

A MYRIAD BYZANTIUMS

CULTURAL STUDIES HAVE come strongly into their own in this, the first age of really existing internationalism. Nowadays, the latter features regularly in tuxedo and bow tie at Rotary Club dinners and Mayoral receptions, with a standard guest-card reading 'globalization'; and on such occasions the opening grace, keynote addresses and concluding prayers are still economic in tone. But we should not be over-impressed by this liturgical language, and cultural studies can provide a perspective that brings one down to earth about the process. Internationalism was once saintliness, sandals and dewy-eyed propriety. Then, after 1989, the real thing suddenly disembarked, complete with democratic crotchets, contradictions and resentments—and attendant culture clashes. Naturally, the discipline has been driven towards the closest encounter with this appalling and exhilarating reality. One side effect has been a mounting preoccupation with 'identity', as discussed in Lutz Niethammer's recent essay, 'The Infancy of Tarzan'.¹ So many millions are now compelled to re-identify themselves, amid new mountains of documentation, that the basics of this process are being forced into more open scrutiny. Identity used to be a favoured playground for epistemology and psychology, even for metaphysics. For growing masses of people, however, issues of identity are not metaphorical but treasured, if deplorable, bits of cheap plastic: matters of everyday life and death.²

New guidebooks are needed on the darkling plain. *On Not Speaking Chinese*, which appeared last year, is a probing and analytical narrative account of the rites of two-way passage, whose inspiration derives mainly from the work of Stuart Hall; it is written from the angle of a non-Chinese-speaking Chinese woman who ended up in Australia, via Indonesia and the Netherlands.³ Her complicated story from the global periphery encounters Niethammer's, from what used to be the centre; vital motifs are common to them both.

'Deep is the well of the past', Thomas Mann's narrator declares at the start of *Joseph and His Brothers*. Quite how deep, how confusing and how inescapable, forms an essential part of the substance of his great tale. The brothers find themselves re-living the past, but invariably in ways that nobody, in that forgotten time, could possibly have predicted. The ghosts are startling rebirths, not mere repetitions: history 'ends' all the time, in other words, but can only do so by bewildering and novel re-starts. The well between the lines of *On Not Speaking Chinese* reaches back into those recesses, and illustrates what has become of them, from Dutch Southeast Asia to the Atlantic and back again, via a detour involving Africa, the West Indies and the British Empire. In such trajectories, continents shrink and centuries appear fleeting; the reader gets a vivid sense of how long Ang's hybrid coat of many colours has been in the making. Its formation was possible only by the confluence of innumerable tributaries into the present day's single stream: what appears as the destiny of 'globalization'. In the latter's immense delta of migration and interchange, she argues, cross-fertilization and mergers must come into their own. Conurbations like Sydney, Los Angeles, Melbourne, London or Vancouver are, for the moment, like the end-*Heimat* of humanity's tale—the forges of post-national culture.

Appearances of the dread prefix, 'post', are frequently ominous, auguring re-writes of Dante's inscription: abandon not just the past but everything intelligible, ye that enter here. So it is important to stress that Ang steers resolutely away from the style of spiritual surfing that postmodernism made fashionable. Instead, her own personal story is recounted as the basis of an embryonic global theory, with a consistently sharp eye for the ridiculous and the endearing. The Ang family were forced out of Indonesia at the time of the massacres of the sixties, and sought a homeland in the Netherlands rather than China. Ien's father made them switch from Indonesian to Dutch. Ernest Gellner used to enjoy telling a similar story. Some time in the early 1930s, his father called together the German-speaking Bohemian-Jewish family and instructed them: 'No more German in this household! I want to hear only Czech from now

¹ NLR 19, Jan–Feb 2003. See also *Kollektive Identität: Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2000.

² For an illuminating recent survey see Jane Caplan and John Torpey, eds, *Documenting Individual Identity: the Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, Princeton 2001.

³ Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*, Sydney and London 2002.

on.’ In both cases the children obeyed, with astounding literary results that no bourgeois paterfamilias could have predicted.

Now a fully-fledged cultural-studies intellectual, the author returned after twenty years to the Southern Hemisphere, and the more Asia-oriented Australia of Paul Keating’s Labour governments. But soon her third homeland was to be shaken by a tide of aggressive nationalist reaction—Pauline Hanson’s One Nation movement, directed against the new immigration and its accompanying multiculturalism. This defiant reassertion of native, in the sense of British, or ‘white-Australian’, identity against the new Asian and Chinese multiculturalism, abruptly threatened everything for which Ang had migrated.

At state level, Hansonism suffered a fate like that of Powellism in Britain. These were populist agitations from outside the core political system, flaring briefly and then swiftly recuperated and damped down by the mainstream parties. The latter acted against immigration in both cases, but in more discreet or roundabout ways, combining increased restriction with a loudly proclaimed ideology of anti-racism. And in both cases, such tactics were staged retreats before trends that were to prove irrevocable. The old polity strove to regain control of the migratory processes, but could do little to reduce or turn them back. In Ang’s sense, a more profound mutation of modern society was under way: it gathered pace in the period of the later Cold War, then burst through and over the lowered barriers of the Free Trade world. Already coursing strongly across crumbling and damaged levées, the tributaries began to merge into the estuarial tide-flow towards hybridity.

