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Reclaiming Multiculturalism:
Global Citizenship and Ethical Engagement with Diversity

The hermeneutics of globalisation:
Negotiating Te Papa as a pluralist cosmopolitan space

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Introduction

In this paper, I illuminate the hermeneutics of globalisation by venturing beyond political and economic overdetermination towards interpretive complexity. Although the idea of a ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’ gains momentum, the debate remains mainly on a theoretical and normative level without offering sophisticated empirical investigations (Calhoun, 2010). This paper, however, approaches the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) as a global public sphere through a narrative examination of ‘cultural action’ (Clifford, 1997) in the form of ‘interpretive contests’ (Said, 2003) and their ‘articulation’ (Bhabha, 1994) by museum visitors, or cultural actors. While the study is situated within a single national place, it simultaneously embodies a ubiquitous global discursive space. This enables me to interrogate a particular case within a global context moving beyond the limiting definition of exclusively local, regional or national research problems.

I want to proceed with the gradual development of my argument with some notes on globalisation, which has quickly become an omnipresent buzzword and the seemingly unquestionable dogma of the current era. It’s thereby not my goal to deny its significance, which would be naïve at best, but to qualify its nature and complicate some common assumptions. Firstly, it seems prudent that even when experiencing dramatic change, we need to defy ‘epochal hubris’, as Bengt Kristensson Uggl (2010, p. 106) argues, the ‘tempting egocentrism’, or ethnocentrism, ‘which places us in an unfeasibly privileged position at the centre of history and the world’. Although globalisation has undergone an explosive proliferation over the last decades through major technological advances in communication and transportation, it is crucial to note that it is not a modern or postmodern invention. If understood through these clear-cut demarcations of a supposedly linear progress of history,
globalisation would appear to be caused by a single and almost magical moment somewhere between the pre- and the post-. Instead, I argue that the current era only witnesses new dimensions of a historically grounded human process performed at the level of practice. I therefore prefer to speak of ruptural transformations rather than epochal ruptures.

Secondly, I want to allude to an important dimension of globalisation, namely, the continued significance of locality. Location or place has not lost its relevance to human life and practice thus defying sweeping claims of global meta-breaks and apocalyptic prophecies of a global homogenisation. Both dwelling roots and traveling routes have always been at the very heart of the human condition (Clifford, 1997; Wilson, Sandru, & Welsh, 2010). While contemporary life forms become increasingly ‘deterritorialised’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), diasporic and truly global, any specific locality still performs, and is performed by, the accommodation of the body and the senses through a ‘special kind of sensual experience’ (Hannerz, 1996, p. 27) and ‘structure of feeling’ (Appadurai, 1996, p. 181). A local place and the global space are mutually constitutive, assigning each other meanings in a circular hermeneutic trajectory through the ‘work of imagination’ (Appadurai, 1996) and the labour of interpretation by human actors embedded in practice. To put it succinctly, the global gains a different meaning in each place, each city, each village, each neighbourhood, and, as in this research, in a particular museum and the interpretive world of its visitors.

**Theoretical framework**

As I briefly hinted at, the mixing of ‘traveling cultures’ (Clifford, 1997) is no contemporary novelty but an endemic process with concrete histories of practice. What is new, however, is the evolution of a ‘world horizon’ (Beck, 1997), a pervasive sense of globality in lived experience induced and magnified by modern means of communication and transportation.
This inescapable hermeneutic condition of globalisation transforms the engagement with difference and the Other from an occasional assignment into an ubiquitous demand. I concur with James Clifford’s (1988, pp. 22-23) view that ‘it has become necessary to imagine a world of generalised ethnography. With expanded communication and intercultural influence, people interpret others, and themselves, in a bewildering diversity of idioms - a global condition of what Mikhail Bakhtin called “heteroglossia”. Considering the circular relationship between the global and the local, which threads its way through this paper, it is vital to note that even undeniable and widespread inequalities have not lead to a cultural homogenisation because of the diverse ways in which global discursive interventions, according to Aiwha Ong (1999, p. 10), ‘are interpreted and the way they require new meanings in local reception’.

