Cosmopolitanism, Branding and the Public Realm

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Sydney, we learned last December, is the third strongest city 'brand' in the world.[1] Let me begin, then, with some images from Sydney of about a month ago – Sydney, December 2005. Here is a description from the ABC reporter Tony Eastley:

The racial events that erupted at Cronulla in Sydney's south at the weekend continued overnight, with police cars attacked in one suburb and dozens of private vehicles smashed in another. At Woolaware, near Cronulla, a man was stabbed by a gang of youths. He's in hospital in a serious condition. What have been simmering, but relatively minor racial problems at one of Sydney's beaches blew out of control yesterday at Cronulla. Large numbers of mainly young people had gathered to, in their words, reclaim Cronulla beach from gangs of youths, mainly of Lebanese decent. There were dozens of arrests as police tried to maintain control of an increasingly drunken mob. Anyone of Middle Eastern appearance became a potential target. Several people were set upon and bashed.[2]

The events at Cronulla, which spilt over into surrounding suburbs, shocked people across the country, leading to a heated debate about racism in

[1] According to the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index, December 2005.
[2] Tony Eastley, AM (ABC morning news and current affairs programme), Monday December 12, 2005, print version available at ABC Online, [http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2005/s1528707.htm].

Australian society, including the part played by talkback radio in the lead-up to the riots, the influence of the gang culture of Sydney's southern beaches, and the possible role of the Prime Minister in encouraging an atmosphere of division and intolerance. For many people, the events were a flashback to the xenophobic politics of Pauline Hanson, but in the contemporary climate they also resonated with anxiety over Islamic fundamentalism and the threat of terrorism.

The Cronulla riots stand in marked contrast to the image of Sydney, projected through the 2002 Olympics in particular, as a cosmopolitan and multicultural metropolis, a city built around its beautiful harbour, its Opera House and bridge, and, of course, its beaches. The reclamation of those beaches was, of course, one of the themes that recurred in interviews with participants in the riots of December 11 and 12. Those riots also contrasted with images of a month or so before, in November of 2005, when Sydney was the venue for Australia's qualification for the 2006 World Cup. Australia's victory over Uruguay saw a huge outburst of national pride, particularly among ethnic communities for whom football is a central obsession. The Australian flag that figured so prominently in the celebrations of the win over Uruguay, and that appeared all around Sydney the day after the victory, was also prominent in the Cronulla riots – what was perhaps most shocking to many people was the way in which those inflicting the violence did so while also brandishing the Australian flag. What does it mean that the events at Cronulla happened at a time when we are supposedly more cosmopolitan

than ever before, and in a city that is supposedly one of the most cosmopolitan and the most multicultural? What does it mean for Sydney itself, for its identity, its image, its 'brand' – a brand carefully cultivated by the presentation of the city during the 2003 summer Olympics.

There are, of course, a set of prior questions here. What do we mean by talk of cosmopolitanism, and what is at issue in the idea of a city 'brand'? I have to admit to having arrived at a somewhat sceptical stance towards both of these ideas – sceptical because it seems to me that the discourse of cosmopolitanism has become so attenuated and broad that it is no longer clear what it means; sceptical because the idea of the branding of cities seems to me to depend on a number of dubious assumptions about the globalized nature of our world and about the character of the city as such.

The ideology of city branding, ubiquitous (and, in some eyes, necessary) though it may have become, implies a conception of the city as a commodity to be marketed and advertised. Whatever the reality of city life, the branding of cities implies the nature of the city as a homogenous entity whose identity can indeed be encapsulated and subsumed under a single 'brand' or image. What the events in Cronulla can be taken to show, and those events provide only one recent example, an example particularly close to home in an Australian context, is not only the way in which the heterogeneity of the city may undermine attempts to commodify them, and so the gap that readily opens between the 'brand' and the reality, but also the way in which, no matter how economically important the branding and marketing of cities

may be thought to be, such branding also runs counter to, even while it draws upon, the tight relation between identity and place.

