

# Containing Spectacle in the Transnational Public Sphere

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses the discursive struggle over the reach and containment of spectacle in environmental politics to provide a) case study-based evidence of how, on one hand, transnationally shared environmental awareness and concern, emerging in part through spectacle, is translating into expectations of participation and demands for accountability, and b) how this is already impacting the ways in which environmental politics is being understood and enacted locally, regionally and transnationally. Drawing on recent mediated debate over the Great Barrier Reef, it finds that while the transnational is clearly an ambition for environmental campaigners, and the perception that transnational publics are emerging is already impacting environmental politics, the potency of these publics and their capacity to meaningfully negotiate accountability, is yet to be empirically confirmed. Nevertheless, measures to contain spectacle are providing a potency for a transnational public sphere, even if in reality it is still little more than a spectre.

## **Key words**

Environment, Spectacle, Transnational Public Sphere, Responsibility, Australia, Great Barrier Reef

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### Introduction

Who is affected? Who is responsible? Who should respond, and how? These are bellwether questions for addressing risks and acting politically and collectively (Jamieson, 2010). Public spheres negotiate these questions by providing an opportunity for all those affected to participate in public debate and a space for a diverse range of views to be put and importantly heard. Decision makers are held accountable through processes of publicity and the pressures of public opinion (Fraser, 2014; Volkmer, 2014). Yet, how can responsibility be allocated and appropriate responses determined and demanded when the arenas for politics, law, communications and risks themselves now cross state boundaries; when the relationship between citizens, corporations and decision makers is further complicated by transnational networks of economics and trade, governance and law, and media and communications? As Nancy Fraser noted in her 2007 essay, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere", republished in 2009 and again with critical commentary in 2014, while talk of a transnational public sphere is now "commonplace" in media and communications studies, we are yet to determine how public opinion can be considered legitimate or efficacious under current conditions, when: a) the "who" of communication is a "dispersed collection of interlocutors"; b) the "what" of communication now stretches across a "transnational community of risk"; c) the "where" is "decentralized cyberspace"; d) the "how" encompasses a "vast translinguistic nexus of disjoint and overlapping visual cultures"; and e) the addressee, once theorized as a sovereign state, is "now an amorphous mix of public and private transnational powers that is neither easily identifiable nor rendered accountable?" (Fraser, 2014: 26).

In an attempt to empirically examine the veracity of the "commonplace" identified by Fraser, this article applies a "commonplace" from the field of environmental communications. Here, it is generally accepted that the symbolic and the spectacular have a role to play in the formation of public opinion, even if we still debate the extent of that role and the legitimacy and efficacy of the public opinion and thus accountability that is formed as a result. The carriage of environmental information, the representation and interpretation of environmental meanings and risk, and the

engagement of individuals and publics in environmental debate and possible action; it is a commonplace that spectacular images, actions and people have long played a keen role in environmental political communications more broadly (Anderson, 1997; Brockington, 2009; de Luca, 1999; Lester, 2010a; Cox, 2012).

It is also apparent that the potency of such symbols and spectacle makes them a site of keen contestation and political conflict (Hansen, 2010, 2011; Lester, 2011; Lester and Cottle, 2011). Environmental campaigners and activists have long sought to generate and widely disseminate spectacular images and powerful symbols, whether of impact of environmental degradation or resistance to developments and human-produced risk. Meanwhile, those industries, governments or individuals proposing change and development have attempted to contain spectacle that highlights potential risk, raises concern and allocates blame (Hutchins and Lester, 2015). National and state bounds have been important in the capacity and strategies of political actors in this regard as they negotiate media, political and legal systems to attribute or avoid the attribution of responsibility; reassure customers of the sustainability and security of supply or of commitment of local communities to preventing environmental degradation; or use electoral or economic cycles to force policy and decision making (Lester, 2010b).

Now, as we continue to work to understand how these symbols and spectacles engage publics in such a way that they can impact decision-making, allocate responsibility and ultimately determine environmental futures, we need to also consider how this is happening transnationally and even globally. Ulrich Beck (2006, 2009, 2011) and Manuel Castells (2009), among others (see, for example, Cottle, 2013; Volkmer, 2014; van Leuven and Berglez, 2015), are clear that these communicative and political flows and networks are operating transnationally, promoting awareness of local and global risk. We know that spectacular visuals can play an important role in the development of global environmental awareness and contribute to a sense of ecological citizenship and associated rights and responsibilities (Szerszynski and Urry, 2006; Lester and Cottle, 2009). In relation to what she calls a “shared social imaginary”, Fraser herself prompts: “Consider, finally, the spectacular rise of visual culture, or, better, of the enhanced salience of the visual within culture and the relative decline of print and literature” (2014: 25).