Conservatives of both Left and Right have tended to agree that there is little really new about globalization. The former perceive only enhanced threats from an authoritarian capitalism always imperially inclined, and the latter see merely the latest phase of an economic expansion synonymous with modernity. Both deny the novelty of a conjuncture that has put together the disappearance of state socialism’s development alternative, the information revolution, unprecedented migration, an all-round cession of nation-state sovereignty, and the formulation of the human genome. In fact, etymology is surely not at fault here: ‘globalization’ is no fad, but a new term reflecting, however inadequately, a great mutation comparable to the one that generated ‘nationalism’ from the 1870s onwards.

Nor has the new effaced the old. Ang's humour is at its blackest in considering the mighty nationalist resurgence through which, since the nineties, a reborn Middle Kingdom has sought to mobilize its diaspora, in Sydney and almost everywhere else. Once, de-Sinicized Chinese had been treated as cast-offs; now they are summoned, in the name of the greatest culture in history, and expected to speak Chinese again. (For English readers, the clarion-call may be appreciated at www.huaren.org—*huaren* meaning 'Chinese people'.) Although created in Vancouver and California, this site rallies all sons and daughters of the race 'home', culturally speaking, and pours obloquy upon all who persecute the Chinese or insult their Republic. By implication it is, of course, also warning them against the perils of hybridity. Particular animosity is displayed towards Ang's start-up homeland, Indonesia. But London readers need not yet be too alarmed. When I last looked it up, the UK contribution was brief and relatively harmless: a somewhat toothless ad for the forthcoming *Chinese Who's Who in Britain*.

Ape and essence

For Ang, the point of 'not speaking Chinese' had been to emancipate herself from unchosen ethno-linguistic ties: she was tired of being corporeally Chinese yet never 'really' so, without the language. Ethno-linguistic nationalism is a dogma intolerant of aberration: 'blood' equals 'race' equals 'tongue' equals 'culture' equals 'civilization', and all boxes must be ticked in the prescribed order. Metaphorical blood—the sort that is thicker than water—also figures in Lutz Niethammer's analysis. In a recent Walt Disney version of the Edgar Rice Burroughs saga, the human foundling, rejected as alien by some of the gorillas, is reassured by his ape foster mother that 'we are identical' as she holds him close, with eyes shut, to feel their two hearts beating together. Differentiated in reality by hundreds of millennia of natural selection, they choose to believe they are as one: thus—on the basis of 'selective perception and emotion'—is 'collective identity constructed and lived out'.

Ang's rejection of imposed ethnicity is more subtle, but acerbic none the less. Tongue is not, as Romantics have always insisted, the 'soul' of a culture or civilization. This was never more than the shorthand metaphysics of ideological ethnicity. The weapon readiest at hand for national or community resistance was indeed often language; but even weak generalizations of the trope have always led to nonsense—Irishmen

speak but are clearly not English, Austrians are not pretend-Germans, Canadians are more than half-Americans, Cypriots long ago ceased to be just extensions of Greekness and so on. It is simply untrue that one 'has to' speak Welsh to be Welsh, or understand Chinese to be a Chinese person. In the recent Iraq War, Anglophony was perceived by some commentators as the key bond among the coalition warriors.⁴ They failed to ask why, in that case, New Zealanders and Canadians (Anglos as well as *Québécois*) remained so obdurately hostile. The reason, surely, was that they speak a different *political* language from the early-modern *Ursprache* that remains inescapable in Washington, London and Canberra. Diametrically opposed meanings resonate from near-identical phonemes in the same historical tongue.

Any particular language is a carnal, living vehicle, whose most vital function is to express and grasp emotions. From this basis it traverses and re-traverses the societal terrain we now call 'identity'—the spider-web of enablement which produces individual and community simultaneously. Extractable ideas are only a small part of it. The same grammatical rules and phonemes may find widely different concrete meanings, over contrasting (even antagonistic) social landscapes. But it remains a 'vehicle' none the less, albeit one of formidable compass and depth. That is, it is not a *Geist*: it does not possess or define either the individual or the community—whatever commands are being issued from the political or ideological stage. One *can* switch from one tongue to another. Not an easy thing to do, granted—in computer terms, more like switching operating systems than changing programmes. But Ang has done so twice over, and she knows intimately how, in the end, the gains and losses will roughly make up for one another.

Some acceptance of language-contingency goes together with globalization. Any given cosmopolis will need a lingua franca; but no one vehicle is better than another for that. Internet English may have it for the moment; but no-one should think it will 'take over the world'. As Gellner maintained convincingly in *Nations and Nationalism*, modern social circumstances do require a common means of transport, especially in formative periods. However, getting on to one or other omnibus is not really offering up one's soul, as ethno-nationalists imagine. Tongue-essentialism is a mystique rooted in an earlier phase of nation-building—in the nostalgic 'heartlands' of Hanson's Queensland, Iain

⁴ See Amitav Ghosh, 'The Anglophone Empire', *New Yorker*, 7 April 2003.

