



“Americanization”: Political and Cultural Examples from the Perspective of “Americanized” Australia

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The international and internationalizing dimensions of culture—from the political to the popular—are today the focus of unprecedented scholarly attention. Paradoxically, a “post-modern age” which celebrates egalitarian diversity and subjectivity is confronted with the homogenizing authority of economic liberalism, Western values, and popular culture—a process linked at every level with the triumph of American power and example. Victory in the Cold War has been interpreted as marking the end of ideological contest, or even, more glibly, as the End of History. America’s triumph has signalled the universal victory of forces which Francis Fukuyama has labelled interchangeably “economic and political liberalism,” “the Western idea,” “consumerist Western culture,” “modern liberalism,” and “Western liberal democracy.”¹ Where once American hegemony from the military to the ideological was proposed, more recent analyses emphasize globalization and/or modernizing and post-modernizing processes. However, the American example, if not naked American power, is still usually seen as implicated most deeply in these fundamental expressions of cultural change. Many Americanists and students of popular culture are convinced that in the late twentieth century one nation has emerged as the principal

source of an homogenizing global culture. As Todd Gitlin has observed: “American popular culture is the closest approximation there is today to a global lingua franca, drawing especially the urban and urbane classes of most nations into a federated culture zone. American popular culture is the latest in a long succession of bidders for global unification.” (Or, perhaps, the world is culturally *bi-lingual* with “American as its second language.”)²

The power of the U.S. abroad is increasingly understood as a consequence of its cultural and ideological authority or appeal. Even conservatives, such as Joseph Nye, have argued that traditional uses of military force and diplomacy are of declining importance in maintaining America’s role as the dominant world state. Instead he identifies “soft power,” America’s “cultural and ideological appeal,” as the basis for its international authority in a post-Cold War world. Writing from a much less celebratory position, Gitlin has observed that “The dominance of American popular culture is a soft dominance—in a certain sense a collaboration,”³ between the more and the less powerful economies and cultures. Other nationalities have also lamented this assumed process: the West German film-maker, Wim Wenders, has one of his characters proclaim that “the Americans have colonized our consciousness” (in *Kings of the Road*, itself paying ironic homage to the Hollywood “road” movie); the British sociologist, Stuart Hall, has spoken of a world “dreaming itself to be American”; and Jean Baudrillard has claimed, “America is the original version of modernity. We are the dubbed or subtitled version.”⁴

Many commentators, from Austria to Australia, have argued that the “Americanization” of popular culture after 1945 was the principal, even the necessary, precursor to “the political, military and economic success of the United States in the Cold War.”⁵ While seldom defined, so-called “Americanization” has been widely invoked as the process most responsible for what is seen as the growing homogeneity and interdependence of cultures. In the eyes of many representatives of Western states with close links to metropolitan America, it is also the process most responsible for the erosion of cultural diversity, ideological difference, and at times, political sovereignty. Typical of these claims are those made with growing frequency about Australia. Given its geographical homology, European migration, military alliances, and modern suburban consumerist culture, the Anglophone, strategically insecure Pacific continent was arguably less ambivalent about Americanization and more open to it than were other Western nations. Nationalist historian Geoffrey Serle, for example, has written of Australia as “more vulnerable to “Americanisation” than any other country. . . . Britain, France, Mexico, Canada all are to some extent insulated from Americanisation in ways we are not.”⁶

Although written against a background of his nation’s involvement alongside the U.S. in Vietnam, Serle’s words echoed those of generations of Australians who had invoked America as either a utopian ideal or a dystopian warning. From early in the nineteenth century the theme of Australia as “the future

America of the Southern hemisphere” resonated through local political discourses on republicanism, federation, immigration, suffrage, social reform, and security.⁷ For over a century, before the Pearl Harbor attack drew Australia and the U.S. into a critical alliance in the Pacific, the two nations were linked in myriad ways by shared political values and cultural forms. For many antipodean radicals and reformers, the models provided by Republican America, Progressivism or the New Deal helped to qualify the authority of British influences on local political culture and contests. At the same time, popular cultural practices were influenced profoundly in colonial and federated Australia by examples and ideas drawn from its New World cousin across the Pacific. This influence was felt in such diverse cultural fields as vaudeville and theatre; literature and comic books; vocabulary and accent; radio and film; advertising; painting; popular music; sport; fashion; magazines; suburban design and architecture. On the eve of World War II, Australia’s “little Digger,” former Prime Minister Billy Hughes, told a U.S. audience: “What we are, you were; and what you are we hope to be.”

Not all nationalists welcomed the American model. In the interwar years “penetration” by U.S. culture had evoked articulate resistance within Australia. W.A. Payne protested in 1930: “Americanisms . . . have crept insidiously upon us with the ‘inevitability of gradualness’ and become habits no longer noticeable to ourselves.” These influences were far more pervasive half a century later, when global advertising, television, popular music, and films were dominated by U.S. corporations. Routine exposure to U.S. popular culture was a result as well as a cause of Australia’s integration into U.S. commercial, industrial, advertising, and media circuits. More importantly, it also reflected the modernization of Australian society and political culture, as well as the language the two societies shared. Before it was tied to Washington by anti-communism and ANZUS, Australia had long-established sympathies for the power that was to become the dominant external source of its commercial culture. The growth of mass consumption and commercial communications media, along with shared anxieties during the Cold War, extended the “future America” paradigm, and it remained a powerful influence on popular culture and political life. In reporting the Los Angeles riots of 1992 to its Australian audience, the influential *Bulletin* magazine’s cover story began: “No, not a movie. This could be the future.”⁸