Here then I analyse the discursive struggle over the reach and containment of spectacle in environmental politics to provide a) case study-based evidence of how, on one hand, transnationally shared environmental awareness and concern, emerging in part through spectacle, is translating into expectations of participation and demands for accountability, and b) how this is already impacting the ways in which environmental politics is being understood and enacted locally, regionally and transnationally. I draw on the recent environmental politics of Australia; a torrid affair in which a highly visible struggle has been playing out over the Great Barrier Reef, one of world's most spectacular places. I find that while the transnational is clearly an ambition for environmental campaigners, and the perception that transnational publics are emerging is already impacting environmental politics, the definition of these publics, their expectations of being heard in distant conflicts, and their capacity to promote legitimate, effective and equal debate let alone meaningfully attribute responsibility, is yet to be empirically detailed. The paradox, however, is that the measures to contain spectacle are in fact producing potency for a transnationalized public sphere that in reality is still little more than a spectre.

### **Transnational Environmental Politics and the Spectacular in Australia-Asia**

In order to empirically investigate emerging conditions of transnational public debate and decision-making within the context of cosmopolitan environmental concern and the spectacular, I draw on Kraidy and Murphy's suggestion for a "translocal" approach in which "global communication processes can be understood by ethnographies of the local that nonetheless maintain the global as a counterpoint" (2008, p. 345; see also Hannerz, 2003). Here, the local is foregrounded as a dominant critical reality within environmental politics. Specific landscapes and resources provide minerals, fossil fuels, timber products or the locations for nuclear power plants, and local communities and individuals carry the anxieties and lived realities of damaged environments. Localised threats and concerns coalesce symbolically into discourses of global risk, and discourses of global risk are synthesised for localised decision-making. It is therefore vital to maintain a focus on the interaction of the local within these transnational flows and cosmopolitan forces.

Specifically, I consider the recent mediated environmental politics in Australia. This might be described as "extreme". Before becoming prime minister of Australia in

2007, Kevin Rudd suggested that climate change was the “greatest moral challenge of our time”. Yet, his short tenure as prime minister coincided with the most recent resources boom and an unprecedented level of mining activity centred on coal. Australia largely avoided the effects of the global financial crisis as a result. Climate change mitigation measures have now played a significant role in the downfall of two prime ministers, including Rudd, and a leader of the opposition. The Australian government has worked internationally to promote a “coalition of the unwilling” on carbon minimisation, and imposed a modest reduction target of 5% by 2020 despite Australians being among the biggest emitters of carbon per capita in the world. Within Australia, environmental debate has centred on commercial access to water as the country’s agricultural industry becomes increasingly irrigation dependent. Biodiversity and habitat loss, vulnerability to natural disasters, especially cyclones, droughts and bushfires, and population growth are debated within the context of climate change impact. However, as Australia’s media contains a notably high presence of climate change sceptics and deniers, debate often focuses on the veracity of science and economic modelling rather than mitigation measures (McKnight, 2010; McGaurr, Lester and Painter, 2013). The intersection between indigenous and environmental issues in Australia is complex, particularly given increasing pressure for resource and agricultural access. In recent years, for example, Aboriginal communities have combined with environmentalists to fight a gas plant in the Kimberley region of far north Western Australia, while the conservation of wild rivers on Cape York peninsula in the far north has been legally challenged on the grounds it violated indigenous community rights to develop the rivers and sell water rights.

Access to resources, such as minerals, gas and timber, is set to continue as a major source of political conflict in Australia. Indeed, given Australia’s desire to capitalise on the burgeoning middle classes of Asia, such conflict is expected to intensify. A 2012 government white paper, while optimistic about the national prosperity that the “Asian Century” would bring, acknowledged that a rising trade of raw materials, manufactured goods, ideas and people faced some challenges and risks, among them regional conflict as Asian countries competed for limited resources including water and minerals, increased pressure on Australia’s resources and infrastructure, and environmental degradation that could hinder Australia’s capacity to meet demand (Australian Government, 2012; Lester, 2014). Japan, in particular, has sought to

increase access and security of supply to Australian coal since the Fukushima disaster in 2011 that shut down the country's nuclear power plants. Australia has responded to such pressures by, in the words of newly elected Prime Minister Tony Abbott in his 2013 victory speech, being "open for business". Meanwhile, the Guardian's Australian edition produced "an activist map of Australia, charting environmental protests going on around the country right now. If you know about a protest near you, please tell us ..." (2014a).