At the heart of it lays a continuous translation between cultural worlds of meaning, which seems difficult in theory but has always been performed in practice. This capacity grows out of the daily task of translating not only between but within cultural communities. In fact, each interpretation or understanding is an act of translation (Ricoeur, 2006). It follows that human existence itself is not only a ‘mode of interpretation’ or ‘hermeneia’ (Ricoeur, 2006), but a mode of translation which is at once linguistic, cultural, political and historical. This endless flow of ‘translation’ proceeds, as Walter Benjamin (1997, p. 117) puts it, ‘through continua of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity’. By offering ‘cultural difference as an enunciative category’, Homi Bhabha (1994: 60), then, opens a hermeneutic terrain of cultural negotiation and contestation without resorting to the last bastion of binary oppositions, which are produced by the inherently essentialising concept of ‘a culture’. This facilitates an understanding of how different subjects or cultural actors engage in the process of cultural worldmaking, a process which, I argue, always begins with an act of interpretation.
(Schorch, 2010, forthcoming 2013). But how can we empirically dissect the ‘moments’ and processes’ in the ‘articulation of cultural differences’ (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2)?

**Methodological framework**

I argue for a narrative construction of meaning and Self through discursive actions, movements and performances (Schorch, forthcoming 2014). Consequently, the research informing this paper required hermeneutics as methodological choice and interpretation as its analytical method. By employing narrative hermeneutics, I shed light on the dynamic interrelation and interdependence of ‘action’, ‘narrative’, ‘meaning’ and ‘Self’ while humanising Te Papa as a global public sphere through ethnographic research on global visitors and their acts of interpretation (Schorch, 2010, forthcoming 2013).

A narrative hermeneutics allows us to investigate the relationship between the psychic and the social as mutually constitutive dimensions of any interpretive performance (Redman, 2005). By illuminating these ‘spiralling exchanges’ and their ‘inescapable hybridity’ (Redman, 2005), I argue that without using formalist and deterministic reductions we can find answers to the open question ‘why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others’ (Hall, 1996, p. 10). I agree with Stuart Hall (1996, p. 14), who stresses the remaining ‘requirement to think this relation of subject to discursive formations as an articulation’, or more specifically a narrative articulation. Such processual understanding of discursive engagements shifts the analytical focus from identities as essential traits to ‘identifications’ as positional and strategic performances (Hall, 1996).

In this study, I explored the heterogeneous ‘articulations’ and ‘identifications’ expressed through the ‘narrative negotiation’ and ‘performative construction’ of Self (Kraus, 2006).
This enabled me to humanise such abstract totalities as ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ to ‘encounter humanity face to face’ avoiding that ‘living detail is drowned in dead stereotype’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 53; 51). Having translated the theoretical into a methodological framework, I continue with the empirical findings in the following section.

**Cross-cultural journeys**

I set out to explore the processes of meaning-making, the ‘growth of meaning’ (Johnson, 2007) and ‘development of understanding’ (Ricoeur, 1981) during cross-cultural encounters. I turn to Julia, a New Zealand born Australian, to begin my exploration of the interpretive processes and moments of cultural worldmaking throughout the informants’ cross-cultural journeys:

*I loved the Māori side of it and it’s wonderful to see that strength there. I mean I look at the Aborigines in Australia and it’s a totally different culture, you can’t compare that, but I think the Māori are in a lot better position as a race in New Zealand than the Aborigines are over there… I think, yeah Australia has got a lot of work to do really in that regard…I loved the modern side of it as well, like the meeting house down there with all the pretty colors in it and made not out of traditional wood, that was just beautiful. Because to me that shows more integration, it’s showing New Zealand as being an integrated country, like we are not talking Māori and Pakeha, we are talking about Kiwis or New Zealanders, which is really good too…It was good to see that side of it, but that didn’t dominate. It’s a small part of this museum and this is giving it a more, I don’t know, inclusive feel.*

Julia, like any human being, cannot help but place her cultural experience in a context informed by her own discursive environment, the ‘reader’s world’ (Bauman, 1978). Consequently, the perceived integration of Māori and European in New Zealand is related to the apparently worse position of the Aboriginal population in Australia. The fact that Julia, as a New Zealand born Australian, is intimately familiar with the socio-cultural situations in both countries attests to the phenomenon of ‘traveling cultures’ (Clifford, 1997) in a ‘cosmopolitanised’ (Beck, 2006) world which goes far beyond the travel encounters interrogated in this study and undermines the imaginary purity of any cultural ‘reader’s
world’. Importantly, Julia highlights the advance of the emotive dimension into the cultural domain manifesting itself as an “inclusive feel”.

