'CELEBRATION OF A NATION': REPRESENTATIONS OF AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY.

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The representations which people have of their country are likely to be rich with symbolic content and this content is likely to be shared extensively among many people. This makes such representations particularly suitable for analysis from a 'social representations' perspective (Moscovici, 1981;1984). A national identity is generally assumed to be constructed around the moral and social unity of a society. However, Australia's colonial origins and history have made the question of an Australian national identity a highly contested and problematic issue. There are many conflicting views of what constitutes and indeed what should constitute such an identity. This is reflected most clearly in the polarised views about whether Australia should sever its ties with the British monarchy and become a republic. It is also reflected in the controversy surrounding the issue of a new Australian flag.

The research within this paper attempts to deconstruct the representations of Australian society and identity contained within the 'Celebration of a Nation' advertisement: a cultural product made specifically to encourage Australians to celebrate their country's Bicentenary in 1988. This advertisement presented an opportunity to investigate the images and themes which the makers of a cultural product deemed important when encouraging national sentiment. It also presented the opportunity to evaluate subjective reactions to the advertisement. Thus this paper considers both the 'objective' and 'subjective' impressions of the advertisement (Ichheiser, 1947). Methodologically, it analyses not only the representations 'in the minds' of individuals but also a representation which existed 'out there' in the public and collective domain (Moscovici, 1985).

THE AUSTRALIAN BICENTENARY

Considerable controversy surrounded the Bicentenary celebrations. Particularly salient were Aboriginal objections to the event. The history of Black Australia is far longer than the 200 years of white settlement which the Bicentenary represented. Aboriginal perceptions of white colonisation were understandably negative since European settlement represented to them, the violence and associated subjugation of their people.

The Australian Bicentenary Authority (ABA) was established in 1979 by the Federal government as an independent and autonomous organisation. The ABA was entrusted to set the objectives and goals of this historical event, and to plan and co-ordinate the program for the Bicentenary. However, over the course of its 9 year existence, the ABA was plagued with internal conflict and government interference. More specifically, there was a continuous controversy over the theme which the Bicentenary should have. The original ABA board wanted to focus especially on the multicultural character of Australain society and initially put in place the theme of 'Living Together'. Multicuturalism as a theme was consistent with the

ABA's major objective of making the Bicentenary a time for reflecting upon and defining Australia's national identity. This was clearly stated by David Armstrong, the General Manager of the ABA,

"The task should be to create a greater self-awareness of what makes up the diversity and richness and character of our national life. As a consequence of this increased knowledge and awareness, we should aim for a better understanding of how this diversity is fused into one nation, one people, one flag. . . " (cited in O'Brien, 1991, p. 35).

In December 1981 the then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, without consulting the ABA, changed the theme of the Bicentenary from 'Living Together' to 'The Australian Achievement'. The new Labor government which came to power in 1983, was not fond of the theme imposed by the previous Prime Minister and resurrected the 'Living Together' theme.

In 1985, the ABA experienced a barrage of public and media criticism which subsequently led to further government intervention. It began with an article written by Dr Ken Baker and published in the Institute of Public Affairs' journal, *Review*. The article was entitled 'The Bicentenary: Celebration or Apology?', in which he criticised the ABA for failing to emphasise Australia's British heritage and traditional values. Indeed, Baker and others on the political right argued that the ABA's objectives were paramount to promoting 'white guilt' over the Aboriginal issue. Baker's critique was followed by an article called 'The Bicentenary Fiasco', written by journalist Alan Ramsey, in which he alleged there was massive overspending by the Authority.

During that year both the Chairman of the Board and the General Manager of the ABA were forced to resign through government pressure.

In March 1986 the 'Mojo/ MDA' advertising agencies were awarded the contract for the Bicentenary advertising. These agencies had been successful in creating advertising campaigns which utilised unique Australian imagery to induce a sense of national pride. Alomes (1988) has referred to this style of advertising as 'popular nationalism' and 'societal marketing'. The ABA instructed the agencies to produce an advertising campaign which would create excitement and involvement in the Bicentenary. The agencies' response to this demand was to abandon the 'Living Together' theme in favour of 'Celebration of a Nation'. This media campaign did not embrace any of the visionary ideals which the ABA had originally emphasised. Creating public awareness of the Bicentenary was deemed to be very important, since opinion polling up to and including 1985 indicated that the Australian public had little knowledge of and expressed little enthusiasm about the approaching event. The advertisement was shown repeatedly on all television stations, beginning midway through 1987, in the lead-up to the January 26 , 1988 celebrations.

THE ADVERTISEMENT:

The 'Celebration of a Nation' advertisement began with a brief display of the Australian flag which was then followed by a focus on Ayers Rock amidst the outback landscape of central Australia. This formed the background for the coming together of many prominent Australian celebrities and personalities who, in song, were encouraging and inviting the Australian people to 'give us a hand' in celebrating the nation's 200th birthday.