Below I examine mediated events that have occurred in relation to the Great Barrier Reef within the context of these transnational environmental, industrial and political pressures. I use an approach that focuses on claims-makers, changing media practices and technologies, and decision-makers, analytically connecting media content with the social conditions and material culture of its production, use and flow (Appadurai 2008 [1990]) and identifying 'modes of symbiosis' (Morley 2009) between different media platforms. Following and analyzing political messages and events as they move through media texts, I identify phrases in which "responsibility" is attributed in relation to the Great Barrier Reef, alongside the political and media spheres in which the attribution is located. Recent empirical research and theorizing (see for example Olausson, 2009; Robertson, 2010; Jamieson, 2010; Cerutti, 2010; Szerszynski, 2010) has identified the attribution of responsibility as a key moment within a public sphere's discursive struggle over environmental harm, and the negotiation and distribution of justice more generally (Sen 2009: 337). Here, the struggle to contain spectacle is keenly fought and visible. This analysis is cross-referenced and supplemented with interviews in Australia and Japan with environmental campaigners, government and industry representatives (including corporate and social responsibility officers, diplomats and corporate communications specialists), and journalists and other media producers.

### *Great Barrier Reef*

Described as one of the natural wonders of the world, the Great Barrier Reef is 2500 kms long and the world's largest coral reef system. It was listed by the World Heritage Committee in 1981 for its range of outstanding values, including being "probably the richest area in terms of faunal diversity in the world" (UNESCO n.d.). The Reef is Australia's premier tourist destination, attracting more than AUD \$4 billion of earnings

each year, and tourist behaviour, from outer reef snorkelling visits to sunscreen use, is monitored for its potential threat to the Reef's health. However, pesticide and soil run off from coastal strip agriculture, coral bleaching, and changes to sea temperature and CO2 levels associated with climate change have dented its status, alongside Australia's as capable and willing to protect its landscapes and biodiversity. The Great Barrier Reef is now described by its management authority as an "Icon under Pressure" (Lloyd, 2014).

A proposal for a massive expansion of coal mining and associated activities in Queensland may yet confirm a new status for the Reef with UNESCO's World Heritage Committee – "in danger". Australia, the world's largest coal exporter, has proposed to expand the sector further by "cutting green tape". Central to this expansion is a proposal for nine mines in the massive Galilee Basin deposit 400kms inland from the Reef. The Carmichael mine, owned by Indian-based company, the Adani Group, and approved in July 2014, will produce 60 million tonnes of coal a year (Adani, 2014). MacMines Austasia, now solely owned by the Meijin energy group, one of China's largest producers of coal and a major supplier of coal products to Japan (through Mitsubishi), the US and Korea, has approval to produce 70 million tonnes of coal a year with an expected mine life of 40 years. Coal from both mines, along with others awaiting approval, most of which include joint investment from Japan, will be transported to massively expanded shipping facilities at Abbot Point, on the central Queensland coast, where dredging will allow ships transporting the coal to make their way through the reef. A change of state government has left it unclear how and where the three million cubic metres of dredge spoil will be dumped – the initial proposal for within marine park boundaries was replaced by a proposal to dump on nearby wetlands, valued by local indigenous communities. The new state government, while quickly reassuring investors of its commitment to the coal industry, has now proposed a third land-based site.

While the management authority for the Reef, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, reflects on what position to take on this, it has also warned of the impact of extreme weather events on the reef. The reef has long coped with cyclones and floods, but recent extreme weather events like those that occurred in 2010-11 have caused unusual levels of damage. Flood waters running into the shallow reef lagoon can form, according to the GBRMPA, reduced-salinity plumes laden with nutrients, sediments and agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides, which stress and kill some of

the Reef's animals and plants, while encouraging productivity in others. Either way, the Reef's ecosystem is disrupted. Tropical cyclones can cause extensive damage to individual corals and to the structure of the Reef. According to the GBRMPA, between 1995 and 2009, approximately 34 per cent of all coral mortality was caused by storm damage. Cyclones such as the Category 5 Yasi that hit in 2011 can have impacts that affect large areas for decades, if not centuries (GBRMPA n.d.).