The engagement with cultural displays can be affected, limited or even prevented by a visitor’s interpretive community, the ‘reader’s world’. This becomes apparent in the following story of Bruce from the USA:

*When we were sort of booking out our tour around New Zealand, one of the things they did ask us was whether we wanted to do a lot of Māori culture things. Originally our reaction was sort of like no because I think it’s based on our experience with native culture in the United States. That sort of indigenous culture stuff you get in the United States is very contrived and kind of hokey. And there is a little bit of feel of imperialism to it that you sort of…you are looking at this culture not as being immersed in it or really trying to understand it, but you are looking at it as being the outsider and ’look isn’t that cute’. You are not; it makes you feel bad about it is the easy way of saying it.*

We accompany Bruce as he reflects on his visit to Te Papa and discover an interpretive pathway which transforms a ‘contact zone’ (Clifford, 1997) into a dialogical ‘Third Space’ (Bhabha, 1994). Bruce undertakes the journey from bicultural meanings to cross-cultural dialogue:

*One of the cool things was that according to the tour guide it was basically presented by the Māori not by, you know, a bunch of white guys saying what we present of the Māori, which made a lot more tellable and believable and didn’t have this sort of stench of imperialism on it. So it made it a lot easier to sort of, because if somebody is telling about themselves rather than somebody telling about somebody else, we call that hear-say in the law.*

Mediated by the tour host, Bruce dares to engage with another world after his initial reluctance. He appreciates the self-representation of the cultural Other, which enables him to overcome the “feel of imperialism”. Now he is “not looking at” the Other but is “immersed” in dialogue facilitating “understand[ing]” and dissolving the “bad…feel[ing]” of being an “outsider”. This is the ‘moment’ or ‘process’ that translates a ‘contact zone’ into ‘the production of meaning’. Given the hermeneutic condition I discussed before, this ‘requires that these two places…the I and the You…be mobilised in the passage through a Third
Space’ (Bhabha, 1994: 36), such that the ‘pact of interpretation’ or ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer in Ricoeur, 1991) occurs through museological self-representation.

Andrew from Canada offers more insights into the interpretive dynamics and hermeneutic negotiations between Self and Other within the discursive museum space:

*I think it was a significant part of the museum to me. I guess I have the Canadian definition of the Māori house, the greeting house, the house with all the hand-carved work around it. That was very, very impressive. I sort of equated it to the long house of the Iroquois in Canada. So I make the comparison between the two indigenous cultures.*

As Andrew proceeds we see how his Canadian Self shifts from the Indigenous to the Scottish inclusion through the experience of the New Zealand Other within the wider context of ‘traveling cultures’:

*We were also very interested however in the section about the Scottish settlers right now. Again I can draw the connection because my family being from Scotland coming to Canada in the early 1800s. And stories were quite similar to what was recounted there...the similarities between the Scottish settlements in Canada and the Scottish settlements here is just amazing. I think there are probably more Scots spread around the world than there are left in Scotland now... and it’s something that people are trying to keep their heritage alive I guess. And I just found it really interesting, the same things happen here that happen at home.*

Andrew carries on by shifting the cultural Self/Other encounter to a personal and professional level:

*I am a former politician so I am really interested in anything political. And gatherings of people from different places with tribal structures are a very political meeting. So I just found that fascinating and the fact that it’s still used for greeting visitors and used for important ceremonies, like the tour guide had mentioned funerals and weddings had been held there, and that’s very sentimental and meant a lot just to see that.*

While describing his experience of a traditional marae (or Māori ceremonial space) he now shifts his Self back to the cultural and includes the Aboriginal Other within the Canadian “we”: 
And I guess I am fairly interested in our own Aboriginal culture at home. And we, the Aboriginals in Canada would carve in cedar and we’ve got very few examples that have survived as well as that one.