The advertisement was made in November 1986, in Uluru (Ayers Rock) National Park. The Bulletin magazine described the group of 60 people who took part in the commercial as a

'most extraordinary gathering of strange bedfellows' (cited in O'Brien, 1991, p. 123). This group included television personalities, sports-persons, popular singers, fashion designers and artists. The Mojo/MDA advertising agencies recommended that no political identities should be included in the advertisement. The ABA and the agencies both made certain that no identity in the advertisement "promotes an issue of political or national sensitivity, thereby endangering the Bicentennial Authority's neutral stance on affairs" (cited in O'Brien, 1991, p. 124).

SUBJECTIVE IMPRESSIONS OF THE ADVERTISEMENT:

The present research was conducted in April 1989; the year following the Bicentenary. Forty-three first year psychology students took part in the study (21 females and 22 males). Mean age was 20.68 years, SD = 5.63 years. Thirty-two of the subjects were born in Australia; 11 were born elsewhere. Fifteen of the subjects had fathers who were born outside Australia, and 14 had mothers born outside Australia. For 12 of these subjects, both parents were born outside Australia. The composition of the sample itself reflects something of the multicultural character of Australian society.

After viewing the advertisement, subjects were asked to respond to two open-ended questions: *'What do you think are the dominant images presented in this advert?'*, and *'What message do you think the makers of this advert were trying to put across?'* These two questions were chosen to determine what respondents perceived to be the most salient and dominant images in the advertisement, and what they understood by its content. That is, these questions tried to tap both the pictorial imagery and cognitive content of the message.

To obtain measures of subjects' affective and evaluative reactions to the advertisement, subjects completed the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS Scales) developed by Watson, Clark & Tellegen (1988).

The open-ended responses were content analysed and sorted into categories or themes.

Question 1, 'What do you think are the dominant images presented in this advert?'

For this question, 132 different responses were given (mean number of responses = 2.6). Most of the responses fell into seven major categories listed in Table 1. Inter-rater agreement in the sorting of categories yielded a kappa value of .76.

The first category contained responses which referred to the party and celebratory atmosphere in the commercial. References to happiness and fun were common. Approximately 70% of respondents gave responses of this nature. Forty-four percent of the subjects made reference to the images of unity and togetherness contained in the advertisement. About 42% mentioned dominant Australian symbols such as Ayers Rock, the Australian outback and landscape, sunshine, akubra hats and the Australian and Bicentenary flags. The most frequently mentioned of all these symbols was the prominent Australian landmark of Ayers Rock, one subject describing it as the 'heart of Australia'. Interestingly, only three subjects mentioned the Australian flag. Category 4 contained an equal number of responses as category 3. These contained references to Australian pride, nationalism and the common identity of 'Australians'.

Table 1
Categories of open-ended responses to advertisement.

What do you think are the dominant images presented in this advertisement? N = 132	% Ss giving this response
Main Categories	
1. Party atmosphere, celebrations, happiness, fun. N = 30	69.76%
2. Unity, togetherness, people coming together, friendship, mateship. N= 19	44.18%
3. Symbols representing Australia - Ayers Rock, Australian outback /landscape, sunshine akubra hats. N = 18	41.86%
4. Australians should be proud, nationalism, common identity, patriotism, the country 'Australia'. N = 18	41.86%
5. Famous Australians, personalities, celebrities. N = 15	34.83%
6. Diversity of society, people from various backgrounds. N = 12	27.89%
7. Omissions, unrepresentativeness of people in advertisement of Australian society. N = 8	18.60%
8. Miscellaneous. N = 12	27.91%
What message do you think the makers of this advertisement were trying to put across? N = 90	
1. To celebrate 200 years of achievement, progress / Great Nation / Pride in Nation. N = 25	58.13%
2. All types of people to join in / people from all backgrounds / Unification Theme. N = 24	55.81%
3. Support for Bicentenary Celebrations / Participation in Bicentenary. N = 20	46.50%

About 35% of subjects referred to the dominant images of the celebrities and famous faces in the commercial. Twenty-eight per cent referred to the diversity of people shown in the advertisement. This included responses such as

'black and white races together',

'diversity of Australian people',

'portrays wide section of community, e.g., handicapped, aged, children'.

In stark comparison to these responses are the responses contained in category 7. Eighteen per cent of subjects made comments regarding the unrepresentativeness of the people in the advertisement or people who were not included. For example,

'no black Australians',

'only one aboriginal',

'token aboriginal and disabled person in wheelchair but mostly people were young, attractive, fit and carefree',

'no signs of multiculturalism'. One person asked,

'what happened to the person off the street?'.

Question 2, 'What message do you think the makers of this advert were trying to put across?'

Ninety individual responses were given in response to this question (mean number of responses = 2.02). These were categorised into three major themes listed in Table 1 (kappa

= .77). The most frequently cited responses were those containing references to the legitimacy of celebrating 200 years of progress and achievement, pride in Australia and in being Australian, and Australia being a great nation. The second category contained references to the unification theme, such as

'everyone should celebrate Bicentenary-aborigines, disabled, young, old, immigrants', and,

'they want everyone to participate'

were common. The last major category of responses mentioned the advertisement's attempt to promote support and encouragement for the Bicentenary celebrations, with its emphasis on fun and enjoyment. About 46% of subjects made references of this kind.