The notion that the American empire or American hegemony was sustained without military occupation was, of course, one that was commonly reiterated in the press as well as in the academic literature. Assuming that the smaller state was the *effect*, so to speak, of the American *cause*, modern Australia has been widely interpreted as part of an informal American empire. If not *de jure* then at least *de facto*, it is an economic, military, and cultural dependent of the Great Power. Australia has been variously interpreted as a “satellite” of metropolitan America, or as the ideological and economic victim of Americanization or American cultural imperialism. Nationalist commentators constantly lament Australia’s docile collusion in this process. In Phillip Adams’s view, for example, Australia

“has succumbed, yielded, sold-out to a cultural imperialism that makes past imperialisms look puny.”⁹

Just as Australian-American relations are understood narrowly in terms of a bilateral political association of unequal national states, so too is the historiography of international relations dominated by study of the exercise of power and diplomacy between otherwise autonomous nations. As Akira Iriye acknowledges: “the phenomenon of cultural transmission and diffusion has been studied more extensively by anthropologists and art historians than by diplomatic historians.” While he concedes that “culture may become as crucial a concept of international affairs as security and trade,” like most historians writing more narrowly of the Australian-American relationship, Iriye views culture as an independent manifestation of national character which can be understood in isolation from politics, economics, and even ideology.¹⁰ At the same time, traditional interpretations of bilateral relationships have been slow to recognize that less powerful nations actively negotiate influence and power, whether these are political, economic, or cultural. They assume that power emanates from the nation that is ostensibly more powerful, which then constitutes the second nation as its effect. But such an emphasis on bilateral power relations makes it difficult to understand broadly parallel developments in two nations, such as those which might more appropriately be labelled modernization or Westernization. If viewed only bilaterally, such developments are too easily explained as the simple consequences of unidirectional power, and labelled as “Americanization.” In discussing Australia and the U.S. we reject unidirectional causal models, sometimes phrased in terms of “imperialism,” which are initially appealing in their generality, but fail to capture the complexity and the genuinely interactive features of the relationship. Despite some important if isolated exceptions, ideological and cultural power and their resistance, negotiation, and accommodation by Australians have been neglected by historians, as have the social and cultural texture of these negotiated relationships.¹¹

After a decade of Labor Party governments, Australians are (again) debating the prospect of severing constitutional ties to Britain and becoming a Republic. In this climate, the media have re-examined Australia’s political and cultural relationships, with some commentators arguing that the Pacific nation is (or ought to be) independent of both its British colonial origins and American hegemony. They point out that in bilateral security arrangements, as in economics, the myth of a “special relationship” has evaporated. Australia is now “on its own” in a world made unpredictable by the global complexities of the 1990s. Without God or America on its side, Australia is coming to recognize its Asian and industrial realities as reflected directly from its region rather than as refracted through American perspectives. The press now acknowledges that the U.S. “no longer guarantee[s] [Australia’s] security, let alone its economic well-being”; and Australia is “no special ally for America.” These observations were made by *Time* magazine in an article ironically titled *Home Alone*, after a popular

American movie about a child left without a baby-sitter.¹² The cultural similarities which were assumed by *Time* when addressing Australian readers underscored the fact that commercial culture remains one medium through which Australians can be spoken of by American interests outside the diplomatic discourses of ANZUS or GATT. Although the local edition of the American magazine proclaimed Australia's independence, the very existence of *Time* (Australia) signified the implication of America's global culture in that of the smaller nation.

In this paper, we have chosen to use the terms "implication" and "implicated" to summarize the various relationships between the greater and the lesser power. We hope to avoid simple formulations that see the more powerful nation as directly dominating, colonizing, or imperially controlling the small nation. In many accounts of the relationship it is taken for granted that the power of the larger state is directly imposed on the smaller nation, albeit, in most cases, with a degree of consent. Although power is clearly an essential concept in any analysis of this question, it is important to avoid pre-judging the issue and therefore to emphasize the various potentially independent domains within which, within Australia, American influences have been differentially effective. This means looking at the ways in which Australia has sought to negotiate, resist, modify, and accommodate the various influences to which it has been exposed. Although it might seem difficult to make the claim, in some areas it can also be argued that Australia has itself had influence on the greater power. Certainly, Australia usually modified and gave its own character to the relationship. Moreover, different analyses must be provided for the military-political sphere on the one hand, and for the subtleties of parallel cultural negotiations on the other.

To study the impact of U.S. policies abroad, it is necessary to go beyond the boundaries of the Great Power and beyond the archive of intention and policy. The relationships between the two "Pacific" powers look very different when seen from within the context of the "receiving" culture—that of Australia with its unique traditions and interests. The tendency to aggregate American influences into a monolithic explanatory concept ("Americanization") is empirically simplistic: It assumes the very "effects" it seeks to explain, and could be argued to disempower alternative interpretations which arise from within the "weaker," smaller nation involved in the relationship.

The blanket term "Americanization" is frequently no more than an assumption concerning the origins of a cultural example (language, dress, food) which may or may not be accurate. It is applied indiscriminately within Australian media discourse to label an array of factors seen as threatening to national(istic) "identity," "way of life" or "values." This pejorative use of Americanization sees Australia as adopting social practices and cultural values which putatively originate in the USA (or in "Hollywood," "Los Angeles," or some metonymic reference to that nation). It assumes that the offending items are not meaningful within the Australian context merely because they make cultural sense to some

local groups, but that they carry with them their alien “American” origins. It follows that popular discourse on this issue is frequently nationalistic, assuming a uniquely Australian cultural and political identity and consensus which U.S.-originated culture threatens.