The branding of cities also stands within a contemporary discourse that could be termed 'cosmopolitan' in the sense that this term is connected, not only with globalisation as a broad phenomenon, but also with the supposedly increased mobility of capital and of population. Such cosmopolitanism, often allied with a certain form of liberal political ideology, seems based, not so much around the idea of universal citizenship understood as a mode of political engagement that looks beyond the parochial to the universal, but rather to a conception of the free-floating investor or consumer who has no primary affiliation other than to the optimisation of investment return or lifestyle satisfaction – no matter where that may be achieved. The idea of the branding of cities may thus be tied to a consumerist form of cosmopolitanism that is some distance removed from the original sense of the term, although one might argue that it inadvertently connects with some of the more unpleasant and politically problematic uses of the term – the idea, for instance, of the rootless and money-making Jew who was such a common figure in the conservative mythologies of early twentieth century Europe.

Yet although, on the one hand, the idea of 'city-branding' is indeed connected with this sort of cosmopolitanism, and so with the conception of the individual as having no independent affiliation to any place in particular beyond the financial and lifestyle affordances of that place, the language and

imagery associated with city brands also seeks to establish the 'brand' in terms of its own uniqueness. This gives rise to a very specific sort of tension. Part of this tension derives from the character of branding as such – the tension between the commodification that branding implies, and the way in which the construction of the brand nevertheless aims to project a sense of uniqueness, individuality, distinctness, and differentiation. In the case of the branding of cities, however, the tension at issue is more specific to the way in which the branding of cities draws on much of the same imagery and language that otherwise contributes to a sense, not only of the identity of a city, but so also of the identity of its inhabitants – the power of a city brand thus derives from that which gives individuals a sense of belonging to, and identification with, a particular city – and yet, of course, such branding also presupposes a conception of the individual as having no primary attachment of that sort at all, at least none that could not be over-ridden by a more optimal combination of opportunities and attractions.

The branding of cities may thereby be seen to instantiate a tension between a form of cosmopolitanism and a form of what we may call 'parochialism'. On such an account, cosmopolitanism refers to the prioritisation of a global, universalist perspective in which local, regional and national boundaries are of only secondary significance, if they matter at all, while parochialism, by contrast, involves the prioritisation of a perspective based in some specific locale – parochialism, it may be argued, is what we saw in Cronulla. Such a contrast between parochialism and cosmopolitanism

is, however, a little too simple, since cosmopolitanism itself exhibits something of the same tension between the 'cosmopolitan' and the 'parochial' within it. One way this is manifest is in the presence within cosmopolitanism, at least in its modern forms, of two tendencies within it, one emphasising heterogeneity and difference, the other emphasising homogeneity and uniformity. It is the latter tendency, of course, that is associated with the globalising perspective of much cosmopolitan thinking, but such thinking, it may be argued, itself issues out of a desire to enable and to protect diversity and difference – out of the emphasis on heterogeneity. Thus the existence of uniform structures at a global level (systems of international law, for instance, directed at protection of human rights) that are not restricted by local or national boundaries can be seen as protecting or even enabling the possibility of a diversity of different practices at more localised levels. In this manner, one may take the two tendencies at issue here as actually two faces of the same project – the opening up of a global perspective that is not tied to any particular locality, region or nation is taken to be the best and only way to protect the differentiation that is itself associated with the local, the regional and the national.

Yet just as the ideology of 'branding', while it may draw upon concepts of identity and attachment, also operates against those concepts, so too does the cosmopolitan emphasis on the global and the universal, on that which is homogenous and generic, present some problems for the preservation of the local and the regional, the heterogenous and the different. The reason for this

is simple: globalised structures and approaches, even when aimed at supporting a level of localised diversity, will always threaten to undermine such diversity simply because of the way they do indeed prioritise the perspective of the uniform and the global over and above the specific, the local or the regional. To take an example from the economic sphere, the ideology of free trade, which has itself been associated with the increasing emergence of globalised manufacturing and marketing, but which has sometimes also been promoted as a way of opening up world trade, has tended to lead to a homogenisation, rather than diversification, in production methods and processes, in sales and promotion techniques and modes of organisation, and in the nature of the products manufactured.