Duncan Smith's shire England, or Le Pen's *vieille France*. Its social correlate was 'assimilation', the sustained stage-musical cherished by traditional imagined communities. Monocultural hallmarking was essentially a byproduct of ethnic nationalism—the powerful identification-mode prevalent from the 1870s to (almost) the present.

Multiculturalism is the transitional way-station towards civic communities of the future. Assorted immigrant communities have first of all to stand up for themselves, by insisting on equal status and maintaining inherited speech and customs. But as Ang acutely observes, these claims tend to be limited in both effect and duration. They are really rites of onward passage, and succumb all too quickly to conservatism, as older generations struggle to keep youngsters within the limits of tradition. Not infrequently, they also move to close ranks against newer immigrant arrivals—sensing that their own pact with the devil could be put at risk by too many new threats. In the UK these reservations have recently been voiced by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown in her pamphlet *After Multiculturalism*.⁵ Ang prefers the formula of 'hybridity'—the acceptance of irrevocable mixture as starting point, rather than as a problem.

However, the question then inevitably presents itself: starting point to what? Stephen Castles and Mark Miller began their exhaustive study *The Age of Migration* by suggesting that what is distinctive about recent years is 'the global scope of movements, their centrality to domestic and international politics, and their enormous economic and social consequences. Migration processes may become so entrenched and resistant to governmental control that *new political forms will emerge*'.⁶ Part of the answer is surely hinted at in this prospect. Although more durable than multiculturalism, hybridity itself will also be a way-station. It rests upon the certainty of irrevocable kinship mixture and ongoing cohabitational fusion. But in the longer run, it surely entails that politics, rather than culture *per se*, must determine the end product. For all its subtlety and imaginative life, *On Not Speaking Chinese* remains encamped within Cultural Studies. Ang shows that this can prove an admirable diagnostic tool; but at a certain point, the subject matter itself overflows her subject-area boundaries, rather as diaspora has overcome ethno-national statehood.

⁵ Foreign Policy Centre, London 2000.

⁶ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Basingstoke 1993, 2nd ed. 1998.

Nomadic identities were never in any case purely cultural formations. They have been formed by states, as well as by languages and cultures—yet these rarely surface in Ang’s argument. The deeply militarist contours of the Indonesian state which occasioned her original transplantation; the Chinese fossil-Communism still striving to reproduce itself through patriotic appeals to a previously ignored diaspora; the consociational anomaly of the Dutch Kingdom that first welcomed and then alienated her; the weird *bricolage* of Australian Federalism (an atrophied replicant of Westminster) which she has finally chosen as home—this gallery of political wonders tends to be neglected in her discourse. So the prophet of hybridity finds it difficult to attach any political profile to her forecast. In the conclusion, ‘Together-in-Difference’, she stresses the ambivalence and ambiguity still clinging to the ascendant hybrid culture. The latter may know where it’s coming from, and that there’s no going back; but whither is it bound?

Something of the same stalemate lies at the conclusion of Niethammer’s account. He rightly downplays Fukuyama’s and Huntington’s views as ‘extrapolations from the knowledge of those who wield power in America’. The best they can do is little different from Nietzsche’s version of culturalism: an ‘animality at play’ that (in effect) abandons the serious world, the political or state universe, to George W. Bush and the resurgent men in uniforms. ‘Perhaps we should for once put the magical formulas of identity aside, and risk a less distorted look at everything that wears a human face’, he concludes; in this way, we might discern ‘the possible forms of our sociability’.

Civic nationalism

‘Sociability’ is surely not quite the word. Would it not be more accurate to say ‘sociality’, with the sense of ‘societal nature’? But as soon as this term is used, an ancient door starts to creak open again: the history of ‘history’ itself, and its origins in human nature. After the halls of mirrors and smoke machines that Niethammer dismisses as ‘collective identity’, it is insufficient to end by appealing to just ‘a human face’—for this, surely, can only be ‘a human nature’; and presumably he does not mean a *tabula rasa* on to which culture writes everything. Do we not then confront the inevitability of a common or universal ‘identity’?

Intellectuals have a particularly exaggerated fear of being ‘determined’, or pre-arranged by fate. ‘Essentialism’ is seen as a submission to inheritance, or a detraction from the freedom to construct any different or alternative future. *Social* constructivism, by contrast, is almost a rule of procedure—virtually the ‘soul’ of acceptable meaning in this area of historical and sociological speculation, and hence to be defended at any cost against the dark retrospectives of evolutionary or anthropological constraint. The ‘human face’ and originary social forms of pre-Antiquity must be classed as preceding all the conscious dilemmas of the present day, rather than as still informing or haunting them.