In more scholarly discourse, it is possible to detect elements of a similarly negative critique of social and cultural change thought to originate in the United States. In this essay we use the terms found in such discourse but do not wish to pre-judge either the effect these labels assume nor to align ourselves with the nationalistic rejection of Americanization with which they are frequently linked. Nevertheless, we implicitly argue that Australian responses to American power, influences, and example are not simply those of protective nationalism. Rather, they are culturally specific, active and much more complex than “national identity” reactions would predict. Thus, in this paper we discuss the example of the Cold War, in which Australian politics clearly echoed dominant U.S. policies, but also the example of the Australian cultural repose to the Vietnam War, in which the smaller Pacific nation fought as America’s most servile ally. By comparing the most salient popular cultural forms originating in the two countries, it can be seen that Australia has constructed very different “memories” of Vietnam. Insofar as the Australian cinema and television industries rationalized and mythologized local involvement in the Southeast Asian conflict, they produced a distinctive reconstruction of the country’s traditional values, markedly different from the American films and television series which were nevertheless widely distributed within Australia during the period 1978-92.

The need for different analyses of these political and cultural dimensions of Australia’s relationship with the U.S. highlights the inadequacy of the assumption that Americanization may be thought of as a simple cultural consequence of economic/political influence, even control, by a powerful U.S. From *within* a putatively imitative national culture, Australia, local history, and conditions, not imported cultural forms, generate local responses.

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The paradox of cultural resistance in the face of pervasive social change and political accommodation was apparent in Australia from the early post-war years. At least at the level of public utterance, Americanization could be denied even when it could not be delayed. To borrow Max Lerner’s observation on Europe in the post-war decades, Australia was “caught between the need for America and the recoil from it.”¹³ Indeed, elements of this cultural schizophrenia were evident even in the nineteenth century. Although unable to free itself from dependence on American military strategy, economic priorities, and mass culture, Australia nonetheless has consistently attempted to define itself in distinctive national terms and to promote its separate national interests abroad.¹⁴ As we shall argue in our analysis of the relationships that developed throughout the post-war years,

Australia fluctuated between an easy deference to American power and an uneasy fear that its great friend might use this power selfishly or irresponsibly. Yet modern Australia was obviously a product of forces other than those that might be identified as “American.” Australia’s own traditions and identity, its British legacies, its deepening multicultural complexion from the 1950s, as well as distinct religious, class, and regional characteristics, formed the social grid into which American pressures had to be incorporated. Thus, throughout the Cold War, a paradoxical nationalism defined itself against what Geoffrey Serle saw as Australia’s ostensible vulnerability to Americanization.¹⁵

At least from the election of the Menzies Liberal-Country Party coalition in 1949, the suspicions and rhetoric of the Cold War that justified America’s global confrontation with communism came to dominate official Australia perspectives and actions in foreign affairs. Independent efforts of the Labor governments of the 1940s may have delayed, but could not avert, a broad realignment of Australia’s policies consistent with American perceptions in both its foreign policy and, to a lesser extent, domestic affairs. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, interlocking changes in international politics, economics, technology, and culture transformed Australia’s links with the outside world, and relationships with the U.S. assumed centre stage. American influences squeezed out many of those long associated with the U.K. and its empire. Although the rhetoric and symbols of traditional ties to the mother country were not all displaced, the realignment of Australia towards the US was to be insistent and irreversible. As interactions between the two multiplied, the vast asymmetries in power and status between the societies biased their relationships towards American models and American interests.¹⁶

Despite America’s decisive role in defeating Japan, and the escalating tensions of the Cold War, Australia’s post-war Labor government refused to accept that Washington’s international actions were in the interests of all former Allies. Indeed, through the United Nations, in its continuing imperial links, and through bilateral diplomacy, Australia encouraged other nations to join it in attempting to counter, resist, or at least deflect U.S. foreign policy initiatives. As a small state, it felt its particular economic interests and regional ambitions stifled by the predominance of American power and influence in the Asia-Pacific area. Only gradually and against the background of an allegedly new Asian threat to its security in the form of communist China, did Australia accommodate itself to American authority in the Pacific. The war that erupted in Korea quickly became a brutal reminder that the divisions of the Cold War had been transferred to the Asia-Pacific region and would now be contested in virtually every sphere of international politics. Against this background, the new Australian government became increasingly receptive to American definitions of international threat, as it did to American interpretations of security issues and international politics more generally.¹⁷

As the Cold War intensified, the Asian-Pacific region joined Europe as a focus of superpower rivalries. Australia's foreign policies and strategic assumptions were radically recast by its associations with the U.S. Some on the left in Australia rejected the need for such a relationship and refused to view international events through what they saw as the distorting lens of the Cold War. Instead, they interpreted revolutions in Asia as legitimate manifestations of nationalism and evidence of long-overdue social change. They criticized the assumption that China and North Korea (and later North Vietnam) were merely willing satellites of the Soviet Union, or pawns in the global contest between Marxism and democracy. But for members of the ruling Liberal-Country Party coalition, as well as the Democratic Labor Party which had recently splintered from the ALP, such interpretations were at best naive, at worst comfort to the "enemy." In the first months of war in Korea, for example, Liberal MP Paul Hasluck greeted his government's decision to send troops to serve under General MacArthur with words that clearly echoed official U.S. statements: "This expansionist, imperialistic and aggressive policy of the Soviet Union must be resisted wherever it is exemplified."¹⁸