If cosmopolitanism is understood as indeed prioritising one 'perspective' over others – the global or the universal over the local or parochial – then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it must always tend towards the uniform and away from the differentiated. It is thus that the common association of cosmopolitanism with globalisation can be seen to be partially correct, even though it represents a somewhat inaccurate appropriation of the idea of the cosmopolitan given its historical associations. There is a way, however, of thinking about the cosmopolitan that does not take it as prioritising any one perspective above others, and in particular, as not prioritising a global perspective. The solution is simply to treat cosmopolitanism as not entailing any 'perspective', whether global or local, as

such. Yet before I take this further, there is another, related issue that deserves consideration.

Inasmuch as cosmopolitanism is viewed as implying a dissociation from the particularities of locality or region, of city or nation, then cosmopolitanism seems to face a basic difficulty: cosmopolitanism arises as a way of engaging in the world – we can think of it as having, therefore, an essential ethical or political dimension – that is not predicated on any particular attachment, but actually eschews such attachment. Yet it is only our concrete locatedness in the world – what existentialist thinkers have referred to as our 'thrownness' or 'facticity' – that gives content to the ethical and political decisions we must make, and that enables us to be oriented in the world in such a way that decisions can matter to us, and can, indeed, be demanded of us. The idea of an engaged stance that is not concretely situated is not the idea of an engaged stance at all. To put this in terms of the language of place, and the attachment to place, it is just our locatedness in the particularity of place, of a particular 'situation', that is the basis for decision and for action.[3] If cosmopolitanism is indeed to constitute a way of engaging in the world, then it cannot be understood as entailing any dislocation from place, any dissociation from the particularity of our locality, region or whatever. The question is whether cosmopolitanism can be reconfigured in a way that accords with this requirement.

[3] This is a point worked out in more detail in my Place and Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Heidegger's Topology (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

If one holds to cosmopolitanism as consisting in the holding a certain globalist perspective then it will be difficult to achieve the kind of reconfiguration that seems called for here. But as I suggested earlier, it may be that the mistake lies in the idea of cosmopolitanism as itself consisting in a particular perspective in the first place – a 'global' perspective over against a 'local' or 'parochial' one. One might argue, of course, whether the idea of a 'global perspective (like the philosopher Thomas Nagel's 'view from nowhere'[4]) actually makes sense as a possible perspective in the first place, but leaving that to one side, there is a way of thinking about the cosmopolitan that need not involve setting the global against the local here.

Cosmopolitanism involves, in its original sense, the idea of a mode of citizenship that is directed towards the world as a whole. That need not mean, however, that it may not also be articulated through the particularities of one's own place within that world. Indeed, it seems that we could reconceptualise the idea of the cosmopolitan as consisting in the assertion of one's engagement in the city as the basis for one's engagement in the world – our worldly engagement thus emerges out of our more particular civic engagement. The difference between this and some other versions of cosmopolitanism is that it makes our own involvement in the local and the regional first as that which enables and directs our engagement with the global. It also marks out the space of the city as the space in which real engagement with others has to take place. The city, and not the globalised 'world', turns out to be the primary place of ethical and political engagement.

