive with highly developed political understandings which rapidly become evident in the nature of places they value (Armstrong, 2000).

### ***Living on the Hyphen: the Complexity within Marginal Space***

Mapping difference in terms of the migrant experience calls for a critique of current notions of multiculturalism and difference; particularly the notion of the migrant as 'other' occupying the underside of history. Instead, there is a constant 'fragmentation' and 'congealing'; a 'physics' of space and cultural identity in multicultural cities (Papastergiadis, 2000). There is a restlessness involved in the migrant experience, insights about which are provided by different forms of migrant cultural production. This restlessness is eloquently described by Chambers (1994:3) as

*... a discontinuous state of being...[migration] is a journey of restless interrogation...the belief in the power of origins to define the finality of our passage is dispersed by perpetual movement and transmutations...*

This representation of migration as a state of uncertainty and change, is also brought out by the feminist writer, Kristeva in her study, *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991). The concept of how we see the 'other' is as pertinent to the migrant as it is to citizens of the host country. Chambers (1994) and Kristeva (1991) suggest that there is not a simple symbolic externalisation of the 'other', but rather a '*condition of dialogue in which different powers, histories, limits and language that permit the process of othering to occur, are inscribed.*' (Chambers, 1994:12). This involves ceaseless negotiations between cultures and complex configurations of meaning and power. The cultural disruption experienced by migrants has particular resonances in Australia where cultural discontinuity is true for most Australians, including those Aboriginal Australians who have been forcibly separated from their land and families.

For migrants, reconfiguring culture and place evokes a particular cross-cultural phenomenon exemplified by transformed and transposed cultural practices. Migrants bring memories of culture which often become frozen in time – a transposed culture. In parallel with this, migrant cultural practice becomes transformed in the Australian context due to the influences of the Australian way of life, altered seasons, and responses to assimilation - a transformed culture. Both are acted out in marginal space in subtle ways.

Reflections of such issues are evident in much of the cultural production of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia. Susan Varga (1994) and Andrew Reimer (1992) are examples of numerous authors writing autobiographically of their experiences as migrants in Australia. Interestingly, Varga and Reimer turn the notion of marginality around by revealing the patronising gaze that some

migrants have of the host as a young society in a culturally raw New World. Other works such as those of the artist, Imants Tillers, and photographer, William Yang, explore the cross-cultural hybridity derived from living with two cultural allegiances. They exemplify Chambers' speculations on hybridity where '*...the migrant's sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of the (post)modern condition.*'(1994:27).

Given this complexity, the common representation of cultural pluralism in Australia today, namely, one where the process of migration and settlement results in successful adaptation needs to be challenged. Simplistically, migrants are seen to add their distinctive cultural practices to Australian culture, simultaneously providing continuity with their country of origin and diversity to Australian society. This representation assumes that migrants are members of homogeneous ethnic communities. It ignores the diversity of migrants from any one country of origin, including their class, education level, whether they are urban or rural people, reasons for migrating, political affiliations and so on. It also avoids acknowledging the experiences migrants have in trying to settle into a different and sometimes hostile culture (Fincher et al,1993; Morrissey et al,1991).

The concept of identity in the migration project is an elusive phenomenon and is often misunderstood. Not only do we need to challenge the stereotypes embedded in notions of multiculturalism, some cultural theorists argue that the concept has emerged within a post-modern context and therefore needs to be understood within post-modern terms. Jameson's (1991) position on post-modern values, as requiring constant negotiation and reflection so that inner contradictions can be acknowledged and included in the discourse, is highly relevant to interpretations of migrant place-making.

Planning processes in many Australian cities show the difficulties in reconciling inconsistencies and sustaining continuous negotiations. Added to which, the growing use of planning incentives to promote stereotyped decorative evidence of particular migrant groups in the large Australian cities are examples of the superficial notions of migrant culture. The migrant experience, namely the cultural identity which emerges from experiences of everyday life in the new country, is a far more substantial aspect of migrant culture. The impulse to appropriate of ethnic character, often driven by tourism entrepreneurs (both within and outside migrant groups) is an example of Jameson's (1991) post-modernism of late capitalism.