The tenor and direction of Australia's policies in the period framed by the wars in Korea and Vietnam were expressed by Prime Minister Robert Menzies in discussions with his cabinet in 1958. Australia must not disagree publicly with the U.S., he stated, and Australia's defense forces must be geared to fight alongside those of its great and powerful friends. Independence in policy formulation, or military-strategic activity, was rejected. "The greatest practical fact of life for Australia is that we are in no danger of conquest, either directly or indirectly, except from Communist aggression," Menzies observed. "[O]ur doctrine at a time of crisis should be "Great Britain and the United States right or wrong." He continued: "The simple truth, therefore, is that we cannot afford to run counter to their policies at a time when a crisis has arisen."¹⁹ Surprisingly, this observation came after the Suez crisis of 1956 had exposed the impossibility of simultaneously courting two great and powerful friends in the event of a disagreement between them. This crisis, along with events in Malaya, South Africa, and Indonesia, confronted Australia with additional difficulties as it attempted to embrace British imperial policies without alienating its powerful new Cold War partner in the Pacific.

As wars in Vietnam revealed, the decolonization of much of Asia was a protracted and bloody contest that ultimately drew the U.S. and Australia deeply into the region in a struggle against nationalist and communist movements. These movements generally enjoyed wide local support as they led the struggles to overthrow European colonial authority and create more egalitarian, sovereign states. But nationalist victories over the French during 1953-64 were won as Cold War rivalries intensified throughout Asia. To the Cold Warriors in Washington and Canberra, peasant nationalism had become merely a euphemism for communist subversion. In Australia, deep-rooted anxieties about Asian expansion and

“racial contamination” were now mixed with ideological alarm over the expansion of communism in what came to be called the “Near North.” The Menzies government, along with most Australians, understood communism as a monolithic movement that had spread from the USSR to Eastern Europe, China, and the wider Asian region. Communities once obscure to Western interests, notably Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, were interpreted as precarious strategic “dominoes” by Australian officials now locked into the ideological imperatives of the Cold War. Justifying his government’s decision to send troops to Vietnam, Menzies echoed this familiar argument. “The takeover of South Vietnam would be direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-East Asia,” he said. “It must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.” Should one domino fall, all the others would topple in quick succession.²⁰

Throughout the period of conservative government in the 1950s and 1960s, the symbols of Empire and Mother England were often invoked to placate those disturbed by the new direction in Australia’s foreign policy. Yet even the cloying Empire rhetoric of Menzies could not conceal this dramatic change in direction. Imperial relations were not the only casualties of Australia’s orientation towards the US. Many Australians who had anticipated that dependence on Great Britain would be replaced by a vibrant regionalism and independence in defense and foreign affairs, along the lines suggested by Curtin and Evatt in the 1940s, viewed with dismay their nation’s reliance on American leadership and power. Opportunities for regional initiatives—perhaps even “non-alignment” as pursued by many recently decolonised nations—were lost as Australia transferred its allegiances from one “great and powerful friend” to another.²¹

Initially, as the private musings of Menzies indicate, many Australians promoted a close public military relationship with Washington while they spoke disparagingly in private of America and Americans, and clung longingly to the culture of Britain and the Empire or celebrated their distinctive “Australianness.” However, by the mid 1960s military dependence on America was encouraged both publicly and privately in the language of the Holt and Gorton administrations. Later governments were sometimes less effusive. The Labor administrations of Whitlam (1972-75), and to a lesser degree Fraser’s Liberal-Country Party government (1975-82), did not blindly follow American leadership on all matters. Under Labor, particularly, the alliance was exposed to new tensions as Australia sought a more autonomous role in global affairs, anticipated U.S. policy by recognizing the People’s Republic of China, and immediately withdrew its forces from Vietnam. But from the early 1960s until the late 1980s, examples of Australian independence or dissent from American initiatives and perceptions were fairly rare. Ironically, as recent disclosures in West Irian and Vietnam reveal, before Labor’s brief period in office Australia’s most forceful initiatives in foreign affairs sought not to offset American power, but to increase America’s presence in Asia and bolster its military effort against communism in the region.

It has been argued recently that Australia deliberately exploited American anti-communism and Cold War fears in order to draw this powerful nation into ANZUS and later into Vietnam.²² This interpretation dramatically exaggerates Australia's influence on Washington. It also ignores the powerful interests and perceptions that motivated American initiatives in Japan, China, Indo-China, and the Pacific from 1945 to 1975. But it does correctly highlight Australia's determination to embrace a new protector from the early 1950s. If this initiative was considered consistent with Australia's perceived security interests, it nonetheless narrowed the foreign policy options Australia could subsequently pursue. By constantly emphasizing the centrality of the American alliance to its foreign policies, Australia undermined its own capacity to bargain with the U.S. While always anxious to demonstrate its reliability as an ally, Australian governments, both Liberal and Labor, found it difficult to dissent from American actions or to resist American pressure for military support.

Occasionally, this docile emulation has been interrupted by independent assessments and initiatives—most notably the Whitlam Labor government's prompt withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and recognition of China, and more recently the efforts of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments to challenge America's protectionist agricultural policies and to promote independent initiatives over such diverse issues as Antarctica, Cambodia, and chemical weapons. But, in general, Australia until the late 1980s followed America's initiatives and endorsed the rationale on which such policies were based.