[4] See Nagel, The View From Nowhere (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

This reconfigured sense of the cosmopolitan clearly stands in contrast to the globalised 'cosmopolitanism' that might otherwise be taken to be associated with, among other contemporary phenomena, the ideology of the city 'brand'; it also stands in marked contrast to the idea of the city as itself a brand. If one looks to the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index that placed Sydney at number three in the list of 50 city brands (London and Paris were one and two), one finds that its index is based on the following six components: the Presence (the city's international status and standing); the Place (people's perceptions about the physical aspect of each city); the Potential (the economic and educational opportunities that each city is believed to offer visitors, businesses and immigrants); the Pulse (the appeal of a vibrant urban lifestyle); the People (respondents' impressions of the inhabitants, community, and safety); and the Prerequisites (people's perceptions of the basic qualities of the city.)[5] The language and mode of presentation of the City Brand Index is clearly not that of the city as a place of belonging or attachment, nor of the city as a site for political engagement, but rather of the city as indeed constituted in terms of the lifestyle and image that is associated with it – 'Yes, cities have always been brands, in the truest sense of the word. Paris is romance, Milan is style, and New York is energy. These are the brands of cities and they are inextricably tied to the histories and destinies of these places'.[6] In the ideology of the city brand the city ceases to be a place and

[5] See http://www.citybrandsindex.com.

[6] http://www.citybrandsindex.com/.

becomes, instead, an abstracted image, a disembodied desire, a generic 'myth'.

In the 1960s the urban theorist Kevin Lynch explored the way in which people come to see the cities in which they live. He argued that people look to find legible images of their cities, built on the interaction between self and place', that enable their capacity to act within the city, as well as contributing to their own emotional stability.[7] The idea of the city as brand is the idea of a very different sort of image from that suggested by Lynch. Whereas Lynch's idea of the city image is based in the individual's own engagement with a particular cityscape, and depends upon specific modes of interaction between, as Lynch puts it, 'self and place', the city brand is involves an image of the city that may well be completely removed from any actual engagement with the city as such – an image that often depends heavily on visual and narrative representations of the city that have a broad, rather than individual appeal, and that are often severed from particular and concrete modes of attachment or activity.

Here the image of the city as brand turns out to be a very different type of image, quite apart from its difference in content, from the image of the city that might serve to play a role in and even to express the actual attachment of individual residents to the city in which they live and to which they belong. Indeed, since the idea of the city brand may be derived as much, if not more

[7] See Lynch's reflections on his original 1960 work, The Image of the City, in 'Reconsidering the Image of the City', in Lloyd Rodwin and Robert Holistr (eds.), Cities of the Mind (New York: Plenum, 1984).

so, from the perceptions of non-residents as residents, the city as brand is even further removed from the city as a place in which one actually lives.

What connection might there be between the third strongest city brand, Sydney, and the rioting that took place in Cronulla in December 2005? – or between the second strongest brand, namely, Paris, and the racial violence and rioting that closed down so many Parisian streets earlier in the same year? The Cronulla riots bring to the forefront the issue of our attachment to the places in which we live, and demonstrate the way in which that attachment can itself be a source of violence, division and dislocation. Such attachment is nevertheless at the heart of the life of any city, it is that on which the city depends, as well as that which can threaten its disruption. The idea of the city as brand seems not to touch such issues at all, but stands in a strange state of suspension in relation to it.

The city is that in which we live, and through which our lives are often articulated and shaped, and yet as expressed in the ideology of the city brand, it is little different from the relation we have to any other commodity – that we are citizens of this city is little different from the fact that we consume this variety of soft drink or that make of sports shoe. The globalised cosmopolitanism that we may take to be associated with such branding is similarly a cosmopolitanism that no longer has any connection with the political, or, one might argue, with the world – a cosmopolitanism of the commodified image, of citizenship as mere consumption, of place as mere representation. Such globalised cosmopolitanism effaces the character of the

city, not as some global 'brand', but rather as the space in which differences as well as commonalities appear in concrete form, and in which the specificity of our own placed attachment enables an engagement that goes beyond that particular location. As Hannah Arendt writes:

> The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects, being seen and heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different perspective…Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.[8]

The public realm of which Arendt speaks is above all a civic space, it is also a cosmopolitan space, in the truest sense, but it is not the space merely of a generic 'image' or 'brand' – it is a space of multiple images and representations, a space of complex and shifting relations, a space in which we find and re-find ourselves, others, and the world.

[8] Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), p.57