Except that they *do*, of course, as Niethammer’s final sentence concedes. Nor is it by chance that they are doing so today with renewed pressure, a kind of urgency; and generating such a notable quantity of new research and argument. The conditions of globalization demand, precisely, a more universal retrospect, as a precondition of efforts to imagine Ang’s more common, human future within the ocean of time that lies beyond the delta. Hybridity implies the transcendence of ‘ethnicity’ in the sense that so deeply scored eighteenth- to twentieth-century modernization. And it is this forward motion itself that demands better insight into antecedents: the runic ‘dream-time’ from which everything conscious and potentially ‘free’ must have emerged.⁷

The goal of human-nature investigation in this sense is not of course to deny or undermine free will and self-direction: it is to understand better what these are—the features of what has been called human ‘ultra-sociality’. In their development of arguments originally advanced by Darwin in *The Descent of Man*, Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd point out how human sociality ‘is based on quite different principles than the ultrasociality of any other species’, such as insects: ‘It arose by adding a cultural system of inheritance to a genetic one that normally supports small-scale societies based on kinship and reciprocity’. The larger-scale societies this made possible tend to be ‘explicitly defined and marked by symbolic boundaries. Some of these marks are relatively simple badges

⁷ ‘I adventure into the past; hence my eagerness, hence my fear and pallor. But eagerness has the upper hand, and I do not deny that it is of the flesh, for its theme is the first and last of all our questioning and speaking and all our necessity; the future of man. That it is which we shall seek out in the underworld and death . . . to find out where it lies and is, in the past. For it *is*, always *is*, however much we say It was.’ Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*, London 1999, p. 33.

such as body ornamentation and dialects. Others are complex ritual systems accompanied by elaborately rationalized ideologies.⁸

In her chapter ‘Together-in-Difference’ Ang zeroes in effectively on the word these changes are carrying us away from: ‘ethnicity’. It is ‘the reification of ethnicity, and therefore of identitarian essentialism and closure’ that has done most of the damage. However, it is again important here to keep some history in mind. Supposedly designating all that is inherited and humanly inescapable, the ‘ethnic’ has occupied popular discourse so decisively only since the sixties.⁹ From the outset it has underwritten *difference* as decisive: that is, not whatever it is that all human *ethnies* have in common, but what each specific heritage may have that supposedly demarcates it from others. But there was always an underground queering of the pitch at work in this argument. Of course all peoples are peculiar, just as all languages are concretely different. Nobody is just ‘human’ (apart from religious icons), and no-one speaks an undefiled essence of ‘language’ (apart from mystics, who are probably pretending). However, as I noted earlier, it does not follow that ‘human’ and ‘communication’ are negligible abstractions—left-overs, too vacant or too remote to count for practical purposes.

Since Noam Chomsky’s work on deep grammar, the situation has changed for linguistics. But human social nature, Niethammer’s ‘sociability’, is

⁸ Richerson and Boyd, ‘The Evolution of Human Ultrasociality’, in Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Frank Salter, eds, *Indoctrinability, Ideology and Warfare: Evolutionary Perspectives*, Oxford and New York 1998. For a summary of recent polemics in this field, see Chapter 1 of Robin Dunbar, Chris Knight and Camilla Power, eds, *The Evolution of Culture: an Interdisciplinary View*, New Jersey 1999. Knight’s previous book, *Blood Relations*, New Haven, CT 1991, sought to revise Engels’s *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, with much greater emphasis on gender than social class.

⁹ See the first ‘Introduction’ to *Ethnicity: a Reader*, edited and introduced by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Oxford 1996, pp. 3–14. First recorded in the OED in 1953, the popular term is in fact Americo-centric, and should be linked with Niethammer’s verdict on Fukuyama and Huntington, cited earlier. It became common discourse only after the abrupt decline of the informal black–white racism that had at once structured and delimited us identity from the Civil War onwards. This terminological shift reflected both the new neo-imperial hegemony (which made racism deeply embarrassing) and the mass arrival of Hispanic-American immigrants (who made it impossible in the old guise). Such big changes created a need for a more effective all-American nationalism: a dilemma of irresolution, tending towards centrifugal dispersion. No answer was found until the feverish *redressement* following the twin-tower attacks of 2001—a dolorous bid at the redemption of times and attitudes irretrievably lost.

surely unlikely to harbour only this one structural capacity, or propensity. One would expect it to have other *a priori* well-springs in heritable store, derived from the same prolonged aeons of natural selection. It may be harder to work out what these are, as squads of social anthropologists are now trying to do. However, being confined to half-educated guesses need not prevent theorists from acknowledging that the ‘human face’ must have some distinguishable features, common to all *ethnies*.

City states?

One way back towards these origins may be to recall how, a millennium ago, there was a single ‘world-city’: the metropolis of Byzantium. It was the fabulous centre of the mediaeval world, a real equivalent to the mythic city-state of Saint-John Perse’s *Anabasis*.¹⁰ Its colossal size, wealth and variegation were unique at a time when Rome had shrunk back to a Papal market town, and London and Paris were biggish villages. But in the broadening delta of the present, scores of such mega-cities either exist or are in formation. The global countryside has decided to move to town, which means someone else’s city, capacious enough for more huddled masses, and with green-field room for indefinite farther expansion. Earlier migrating tides—like those from nineteenth-century Europe—often sought a superior and more egalitarian rurality, better farms and small towns they could call their own. Their ideal was whatever could be appropriated as ‘virgin’, or ready for a ‘countryside’ to be made. Some even then ended up as city-dwellers; but nowadays they all do. The sole destination possible has become *cosmopolis*—and hence, following Ang’s analysis through, the condition of a longer-range hybridity that is bound to transcend assimilation and multiculturalism alike.