Notwithstanding the apparent military, political, and economic alliances and co-operation between the U.S. and Australia throughout the Cold War, it is not possible to generalize beyond these spheres and to argue that, in its domestic culture, Australia uniformly or dependently became "Americanized" as a result.²³ This is most clearly evidenced in relation to the significance and meaning which the so-called Vietnam War has been given in Australian culture compared to its dominant construction in the culture of the U.S. Despite the alliance between the U.S. and Australia which brought the two nations into day-to-day cooperation, and despite ostensibly similar domestic conflicts over communism, the Cold War, the prosecution of the war in Vietnam and military conscription, Australian culture (especially its "popular" culture) has interpreted and remembered the Vietnam war period, the events and their significance, very differently from its American counterpart. The difference between the two countries' respective "memories" of the period are reminders that culture always involves the active construction of meaning by its participant members, that the argument that one culture might simply impose itself on another, imitative culture, is very difficult to sustain.²⁴

By the 1970s and 1980s, Australians, large numbers of whom had no personal memory of the Vietnam War, had been exposed to many hours of film and television presenting particular interpretations of *America's* involvement in that South-East Asian conflict. At the same time, Australian cinema and

television (to the extent that it dealt with the conflict at all) sought to construct another history of just this period, one in which America was represented partly as Australia's *enemy*. Even in this recent example, it could be argued that the formal relationships between Australia and America in the actual military and strategic sphere of the Vietnam War, have had cultural ramifications that reach beyond the particular period of that political and military alliance. In seeking to understand the relationships between the two nations, even in the recent past, it is important to examine these cultural as well as political dimensions, and not to assume that what is held in the archive and studied by the traditional historian exhausts the significance of the relationships in question.

The cultural legacy of Vietnam to the U.S. is partly embodied in the many Hollywood movies which sought to reconcile America to this defeat, beginning with *The Deer Hunter* and *Coming Home* (1978) and continuing through to *China Beach* and *Tour of Duty* (shown on Australian television in the late 1980s).²⁵ A necessarily brief comparison of the American and Australian cinematic and televisual remembering of Vietnam shows very clearly how, despite the repeated, almost continuous exposure to American popular culture, Australia produced contrasting images of this period. Moreover, the Australian films represented America and Americans, as well as Vietnam and Asia, quite differently. In this way, Australian television mini-series and movies provided a representation of "what America means" in the post-Vietnam period. This cultural meaning is paradoxical and linked to formal aspects of the U.S.-Australia relationship.

Until Vietnam, the American involvement in modern war had been uncomplicated by defeat and uncompromised by moral or political ambiguities sufficient to cause major rifts in public assent to the legitimacy of the war efforts. Australia had similarly supported the victorious Allies in the two World Wars and Korea. But its nationalistic pride has usually been epitomized by valiant defeats, where mateship and "batting" could compensate for otherwise pointless losses. Conflict over conscription had split the nation fifty years before Vietnam, and the Boer War involvement by pro-British Australians was less easily rationalized as having God on its side than was either the First or Second World War commitments. However, in the 1960s both the U.S. and Australia had to come to terms with the moral contradictions of supporting a succession of failed South Vietnamese regimes. Each also had to deal with its own internal political conflict over intervention in Asia, as well as conscription. Finally, the relationship between the two allies "invited" to prevent the South East Asian dominoes from tumbling towards Australia was always tense and continually being re-negotiated.²⁶

Fictional film and television have always found political and historical *analysis* difficult, given the conventions of Hollywood. Vietnam films proved no exception. Put very simply, Hollywood subsumed Vietnam to American popular cultural paradigms which repeated the stories of other, earlier genres. It ignored the contradictions and complexity of the period which culminated in the war. Australian popular cinema of the 1970s and 1980s virtually avoided Vietnam

completely. The only widely released local film set in Vietnam, however, is significantly different from its American counterparts and indicates some of the ways Australians have been invited to see their own involvement.

The Odd Angry Shot (Australia, 1979) did not see war as apocalyptic and transcendental, nor as a theatre for the clash of Good and Evil. The biblical and the metaphysical connotations of America's Vietnam films were ignored in favor of earthy, scatological humor, the mundane necessity to kill in order to survive, and a detached, ironic stoicism shown by a cross-section of ordinary blokes—blokes played by a virtual who's who of "Aussie" actors of the time. It is significant that early in this film, the Aussie camp is attacked, suggesting that "our" boys, the Americans' allies, are not the aggressors. Yet the Asian enemy is curiously invisible, and the Americans themselves become Australia's symbolic enemy defined in terms of sporting competition, which allows the underdog diggers to assert their value by contrast with the more powerful "Yanks." Deeply ethnocentric, *The Odd Angry Shot* contrasts the innocent mateship of Aussies to the power of America and the incomprehensible corruption of the Vietnamese. The principal character's reference to Vietnam as "this tossed-up, up never-come-down land" epitomizes this resigned but perversely comic attempt to stay Australian in the alien world of Asia. Vaguely critical of authority (the "they" who sent the troops in), while celebrating ordinary mateship, the film is as populist as it is determined to avoid any engagement with the very questions its "shit-shovellers" ask about why they are there, or about class or politics in any form. The nearest the film comes to critical reflection is the cynical, self-congratulatory jokes by which morale, masculinity, and mateship are maintained. If America's Vietnam films saw the enemy as "within," Australia's films largely displaced the enemy onto a symbolic power against which an innocent, populist heroism-of-the-underdog could be asserted. The shadows of nationalist Australian leaders, Prime Minister Billy Hughes at Versailles, and Prime Minister John Curtin and Dr. H.V. Evatt in the 1940s, stretched across these films.