The sense of the Canadian “we” is realigned through contrasting himself with the Aboriginal Other within the Canadian Self. This happens again through the experience of the New Zealand Other which leads to a cosmopolitan conclusion:

I noticed you have a similar problem here that we have at home, and that’s the number of Aboriginal land claims. A lot of Aboriginals here are claiming they were taken advantage of during the Treaty process and we have still got legal challenges going on. And I am not sure if the tour guide carries a prejudice into it, I don’t know, but it would have appeared to me from his explanations to us is that New Zealand is somewhat ahead of Canada in resolving these issues. And I just found it very interesting to know there was a similar concern going on in both parts of the world.

Andrew’s cross-cultural journey is characterised not only by the opening towards the Other but by a shifting sense of Self. The ‘cosmopolitanised’ condition of our time forces and enables Julia “seeing it and being here through Australian eyes…instead of Kiwi eyes”. It causes Michelle to identify as both Armenian and American and leads to Andrew’s ‘multiple loyalties’ (Beck, 2006), the shifting Self which corresponds to an endemic relativity of otherness. In the process, the contemporaneous presence of commonalities and differences creates a shared ‘cosmopolitanised’ terrain which represents the ‘common sphere’ (Dilthey, 1976) needed to transform cross-cultural dialogue into potential understandings. Most importantly, such a vein of thought converts the ‘neither/nor’ predicament of a ‘hybrid Third Space’ (Bhabha, 1994) into a ‘both/and’ outlook of what I term a pluralist cosmopolitan space. The former simultaneously contests and perpetuates the either/or logic of binary oppositions while the latter builds a shared framework for multiple identifications.

Conclusion

The respondents’ interpretive voyage led to a cross-cultural hermeneutics embodied by Julia’s comment that “it is interesting seeing it and being here through Australian eyes...now
instead of Kiwi eyes”. The research findings supported my argument that cross-cultural
dialogue was processed not only through the opening towards the Other but through the
interpretive ontological endeavour of what I termed the shifting Self. Importantly, the
associated multiple identifications emphasised the relativity of otherness and shaped what I
called a pluralist cosmopolitan space. This discursive terrain for the interpretive negotiations
of a cross-cultural hermeneutics is characterised by a twofold movement of the frame of
reference: the simultaneously expanding ‘cosmopolitanised’ horizon and contracting
humanisation of culture through ‘stories’ and ‘faces’.

I argue that the conceptual understanding of the shifting Self offers the clearest mirror of
contemporary identity formations. In a ‘cosmopolitanised’ world, identities in their
ethnographic sense are neither purely essential and coherent nor completely fragmented and
fluid, as the dualistically opposed modern and postmodern perspectives claim. The
inescapable mixing of ‘traveling cultures’ requires us to shift between discursive positions, a
simultaneously transient and continuous task. This interpretive ontological endeavour finds
its expression in a ‘situational localisation’ (Boomers, 2004) of the Self. In other words, Self
and Other, us and them, are articulated from a certain perspective until changing situations
and circumstances provoke new ‘moments’ and ‘processes’ of selfing and othering. To put it
succinctly, the sense of Self is at once both coherent and fluid – it is shifting.

The evidence gathered in this research, which can only be hinted at here as in the case of the
tour host’s mediation through self-representation from an ‘emic perspective’ (Mieri, 2010)
that helped Bruce to engage with a foreign cultural universe after his initial reluctance,
suggests that the humanisation of culture and cross-cultural dialogue transforms a ‘Third
Space’ into a pluralistic cosmopolitan space which pays tribute to the inescapable pluralism
from within. Bhabha (1994) attempts to capture this ‘difference within’ through the term ‘hybridity’. While this move successfully exposes ‘cultural purity’ as an ‘oxymoron’ (Appiah, 2006), it is still a line of thought which sets out from the cultural. Instead, I postulate a pluralistic cosmopolitan space that evolves through the face and story of a cultural human being. In other words, the individual is the genesis of culture and not vice versa. Only by deconstructing cross-cultural dialogue as interpersonal dialogue among cultural human beings can the Other be freed from its abstract cage and opened for moral and political engagement. At first sight, exposing the hermeneutic multiplicity within ‘a culture’ might make the prospect of a potential dialogue between cultures even more daunting. Conversely, however, I argue that such awareness is the very precondition of a conversation. ‘A culture’ cannot speak or engage in dialogue. In fact, it would simply disappear without the face and stories of a cultural actor.