Thus London, for example, has undergone the mutation from staid Anglo-capital into *cosmopolis* within a single generation. It is this process,

¹⁰ ‘Trace the roads whereon the folk of all races take their departure, showing the heel’s yellow colour: the princes, the ministers, the captains with tonsillar voices; those who have done great things, and those who see this or that in a vision . . . There lies the way of the world and I have nothing to say of it but good—Foundation of the City. Stone and bronze. Thorn fires at dawn bared these great stones, green and viscid as the foundations of temples, of latrines; and the mariner at sea, reached by our smoke, saw that the earth to the summit had changed its form . . . Thus was the City founded and placed in the morning under the labials of a clear sounding name.’ Saint-John Perse, *Anabase* (1924), trans. T. S. Eliot as *Anabasis*, London 1959; translation slightly modified.

more than anything else, that has altered the country's whole centre of gravity, and thoroughly undermined its archaic gentry-constitution. Successive governments have been running out of excuses for failing to undertake drastic political reform. Margaret Thatcher herself did nothing, since she thought economics alone mattered. Tony Blair shuffled into a less than half-hearted devolution, then trod water, then panicked, before trying uselessly to regain the shore. As I write, he appears to be drowning.

The economist *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s was partly responsible for such political absurdities. The whole world took seriously their penny-whistle choruses about state nationalism 'fading away', but did not worry equally seriously about what might be taking its place. Yet social nature also seems to abhor a vacuum, and the boundary-loss world of the nineties was bound to seek some compensation. Neoliberalism was of course founded on the tunnel-vision conviction that nothing whatever would be required to take its place. *Homo economicus* had only to step forth, as in a dream of revelation: the assembled spotless egos of One Market Under God, gabbling pidgin-American. After just a decade of hegemony, this occlusion of politics and culture bore history into the twin-tower atrocity, the re-ignition of American nationalism, and the Iraq war. Castles and Miller were surely more intuitively right. New (and particular) '*political forms*' will be what emerge, and these can now hardly avoid being fuelled by Ang's hybridity. The latter is much more than academic animality at play. In her depiction, it is more like an as-yet laconic signpost to deep-current sea-changes; a societal equivalent of global warming.

In an essay on Claude Lévi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz pointed out how in earlier periods the seals of ethnic diversity were more easily kept intact:

When so-called primitive cultures were only very marginally involved with one another—referring to themselves as 'The True Ones', 'The Good Ones' or just 'The Human Beings', and dismissing those across the river or over the ridge as 'earth monkeys' or 'louse eggs' . . . cultural integrity was readily maintained.¹¹

¹¹ 'The Uses of Diversity' [1985], in Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, Princeton 2000. Lévi-Strauss had got into hot water with UNESCO for suggesting that the 'all-the-sameism' he had helped it adopt in the 1950s was now out of date, and that (by 1971) more recognition should be accorded to ethnic differences.

Now things are more complicated. Not multiculturalism alone, but normal inter-nation relations call for something more exalted than louse eggs. Ethnic nationalism was the nineteenth- and twentieth-century compromise. It sanctioned a somewhat strained *égalité* of ethnocentricities: all monkeys are really as good as one another (or as awful as one another), but each is also allowed to continue subscribing to its own superiority, within its own drawing room. The louse eggs were for deployment only in times of warfare, or by the frankly uncouth. Regrettably, this meant ‘most of the time’. In 2003, Bush’s Mesopotamian war has fostered an earth-monkey stench of awesome intensity.

Such devices may have once served a developmental purpose; but they have become foundering hulks in the post-1989 delta. Geertz puts the point in terms of visual art: we were accustomed to dwelling in framed landscapes and still-lives, but now have to inhabit ‘panoramas and collages’, extending from almost any urban neighbourhood, via the evening tv news, into ‘ill-defined expanses, social spaces whose edges are unfixed, irregular and difficult to locate . . . That the world is coming, at each of its local points, to look more like a Kuwaiti bazaar than like an English gentleman’s club, is shatteringly clear’. Navigating a way through a collage calls for new skills and ‘strengthening the powers of our imaginations to grasp what is in front of us’—formulae with which Ang and Niethammer would be unlikely to disagree.

I would suggest that ‘hybridity’ is most likely to become a conduit for aggressive (and in the long run, probably highly litigious) ‘civic nationalism’. The mildly exasperating nature of the term is probably due to the fact that its contemporary usage was first coined mainly as a counterpoint to ‘ethnic nationalism’, and usually signified ‘ethnocentrism-plus’: peoples do need to belong and cohere, but also to locate themselves via principles and some shared cultural signposts. However, the priority still awarded to inherent and discrete traits (‘blood’) indicated the theory’s own location, as a defensive response to ethnicity’s vision of human nature. ‘Civic’ in that context then tended to become a counter-metaphor, meaning head rather than heart—the extrinsic or the abstract, contrasted with Niethammer’s fabular example of hearts beating instinctively as one.