Whereas many American-produced movies such as *The Deer Hunter* (1978) were centered on the powerful male hero, or the rite of passage (especially *Platoon*), on the nation reconciled, and on the alien Asian culture and enemy, Australian television dramas presented a more ambivalent and vulnerable hero.²⁷ They saw the family as the social unit torn apart by Vietnam and therefore in need of reunification, and constructed the Asian enemy very differently. The Australian television series presented the U.S. and its soldiers themselves as an enemy, or at least they contrasted them with Australian servicemen, to the advantage of the locals, of course. *Vietnam: The Mini-series* (1987) lists four sets of dramatis personae. Significantly these begin with "The Family," then come "The Politicians," "The Soldiers," and "The Friends." The nostalgic 1960s montage of old advertisements, news clips, and pop stars which opens the series is set to the pop song "to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven. . . ." This nostalgic fatalism sets the somewhat resigned mood which the series seems content to rely on for its general emotional force. Against these

filtered recollections of the 1960s, the Goddards' family drama plays out various positions on the Vietnam conflict—the father's support for government intervention changing to its opposite; the mother's and daughter's liberalism turning to active opposition; the volunteer soldier son's experiences leading to alienation, cynicism and aggression. Finally, however, the family accepts the experience and painful growth of the war period to emerge tentatively united, the son accepted by, and accepting of, the family.

However, it is in its treatment of the Vietnamese that the mini-series offers a more complex, less clearly ethnocentric image of the war than do its cinematic counterparts from the U.S. Phil Goddard's love for a Vietnamese woman, from whom he is separated by the war, and her subsequent death as a Viet-Cong at the hands of the Australian soldiers, constitute a rather trite sub-plot. Yet the Vietnamese villagers are portrayed as human, humane, and politically sophisticated. The savage rape of a second Vietnamese woman by U.S. soldiers and her later attempts to relate to the insularity and insensitivity of suburban Sydney are overtly critical of "us" Australians, if rather condescendingly sentimental about the Vietnamese. It is significant that the innocent victims of the war, women and children, become the acceptable representatives of the Vietnamese which allows Australia to be distinguished from what the mini-series sees as the excessive brutality of America.

Our necessarily brief discussion of Australian-produced popular cultural rememberings of Vietnam is not intended to illuminate mainland U.S. readings of the war and its aftermath. Rather, we emphasize that within the putatively Americanized Australian society, arguably very different discourses circulated, discourses grounded in the local culture, including its traditional anti-heroic, collectivist strands. The claim that Australia is in some sense a "ventriloquist's dummy"²⁸ for powerful U.S. culture is refuted by such examples. Significantly, it is in cases in which U.S. media appear so imperially present in the local culture that their meanings may be most explicitly challenged by indigenous alternatives. What "Vietnam" or "America" meant was not determined by the ostensibly hegemonic Hollywood cycle of films which became ironic counterpoints, not imposed models, for local cultures.

This is not to imply that all, or a majority of "typical" Australian citizens share a simple consensus around these issues. The popularity of local film and television explorations of post-Vietnam adjustment, however, does itself indicate that Australian popular culture actively reconstructed complex, perhaps contradictory memories of this period which local audiences understood but which would make little sense to British or U.S. audiences. Local film and television was not merely "anti-American," it was culturally significant beyond such limited nationalism.

Australian military support for the U.S. in Vietnam has been remembered by Australia's recent movies and television as a reluctant alliance.²⁹ The U.S. has been painted as excessive, even barbaric, in local versions of the war. By contrast,

American films such as *Platoon* and *Good Morning Vietnam* have been widely distributed in Australia, providing a more positive representation of America “finding itself” in the jungles of Asia. These examples suggest that the degree and quality of cultural Americanization through even a period in which American media were highly visible in Australia depend on local accommodations, including resistances to, and re-interpretations of, what “America” means in the local, receiving culture. Second, Australia’s response to the Vietnam experience shows that military and political co-operation, bordering on acquiescence, need not be translated into cultural imitation or dependence. Culture is dynamic, inconsistent, and rooted in the soil of the society whose meanings and values it expresses.

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“What is modern,” Bruce Grant has claimed, “always comes from America and is always replaced by America: only America can both create and destroy.” He concluded pessimistically that these are “harsh terms” for Australia to negotiate.³⁰ However, the implication of the U.S. in Australia provokes active negotiation, albeit negotiation which has frequently been conducted within the language and culture of the greater power, and within global structures in which Australia has exhibited ostensibly very little power. Despite this, when studied from the perspective of the supposedly servile or imitative lesser power, negotiation, resistance, and cultural independence may be seen. This is evident even during the Cold War period when the more distant view might see only unidirectional power at work.

Neither strategic agreements nor profound economic change, and certainly not cultural interpretation, constituted “Americanization” in the sense that they were imposed on Australia by power from abroad. Relations in every field were negotiated and modifications won which were appropriate to Australia’s increasingly subtle interests as it sought material support and nationalistic meanings in the old and the new English-speaking empires. To conclude, any simple chronology of the post-war implications of the U.S. in and for Australia is complicated by various processes which do not simply reflect inequalities of power. These include the many levels of material and cultural interaction between the two nations and the fact that more general modernizing and globalizing changes have driven both the U.S. and Australia from the late nineteenth century at least. Furthermore, the particular nationality of ownership of the culture industries and of retail or other consumer industries is not necessarily an indicator of their significance in the “receiving” culture, as we have seen in the Vietnam example. Finally, because power is always negotiated, even between apparently unequal allies, it may be resisted overtly or covertly, directly or indirectly.

