

introduction

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Community is impossible. We may nostalgically believe in the existence of community prior to the ravages of modernity, or hope for a better (democratic, socialist, anarchic, feminist, gay or open) community in the future, or have faith in our current communities—be they national, global, cultural or sub-cultural. But these communities, when founded on common identity, values and projects, exclude the other and so also community-with-others. National communities marginalise and vilify the racial and sexual other: Nazi persecution of Jews and gays, apartheid brutalisation of Black South Africans, colonial massacres of indigenous peoples, are not aberrations but are the ground work of homogenous national community. The global community condemns the ‘barbaric’ country or culture. The heterosexual community invalidates gay and lesbian life. The valorisation of communal belonging produces exclusions through the insistence on the self-determination of nations, the unified identity of cultures and the exclusivity of binary formations: straight/gay; with-us/against-us; white/black; civilisation/barbarity; citizen/foreigner; good/evil. The formation and perpetuation of in-common community requires the estrangement of those who threaten its commonality.

Yet, community is nonetheless indispensable. Human existence is social existence: born into dependency we grow into sociality. Human being is a being-together-in-community.

This paradox—the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of community—has already been addressed by thinkers from a range of disciplines. What remains unthought, however, is the relation between community and affect. Passion, emotion, sensibility, cannot be divorced from community for it is the exchange or dissemination of feeling and the experience of belonging through familial, amicable or intimate relations that binds us in and also alienates us from community. While political theory focuses on rational agreement and contract, and

social theory investigates the cultural production of community, there has been little exploration of the feeling of community.

This collection begins to investigate the affectivity of community—though it by no means ignores the politics, ethics and aesthetics of community. Just as emotions are frequently contagious—hate begets hate, lust sparks desire, gloom and happiness each circulate and propagate—similarly, affect contaminates and intertwines with rational, regulatory and imaginary communal formations.

Three themes then recur in and link these papers. Affect—understood variously as emotion, display and influence—is a central concept throughout these essays. The writing or imagining of community, through cultural performances, symbols, objects and institutions, is also a recurrent theme. While this cultural construction of community is by now familiar, the essays in this collection extend this approach by exploring the lived experience and embodied affects of this invention of community. Finally, many of the papers reflect on some aspect of Australian community, commenting on the forms of exclusion and assimilation of the other in refugee and immigration policies, the regulation of Aboriginal populations and the representations and practices of multiculturalism.

The affect of shame and its functioning in the formation of racialised community in 1970s country-town Australia is the focus of Robyn Ferrell's 'Pinjarra 1970'. In divergent readings Leela Gandhi and Nikki Sullivan consider the affective relations of friendship as a basis for community: Gandhi rejects fraternal friendship as a model of community and advocates instead a positive utopian vision of *philoxenia*, or 'love of guests, strangers, foreigners'; Sullivan considers the 'affective dimension of being-in-the-world' through a story of female friendship and argues that the sharing of community 'as a "we" is the condition for the possibility of each "I"'. Rosalyn Diprose elaborates the metaphors of the touch, the handshake and the donation and circulation of blood to reveal 'the separation and merging of bodies' in the affective, embodied experience of community. The affective connection with country (or land) underlies Katrina Schlunke's consideration of settler community. Fiona Probyn reveals the role of white paternal (dis)affection in the formation of the policy of Aboriginal family separation, while I trace the affectation of harmonious community and the interruption of this idyll in Australian myths and literature.

Affection and disaffection—passions and agonisms—circulate between and across these papers invoking tensions, connections and antagonisms, and creating a writing of disjunctive and interrupted community. This image of a writing of community permeates the collection. Sullivan explores the function of myth and story—and of shared thinking and writing—in creating community. For Schlunke, the proliferation and transformations of books and writing, the collection and dispersal of libraries, reflect the possibility and impossibility of creating hybridity and of unbecoming-white in colonial/settler communities. She, along with Sullivan

and Ferrell, combine theory, storytelling and autobiographical reflection to create a poetics which emulates the entanglement of myth, literature, lived experience and public policy in the constructions of community. I focus on the operation of myth and literature in constructing community, contrasting the mythic Olympic Games opening ceremony with the hope offered by Kim Scott's compelling story of miscegenation, resistance and survival.

Along the way, many of these papers discuss the functioning of racial politics within the formation of Australian community. Gandhi and Diprose reflect on the treatment of asylum seekers in Australia. Ferrell, Schlunke and I recollect the massacres and the ostracising of Aboriginal people within Australian communities. Probyn reveals the occlusion of white fathers and their replacement by a paternalistic state that facilitated the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

To write and to read about community is an experience of community: it is experience of the bonds, the affects, the agonism and the passion that produces community. The essays here question the mythic ideal of harmonious communion. They attempt, instead, to undo the grammar and logics of unity, to unwork and unravel totality, in the hope that strange communities, communities of strangers, may yet be to come.