AFFECTIVE REACTIONS TO THE ADVERTISEMENT:

PANAS scale results indicate that the advertisement evoked predominantly positive emotional reactions. The advertisement did not evoke negative emotions to any great extent. There was a highly significant difference between total scores on the positive (M = 24.75) and negative scales (M = 13.93), indicating that the advertisement evoked positive emotions to a significantly greater extent than it evoked negative emotions (t = 5.19, df = 39, p < .0001).

DISCUSSION

If we look at the advertisement itself and subjects' impressions of it for clues about what it says about Australian society, one recurring theme predominates: the unity and togetherness of the Australian people. Forty-four per cent of the sample saw this as one of the most dominant images in the advertisement and 55.8% felt that this was certainly the message behind the advertisement: for people from various backgrounds to join in, come together and celebrate. Coupled with this was the image of the diversity of the Australian people, the multicultural and multiracial character of Australian society. Close to 30% of the sample mentioned this as a dominant image. Certainly, the advertisement attempts to give such an impression by portraying a large number of people coming together in a remote location (the centre of Australia) in unity and good spirit to express nationalist sentiment and pride in their country.

While 44% of the sample said that the advertisement portrayed the diversity of the Australian people, i.e., multicultural and multiracial Australia, 18% complained of its general unrepresentativeness of the Australian people and its failure to incorporate some sections of Australian society. A closer and critical look at the advertisement would certainly support the latter analysis, made only by a relatively small percentage of respondents. The overwhelming number of people represented in the advertisement were white, well-known personalities and celebrities. There is one Aboriginal (identity unknown) upon whom the camera focuses a number of times. There are no obvious representatives of multi-ethnic Australia. A close scrutiny of the advertisement did not reveal any significant variations from the white well-known person of anglo-saxon origin. There are a small number of unrecognisable faces which supposedly represent the 'average Australian'.

It is remarkable how this 'unrepresentative' representation of the Australian people is able to create a dominant image of the 'diversity of people' to which many of the respondents

refer. Of course, a close scrutiny of the advertisement is made difficult by the fast editing of the advert which 'slides over' many faces in the crowd of people. This advertisement, perhaps like all forms of propaganda and ideology, demonstrates the schism between what has been referred to by Ichheiser (1949) as objective impressions and subjective impressions. Not only does the advertisement create an image of diversity but also an image of unity. The two images are related integrally. The integral relation between the themes of unity and diversity is reminiscent of Billig's (1982) methodological and theoretical injunction to look for contradictory or countervailing themes in any ideology, social representation or social behaviour.

The notion of unity in nationalist sentiment is not uncommon and, in many respects, always forms the underlying intent of any nationalist ideology. The moral and social unity of a society is also at the core of liberalism as an ideology (Rowse, 1978). Certainly, the main thrust of the Bicentenary commercial is that group loyalties are to be subverted for the common good of a united Australia. This was particularly relevant for Aboriginal Australians, the majority of whom opposed vehemently both the celebrations and the whole concept of the Bicentenary.

Social representations theory may inform us where these representations of Australian society come from and how they proliferate in everyday life: how people seize upon such representations in the media and use them to make sense of their everyday social existence in a complex society. It may also inform us how the affective core of a representation contributes to its maintenance and stability. For example, despite the cynicism and critical evaluations some subjects made about the Bicentenary, the images contained in the Bicentenary advertisement evoked overall positive feelings and emotions. Several subjects who were asked to participate in a group discussion about the advertisement indicated that even though they were critical of the Bicentenary and the message and images contained within the advertisement, they could not help but feel emotionally 'stirred' in a positive direction by the commercial. This suggests the importance of the independence of affect or emotion from evaluation and appraisal in nationalist advertising. It may be this affective core which contributes to the maintenance of an image of Australian society as being united, despite its diversity of people.

So successful was this 'Celebration of a Nation' advertising campaign that O'Brien (1991) argues that the advertisement alone was primarily responsible for the change in public opinion towards the Bicentenary: from a climate of critical cynicism to a "climate of imminent celebration" (p. 294). O'Brien argues,

> "More than anything, the post-1985 public perception of the Bicentenary was conditioned by the Authority's choice of the Celebration of a Nation advertising campaign aimed squarely at the mass" (1991, p. 300).

The campaign was so successful that tracking research during the latter half of 1987 suggested that 99.3% of Australians were aware of the Bicentenary. This was a phenomenal accomplishment, given the chronic low levels of awareness and interest the Australian public had demonstrated towards the event up to that point. Indeed, O'Brien refers to the campaign as a 'case study in communications management'.

The present research indicates the need to look at representations of life and society contained within popular culture, and the 'sharedness' of reactions which they may evoke. Popular forms of culture contain representations (ideological texts) central to social life, and

subjective reactions to these may tell us something of the effect of such texts on the way in which people socially construct their world.

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