In the world of intensifying hybridity, however, ‘civic’ is reverting to something like its originary sense: ‘cities’, or to do with cities. And for that, another term might be appropriate, something like new or

'neo-civic'. 'Ethnic', by contrast, has already slipped into something like 'post-ethnic': the world everyone has lost, or will soon lose—that is, rurality, the retreating landscape of peasant or pre-peasant origins, and of cultural transmission by heartbeat and habituation. Nostalgia was a vital cement of that ethno-national world. It made the motifs of kinship appear 'immemorial', by fusing them into the formation of modern states. Hybridity is unlikely to forsake such an enduring feature of sociality; but it will certainly have to redefine it.

The vast new mega-cities cannot avoid dominating their hinterlands, whether these are pensioned-off nations such as 'England' or merely rural 'regions'. Yet such hegemony cannot, for obvious reasons, assume ethnic forms. Old nation-states (and their conurbations) could embody supposedly ethnic majority rule; but today's successors to Byzantium are sustainable without that kind of dependence. They may choose, but they no longer rely upon, rustic or small-town sustenance—or upon the conscript armies and ex-peasant police forces that nations permanently in arms used to demand.

This is why the retreat of 'ethnicity' is altering the centre of gravity, and producing a salience of the civic and the democratic—not because liberal democracy and its civic identity are more worthy, but because there is no alternative: mega-city hybridity can breathe no other air. Two other preconditions are needed, admittedly: a steeply falling birth-rate and a rapid growth in literacy. But as Emmanuel Todd has underlined in *Après l'empire*, these are already largely in place, or soon will be.¹² Indeed, they partly explain the migratory movements and effects that have taken place. They were preconditions of the long shift towards democracy from the sixties onwards. Here, Mayor Ken Livingstone's defeat of Her Majesty's Labour Party (New) in London was a genuine augury, even if he himself has subsequently gone weak at the knees about it. Nation-state territorial parties have become a bit like 'ethnicity' itself: on the slide but refusing to go quietly, especially on the subjective level.

¹² See Todd, *Après l'empire*, Paris 2002. The subtitle—*essai sur la décomposition du système américain*—is worthy of note. The decomposition to which Todd refers is that of the primitive global system left by the abrupt end of the Cold War, upon which the anachronistic us state has come to depend. His argument is that this system was undermined by longer-term, deeper developmental currents representing authentic global (or 'globalizing') movement, against which America then had to defend itself by an armed restoration of the *status quo ante*.

Beyond London, the disintegration of Great Britain as a whole can indeed be viewed quite coherently with the same bias. Officially if nervously, 'devolution' was granted in 1998 to two textbook ethno-nations, Wales and Scotland. In fact, limited political power was being bestowed upon the Glasgow–Edinburgh and South Wales conurbations, the 'city-states' in or around which most of the Welsh and Scots live.¹³ Even more cautiously, self-government was doled out to Northern Ireland by the Peace Process—but, in that case, to a dominant city in steep economic decline, and still riven by the ethnic hatreds of previous generations. The largest part of the former multinational kingdom, England, has not so far reacted against both London dominance and devolution with 'English nationalism'. It was only ethnicity-fixation that demanded the latter arise from slumber when called. So far it appears to be snoring more loudly than before. Could that be because it stands no chance without London? Which has already opted convincingly for 'hybridity'? The most salient observable change—a big one—has been demands for equivalent powers from its largest and geographically most remote conurbation, that of the north-eastern river-valley cities.

The cosmopolitans

Within the delta, cosmopolitanism is no longer a precarious abstraction, or (*pace* Ang) an endangered species that requires rescuing. Nor is it really an ethical posture, as ex- or anti-nationalist intellectuals so often claim—an elective moral stance, which thinking persons are encouraged to slip on like a new overcoat. Be a cosmopolitan today, and see your uncouthness disappear (or be forgiven). In reality, cosmopolitans are idiosyncratic individuals, who, amongst other things, write books like *On Not Speaking Chinese*. They show attitude, in other words, and possess idiosyncrasies matching or exceeding those of any known national identity. While there have always been quite a few around, we know that millions more are on their way. Ang happens to come from somewhere between Surabaya, Amsterdam and Sydney, and the sub-title of her book is 'Living Between Asia and the West'. But all are from some land of 'between', and destined to end up as citizens—not constitutional

¹³ One of the leaders of the Scottish struggle against the state-surrender of 1707 was Andrew Fletcher. The Laird of Saltoun's vision was of a British Isles comparable to the seventeenth-century Netherlands, a loose confederation of autonomous city-states. By a piquant historical coincidence, the new Scottish parliament is at present arising on the former Saltoun family lands at Holyrood, in Edinburgh.