Culture is a dynamic condition of social life, not just its “reflection,” so negotiation, resistances, and accommodations between interacting cultures can

be seen at all periods of their history. These are particularly evident in the contradictions in which America has been embedded in Australian discourses which construct the larger nation as a model for the smaller. As “Australia’s future,” the U.S. has been represented in both utopian and dystopian terms. America has been seen as the locus of progressive idealizations and of threatening nightmares alike; as the positive promise and as the negative fate of its little antipodean brother. Both of these conflicting narratives interpreted the U.S. as an *extreme* version of a projected Australian future. Many examples of this can be cited: in Australia, in the 1890s and a century later, “Republicanism” was and is generally seen in the example of the U.S., “Presidentialism” likewise, whether endorsed or rejected; Australian cultural industries, like the cinema, even individual artists, were judged in terms of potential U.S. success; criminal and political corruption from Al Capone to Watergate were seen as the models towards which Australia was heading. More recently, American serial killers have been characterized as the limit point of violent tendencies in our own society, while social contagion imagery associated with drug use has been widely cited to represent “our” future following the American example.³¹ In these “extreme future” scenarios, Australian popular discourse may turn clichés from the U.S. against themselves, or it may embrace them as its own fate. Because discourses of both positive and negative Americanization have had as their sub-text various other discourses of “modernization,” these proclamations of, and laments for, Australia as “a future America” may emphasize either the gleaming promise of modernity or the barbarism of an economically-driven consumerism.

C.W.E. Bigsby has argued that Americanization is a label applied to the processes tied to the processes of mass reproduction, urbanization, industrialization, and consumerism, appropriate in a world “for whom the modern experience is coeval with the American experience.” Cultures quite different from that of Australia have lamented or welcomed Americanization, which “frequently means little more than the incidence of change.”³² American entertainment has always evoked reactions that accused it of “levelling down” high standards of literate and musical culture, but it also produced a rich array of non-elite cultural enjoyments as the by-products of material progress and modernization. More importantly, because culture involves shared and contested meanings and values, Australian cultural negotiations with imported examples are distinct and rarely imitative. Materially, as well as symbolically, Australia may have become another America, but only in the sense that it is another modern, Western state. It is “other,” and therefore different, yet expresses similar world-historical processes. Australia is not made in America’s image, is not a dependent satellite. Nor is it a simple effect of the “great power.” To see it as “Americanized” greatly overestimates the strength of America’s global reach since 1945. But America has been deeply implicated in many spheres of “that other America’s” political and cultural life. America has also come to symbolize the very processes of social and cultural modernization themselves. Yet tension, resistance, adaptation, and

even indifference have characterised the various relationships between America and Australia since the Second World War.

Other modern nations have also been touched by American example and allegiance—by its “soft” or “hard” authority abroad. Like Australia, however, they should not be interpreted as unwitting victims of America’s transforming power.

Notes

1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992). See also Otis Graham, “Premature Reports of the ‘End of History,’” *Organization of American Historians, Newsletter* (May, 1990), 3, 23.

2. Todd Gitlin and Joseph Nye, cited in Joseph Nye, et al “Popular Culture: Images and Issues”, *Dialogue*, 99 (1/93), 52. Broader assertions of U.S. ‘global reach’ and cultural imperialism’ can be found in Edward Said’s recent study, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993) esp. xxv, 341-95. See also Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity* (London, 1990).

3. Gitlin and Nye, in *ibid.*, 51-67.

4. J. Caughie, “‘Playing at Being American’: Games and Tactics”, in P. Mellencamp, ed., *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington, 1990), 46-59; Baudrillard, *America* (translated by Chris Turner) (London, 1989), 76.

5. Richard White, “‘Americanization’ and Popular Culture in Australia”, *Teaching History* (August, 1978), 3, 21. See also, Nye et al., “Popular Culture . . .”.

6. Serle, “Godzone: Austerica Unlimited”, *Meanjin Quarterly*, xxvi (iii, 1967), 240-49.

7. John Dunmore Lang, *The Moral and Religious Aspect of the Future America of the Southern Hemisphere* (New York, 1840). For an excellent discussion of the US and colonial Australia, see Noel McLachlan, “‘The Future America’: Some Bicentennial Reflections”, *Historical Studies*, 17:68 (April, 1977), 361-83. Although neglected, the study of US influence and Americanisation has not been totally ignored by Australian writers. The following studies are, arguably, the most significant attempts to discuss the broad character of Australian-American interactions: R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney, 1981), esp. 47-59, and “‘Backwater Awash’: The Australian Experience of Americanization”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 3 (1983); C. Hartley Grattan, *The United States and the Southwest Pacific* (Melbourne, 1961); R. Bell, “The American Influence”, and R. Waterhouse, “Popular Culture and Pastimes”, both in N. Meaney, ed., *Under New Heavens: Cultural Transmission and the Making of Australia* (Melbourne, 1989), 237-86, 325-78; B. Grant, *The Australian Dilemma: A New Kind of Western Society* (Sydney, 1983); L.G. Churchward, *Australia and America, 1788-1972: An Alternative History* (Sydney, 1979); G. Serle, “Godzone: Austerica Unlimited?”, *Meanjin Quarterly*, xxvi (iii, 1967), 237-50; S. Alomes, “The Satellite Society”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 9 (November, 1981), esp. 2-11; M. Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890-1960* (St. Lucia, 1984); D. Collins, *Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies, 1896 to the Present* (North Ryde, 1987).

8. Hughes, cited in F.K. Crowley, ed., *Modern Australia in Documents*, (Melbourne, 1973) I, 592; *The Bulletin*, June 30, 1992, 83-4.