Lechte and Bottomley (1993:27) suggest that, unlike the current rhetoric which assumes that there are clear boundaries between homogeneous migrant groups, migrant identity can be described as '*the interweaving and collage effect*' which they call '*The Post-modern.*' They suggest that the earlier status of migrants in Australia, that is, located between the Anglo-insider and non-Anglo outsider has been subverted as boundaries between insiders and outsiders shift in contemporary multicultural Australia. Hage's (1998) Bourdieu-ian analysis of Australian multiculturalism confirms their speculations. The concept of an Australian multicultural society is eloquently described by Lechte & Bottomley (1993:32) as

*...we are witnessing the incessant interweaving of practices; practices producing meanings which burn brightly for a moment only to die away in the wake of new meanings. A model for a multicultural society is not feasible because any model - as an objectification - must lay claim to a degree of transcendence (that is, a capacity*

*to objectify) that would contradict the very (multicultural) reality it was supposed to represent.*

They call this the collage/montage effect or '*synchronic level of living history*' rather than the objectified history of historians. How does the mapping of difference and the charting of urban history sit in this 'incessant interweaving' of meanings and how can the minority discourse be used as insightful observations of mainstream culture?

Clearly simplified versions of ethnic difference and models of the multicultural society put forward by politicians and planners aimed at managing ethnic diversity are inadequate. Not only does this raise issues of ethnic stereotyping, it also fails to accommodate the dynamic nature of Australian society in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus charting urban histories in multicultural cities are not only past histories recalled in the imagination but also material relations that exist in the present.

Chinatowns in major Australian cities exemplify these issues. Anderson's (1993) study of Australian Chinatowns can now be augmented by similar re-interpretations of Italian and Vietnamese precincts for the tourist gaze. Her argument that planning and design professions in Australia define and fashion mythic Chinatowns needs to be updated by the fact that Chinese communities in Australia are also powerful agents in their own community development. The complexity of power relationships in Australian communities questions much of the current discourse on ethnicity and place (Hayden, 1995, Keith & Pile 1993). Multicultural communities in Australia are not merely reflections of marginality. Instead there are dynamic intersections of culture, power and the sense of being multicultural where many commercial interests are Chinese, Italian and Vietnamese and have participated in the orientalising and exoticizing their precincts thus exploiting the projection of 'difference' as part of the spoils of multiculturalism.

Mapping difference and charting urban history must therefore recognise the vulnerability of migrant places in terms of a number of forces. These are the constant pressure for redevelopment in urban areas, the stereotyping and commodifying of ethnicity for tourism and finally the lack of understanding about the reconfiguring of cultural pluralism with its blendings, interweavings, and changing values.

### **Marginal Space as Landscapes of Hope: the Urban Uncanny**

The exploitation of 'difference' as a commodity acts against another valuable aspect of migrant places, namely their 'uncanny' ability to be a form of self-reflection for the mainstream culture where 'difference' can lie within, awaiting self-reflective enquiry.

Marginal space is a fertile area providing many insights for the mainstream. In this space, migrant discourse can embody another form of 'hope'- a hope for enlightenment in the mainstream. It is not simply a space in which the marginal passively suffers oppression. Marginal space is also a space rich in people who, through their own cultural heritage, are able to observe and comment on mainstream space.

From in-depth discussions with migrants about what they see as their heritage within Australia, many insightful observations emerged about Australian culture and place (Armstrong, 1993, 1997, 2000). Hage (1998) points out that 'national space' can contain accumulated capital of many nationalities, for example, Greek and Italian heritage as a gift to Australian culture was



often apparent in the migrant discourses. This hybridity in migrant identity, which Chambers suggests is a form of 'creole' (1994:17), is central to charting recent Australian urban history.

If we see marginal space as a new landscape of hope, then unlike the new migrants, Australians need to make the familiar become unfamiliar – the essence of the uncanny. In these spaces of self-reflection there is hope that we can avoid the womb-like comfort of New Urbanism. Drawing from Vidler's position that the uncanny has important implications for urbanism and the contemporary city, marginal spaces can allow us to understand the unhomely, the other within oneself. It is timely that Australians, an inclusive term for the multicultural population, pause within uncanny urban moments and reflect on the new fears of difference, evident in the recent elections. By revisiting the aspirations associated with the partnerships between the migrants and the Australian community in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century 'to build a nation', can new landscapes of hope be developed that accept both humanitarian and environmental responsibility?

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