abstractions, that is, but members of one neo-Byzantine *civis* or another. In this emerging context, ‘cosmopolitans’ are nomads from assorted elsewhere, become citizens of a particular polis, but naturally take the ‘wider world’—‘globalization’; ‘post’-this-and-that—for *granted*. This is why ‘civic nationhood’ will become less an item of political philosophy, and more like the specific fate prescribed by city-plus-hinterland countries. As yet, however, we have only piecemeal intimations of how such reinvented nationality politics may work—though enough to see they will be utterly distinct from the rural-national idylls of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In my experience cosmopolitans are intellectually curious, critical, fashion-conscious, and often enough ‘lateral’ or experimental in their thinking. Derided by nationalists as ‘rootless’, they tend to be rather family-oriented. Scepticism about the prescribed metaphorical family of the landing-place—‘France’, ‘America’, or whichever—is often compensated for by over-indulgence of the real one. This kinship nexus is normally distributed over several continents, yet invariably treated (in several languages, or out-of-date *argots*) as if everyone still dwelt in adjoining streets. The information revolution—email, above all—gave cosmopolitans a huge boost. Having grown up with the ‘abolition of distance’, they tend to be communication addicts to an even greater extent than the rest of us (which may help explain their distinction in Cultural Studies). Once élite cadres almost by definition, cosmopolitans have become as bourgeois or as proletarian (not, of course, as *rustic*) as anybody else. In short, they were born for both globalization and hybridity.

But to reiterate: cosmopolitanism is not the same thing. One should not confuse actual social mutation with the fog-machines of ideological yearning. It must also be observed that one great danger of cosmopolitan living is not yet extinct. This amounts to a lot more than the dominant-male (or ‘nationalist’) ethos evoked in Niethammer’s fable of the apes. It is the standing temptation to *outdo the ethnies*, by becoming, for example, more British than the Brits, or more gushing over twilight’s last gleaming than the average us (‘Caucasian’) homelander. Recent and ongoing history offers grotesque illustrations of the latter, on which there is no need to dwell farther. The point is that less-rooted incomers have a big advantage here: their very distance provides them with better understanding, as well as with a stronger sense of cultural and political

opportunity. Alas, renegades from hybridity still make the worst (and most plausible) ethno-nationalists; but probably not for much longer.

Hybrid sociality

My personal recollections of Tarzan, King of the Apes, go back farther than the Walt Disney version Niethammer refers to. He loomed large in early 1940s Scotland, where I was one of thousands of under-agers that practically lived for the next Tarzan movie. Swimming champ Johnny Weissmuller played the part in those days, with Maureen O'Sullivan as his mate. There were (still are) other Tarzans of course; but, just as many have never got over Sean Connery ceasing to be James Bond, some of us would later be inconsolable when Weissmuller became too tubby for the role.

The rules of last century dictated accompaniment by an adult for ten-year-olds, which in turn meant desperate strategems of first-night persuasion, especially in a middle-class household where stuff like that was held to be rather vulgar. Eventually in sheer (apparent) exasperation my schoolmaster father gave in, and I was grumblingly taken to the pictures. It must have been in 1940 or 41. On the way down the long hill towards the Alhambra Picture Palace, Dunfermline, I was virtually apologising to him for having such primitive tastes, when he suddenly said (lowering his voice conspiratorially): 'No, no . . . actually I don't mind Tarzan films . . . *I quite like them*'. Here was an epiphany far more blinding than the movie itself. In fact, it was quite like the common heartbeat Niethammer recalls in his essay: we became as one—and however many disappointments still lay in store, it wasn't just delusion either. However, words and culture were the vehicle, not the resonance of 'blood'.

Looking up the filmography, I see the film must have been *Tarzan Finds a Son!* (1939), the one where the couple acquired 'Boy' after a plane crash in the jungle, thus completing their family. Much as I enjoyed sitting through it in the company of another human being, the whole matter of human-ape relations did worry me a bit. Politico-social correctness was not involved: I simply could never work out how it would ever be possible to set up such an ideal family situation, without the chain of unlikely accidents Edgar Rice Burroughs so deftly leaves in place. It was not as if a Dunfermline lad could just go out to jungle-land and *explain* to the apes and other fauna what he wanted. The enabling

'ultra-sociality' of communicative culture was lacking; had it not been, I think we would all have run away, and tried to get on the next boat.

Niethammer seems to believe that 'collective identities' are perilous inventions, like fireworks. Someone is always getting blown up by them, in the name of a show not worth the sacrifice, and in someone else's interest. But this may be because international mentality has become over-wedded to the ideology of ethnicism: 'peoples', distinct and bounded by reputedly inherent characteristics, manifest in tongue, culture and in society's substitute for 'instincts'. But looking back from really existing internationalism and its correlate, 'hybridity', it is at least clearer what this prestidigitation consisted in. Displays of the originary were necessitated by a defence—or, often, by the aggressive advance—of political boundaries. Hybridity has shown how ethnicity was, in reality, largely shifting sand. But civic-political boundaries, ancient or new, are not. Folk-song, dialects and dance come and go, readily imitable, and also exchangeable; by contrast, expressions of a common will or agency, and their institutional manifestations, are much closer to being the iron of human history.¹⁴ These enduring templates have proved readily communicable across generations, centuries; even millennia. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the general form of the human 'habitus'—togetherness obtainable solely through 'diversity'—may be more resistant than its passing contents.