9. The most vigorous and influential claims regarding Australia’s ‘Americanization’ are expressed periodically by Philip Adams writing in *The Australia*. See, for example, “Dolls on the American Knee”, *The Australia*, September 12-13, 1993. See also, John Docker, in *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 19, 1987; Alomes, *op. cit.*; Churchward, *op. cit.*; G. Crough and T. Wheelwright, *Australia: A Client State* (Melbourne, 1982); G. Crough, T. Wheelwright and T. Wilshire, eds., *Australia and World Capitalism* (Melbourne, 1983 edn), esp. pp.123-216; H. McQueen, *Australia’s Media Monopolies* (Canberra, 1977); M. McNain, “From Imperial Appendage to American Satellite”, *ANU History Journal*, 14 (1977-80), 73ff; L. Fox, *Australia Taken Over?* (Sydney, 1974); K. Tsokhas and M. Simms, “The Political Economy of United States Investment in Australia”, *Politics* 13 (1, 1978), 65-80; D. Phillips, *Ambivalent Allies* (Ringwood, Melbourne, 1988), esp. ix, 109.

10. Iriye, “Culture”, *The Journal of American Studies*, 77:1 (June 1990), 104.

11. Most prominently, Norman Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend: A Study of Australian and American Relations Between 1900-1975* (St Lucia, 1987); Camilleri, op. cit.; and Glen Barclay, *Friends in High Places: Australian-American Diplomatic Relations Since 1945* (Melbourne, 1985).

12. *Time* (Australia), April 6, 1989, 13.

13. Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York, 1957), 929.

14. This claim can be sustained even for the difficult years of war against Japan. See, especially, Roger Bell, *Unequal Allies: Australian-American Relations and the Pacific War* (Melbourne, 1977). For the post-war years, see Peter Edwards and Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asia Conflicts, 1948-1965* (Canberra, 1992).

15. Serle, op. cit., 247-49.

16. See generally, Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney, 1987); Camilleri, op. cit.

17. Camilleri, *ibid.*, 124-26; "Under Orders from the CIA", *Time* (Australia) October 10, 1987, 15-17; Malcolm Booker, in *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 22, 1986, 13.

18. Hasluck, September 27, 1950, [Australia] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 209, 30.

19. Menzies [1958], *The Australian*, January 2, 1988 (cites Australian Cabinet Papers from 1958).

20. Menzies, cited by Neville Meaney, "Australia and the World", in Meaney ed. op. cit., 432.

21. See especially, Haper, op.cit., and Pemberton op. cit.

22. See especially, M. Sexton, *War for the Asking* (Ringwood, Melbourne, 1981); P. Edwards, in *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 6, 1989, 19.

23. For a concise, yet sophisticated discussion of various interpretations of cultural influences between 'stronger' and 'weaker' powers, see John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore, 1991), esp. 140-79.

24. Philip Bell, "Remembering Vietnam", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 65:2 (1988), 16-22. Ina Bertrand, "From Silence to reconciliation: the representation of the Vietnam war in Australian film and television", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8:1 (1988), 75-89.

25. It is not our intention to re-present the debates about U.S. cultural responses to 'Vietnam', a topic so deeply analysed that the *Bulletin of Bibliography*, as early as 1986 (Vol 43, No. 3), included a nine-page entry. The fictional revisions of U.S. history and society which many have seen in the cycle of films beginning with *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and continuing to *Forrest Gump* (1994) constitute a significant cultural force in themselves, not quite a 'genre' but relying on earlier genres, especially the 'Western'. See, for example, M. Ryan and D. Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, (Bloomington, 1990), 194-216; S. Jeffords, "Things worth dying for: gender and the ideology of collectivity in Vietnam Representati", *Cultural Critique*, 8 (1987-8), 79-103; or A. Auster and L. Quart, "Hollywood and Vietnam: The triumph of the will", *Cineaste* IX:3 (1979), 4-15 and the 'symposium' in "Platoon on Inspection", *Cineaste*, IX:4 (1987), 4-15. The authors accept that, notwithstanding the contradictory ideological readings made of this cycle of films, their masculinist, heroic revision of, and frequently nostalgic yearning for, 'the gendered story that is America' (Jeffords, 98) are very different from their filmic and television counterparts produced in Australia.

26. See Australian House of Representatives Paper Tabled H.R. May 13, 1975, on *Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam*, esp. 2, which discusses US 'requests' for involvement in Vietnam.

27. Many commentators have seen some Hollywood films as concerned to 'excuse' U.S. intervention in South-East Asia by presenting the U.S. as a victim of the conflict. The Australian films can also be read in this way (see Bertrand above).

28. Philip Adams, 'Dolls on the American Knee', *The Australian*, September 12, 1993.

29. Compare, Pemberton, op. cit.

30. Grant, op. cit., 20.

31. For example Philip Bell, "PCP and the Press: American Fiction as Australian News", *Australian Journalism Review*, 6:1 (1984), 68-72.

32. Bigsby, "Europe, America and the Cultural Debate", in Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (Bowling Green, 1975), 6. A number of recent works, in addition to Von Laue, *The World...*, and Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, have revitalised debate over America's globalising cultural authority, and 'anti-American' resistance. See, for example, Akira Iriye, *The Globalising of America, 1913-1945* (1993); Marshall Blonsky, *American Mythologies* (New York, 1992); Denis Lacorne, *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism: A Century of French Perception* (London, 1990); and Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism: Critiques at Home and Abroad 1965-1990* (New York, 1992).