If in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries 'nation' proved more durable than 'class', this must have been for structural, rather than conjunctural reasons alone. Such an outcome was never realistically ascribable only to élite conspiracies, betrayals and failures of moral will. And the same factors probably mean that it is new political and state forms that will compel a staggered transition from the ethno-national identity scene (the fixed views and daguerreotypes) to Geertz's and Ang's 'collages' of hybrid societies. However, these factors cannot be themselves all

¹⁴ One of the most influential anthropological essays of recent times makes a similar point: Fredrik Barth's famous 'Introduction' to Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, London 1969. Barth argued that the boundary itself is often much more important than the 'cultural stuff' found on either side of it. Though of course based on pre-existing *differentiae*, these markers then add a new and constitutive dimension, enabling the sacral formation of 'the True Ones', 'Human Beings', etc. Particular ethnic borders are malleable or shifting; 'boundary-ness' (or ethnocentricity) is not; it eventually becomes the cultivation of 'diversity' that marks the move towards globalization.

'chosen', as the post-colonial or postmodern spirit would prefer. The elective capacity itself must rest, surely, upon certain *a priori*, whose visage (as Niethammer says) is just what we need to understand better. To do this entails admitting that not *all* 'identities' can be equivalently porous, dubious, dissembling, collapsing and discardable. At the very least, some must be a good deal more fixed or durable than others. 'Ethnicity' (c. 1953–c. 2001) may have been predominantly *papier-mâché*; it should not be assumed that the same is true of civic-political nationality, especially in the post-Cold War, literate, gender-equalizing and hybrid-informed society forecast by Ang and others.

Pre-history and anthropology to one side, there is also a strong high-cultural argument for some of these perspectives. Basing himself primarily on Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and the Animals*, Ian McEwan has argued that great literary texts have always implied limitations to the 'Standard Social Science Model'. Darwin's life, as well as his theories of biological origin, led him to recognize the common traits since theorized as structural grammar and 'ultrasociality':

That which binds us, our common nature, is what literature has always, knowingly and helplessly, given voice to. And it is this universality which science, now entering another of its exhilarating moments, is set to explore.¹⁵

The 'well of the past' may be as deep as Mann's opening invocation suggests; but, short of natural catastrophe, that of the human future will be deeper still, and it defies imaginative belief to conclude that globalization must dilute it down into a quarter-inch-deep trickle of uniformity, or homogeneity. This is the stuff of dystopias, rather than of actual, contested development and change. The latter is far better conveyed by a later chapter of *Joseph and His Brothers*, the one where Jacob at last decides to show his favourite son something of what will one day be his. He goes to a bolted trunk at the back of his tent, and rummages about among the woolly things, skirts, head-cloths and smocks, to find 'Rachel's *ketonet passim*', a garment bought from some pilgrim and 'supposed to have belonged to a king's daughter in times past'.

¹⁵ Lecture at Trinity College, Cambridge, 2001; an extract was published as 'The Great Odyssey: Literature, Science and Human Nature', *Guardian*, 9 June 2001. Donald Brown's *Human Universals*, New York 1991, is a more systematic exposé of the same argument.

When he fishes out the dusty relic, it turns out to be a revelation: the incredible collage of creation itself—

The metal embroideries glittered in the lamplight. The flashing silver and gold blotted out at times the quieter colours as the old man held it up in his unsteady arms: the purple, white, olive-green, rose-colour, and black of the emblems and images, the stars, doves, trees, gods, angels, men and beasts, lustrous against the bluish mist of the background.

Joseph tries on the many-coloured coat and manages, effortlessly, to ‘look like a young god’, to the chagrin of his brothers.¹⁶ I suspect something like this is the real point hovering over both Niethammer’s essay and Ang’s book. Both suggest how perfectly absurd it is (now as then) to think that the powers which generated this wonder will, because of farther mingling and migrations still to come, somehow lose their potency, and become unable to produce still greater marvels in future time.

¹⁶ The contemporary theorist who has taken this idea seriously is Roberto Mangabeira Unger. See for example his *Boutwood Lectures*, Cambridge 2002, obtainable from www.law.harvard.edu/unger. The ‘ascent of humanity to more god-like status’, as he describes it in Lecture 1, leads him on to the following ‘untimely remark’ in Lecture 2: ‘The solution that converges with the interests of democracy and practical progress is to replace fantastical or willed difference (i.e. ethnic demarcation) with the ability to create real difference. To strengthen this capacity is one of the purposes of a democratizing and experimentalist alternative. Such an alternative can help turn the national difference into a product of moral specialization within humanity. This turn expresses the truths that the roots of a human being lie in the future more than in the past and that under democracy, prophecy speaks louder than memory’.