Both the spectacular nature of the Reef and the stresses it is under frame media texts that attribute responsibility across various institutional, political and geographic arenas. Writing in August 2014 in the UK's *Guardian* newspaper, for example, high-profile Australian scientist and environmental campaigner, Tim Flannery, attempts to assign rights and responsibility to distant publics:

If the Carmichael coal mine is a global story, and the Great Barrier Reef a global asset, then the issue should not be left to Australia alone to decide. The citizens of the world deserve a say on whether their children should have the opportunity to see the wonder that is the reef. Opportunities to do this abound. Petitioning national governments to put climate change on the agenda of the G20 summit, to be held in Australia in November this year, is one. Pushing governments to play a constructive role at the 2015 climate negotiations in Paris is another, as is letting the Australian government know directly that everybody has a stake in the reef, and that it needs to act to secure its future. The Great Barrier Reef does not have to die in a greenhouse disaster like the one that devastated the world's oceans 55 million years ago. But if we don't act decisively, and soon, to stem our greenhouse gas emissions, it will. (Flannery, 2014)

Here, Flannery draws attention to the global and transnational elements of the case; defines the means for influencing international decision-making bodies; and by invoking the concept of an 'everybody', 'citizens of the world' and a global 'we', suggests the existence of a legitimate and potentially efficacious transnational public sphere (Fraser, 2014). He is also assigning responsibility to a global 'we': 'if we don't act incisively, and soon...'

Greenpeace clearly spoke to the "distant" when it warned that "any dumping of dredge spoil on the World Heritage-listed reef will be an 'international embarrassment'

and akin to ‘dumping rubbish in the Grand Canyon’” (ABC, 2014). It further invoked the spectacular when it produced an advertisement that accused the Australian Government of killing Nemo – in a blender no less. As reported by the *Daily Mail*:

The super-cuteness of Nemo, the beloved clownfish made famous in Pixar's delightful film *Finding Nemo*, is being used to highlight what Greenpeace says is a potential environmental disaster on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Greenpeace Australia Pacific has released a controversial advertisement which features a clownfish stuck swimming in a blender as part of its campaign to stop what it claims is a “monstrous new mine” in Queensland, which will require a shipping terminal in the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. The 30 second video, which was uploaded on YouTube on Tuesday, has since gained more than 29,000 likes. (Daily Mail, 2014)

Such appeals manifest across a range of local, national and international forums. Legal and governance structures are key spheres for drawing attention to the spectacular while publicly attributing responsibility, particularly given the well-established relationship between these institutional arenas and journalistic reporting practices. By January 2015, court cases against Adani and its Carmichael mine were underway in Australia. One was brought by the local Queensland Mackay Conservation Group, which claimed the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the Reef had not adequately been “taken into account” when the mine was approved (News, 2015). In some reporting of this case, however, “consequence” was expressed in terms of impact on the coal industry, and “responsibility” placed on the conservation group for disrupting the industry and the federal government in approving the mine. A second case was brought by the Conservation Action Trust, an Indian environmental group, which was reported as being the first such challenge in Australia mounted by overseas activists. According to the *Guardian*:

Debi Goenka, an executive trustee of the CAT, said: “The coal from Carmichael, when burnt in India, threatens the health and livelihoods of poor, rural people in India. These people can’t afford the electricity that will be generated – all they’ll get will be damage to their health and the air, water, land and natural resource

base on which their survival depends.” (Guardian, 2014b)

Adani Mining’s head Jeyakumar Janakaraj reportedly responded by claiming that activists were using lies in their anti-mining campaigns. “I don’t think they can sleep at night because they are using falsehoods.” He drew on established CSR-type discourses of responsibility to restrict activist claims when he said: “We are doing what is right. We are responsible, we are changing the lives are millions.” (Courier Mail, 2014).

The struggle over the spectacular shifted into the political arena in November 2014 when US President Barack Obama made an official visit to Australia. In a speech at the University of Queensland, Obama told the audience the “incredible natural glory of the Great Barrier Reef is threatened”. He located responsibility for the Reef with the nation state, and responsibility for climate change on nation states collectively. While calling for a “leapfrogging” of coal in developing countries, he also specifically queried the management of the Reef and claimed the right of his daughters and their children to see the Reef in fifty years time. Australia’s mismanagement meant they too were among the affected, he inferred. Both the Queensland and Federal governments responded angrily. Claiming there “was an issue” with the President’s speech, the Australian foreign minister, Julie Bishop, said: “We are demonstrating world’s-best practice in working with the World Heritage Committee to ensure that the Great Barrier Reef is preserved for generations to come... I think President Obama might have overlooked that aspect of our commitment” (Australian, 2014). Queensland Premier Campbell Newman claimed the Great Barrier Reef was the state’s best asset and “is pretty healthy now”.

Secondary appeals to consumers to alter their buying habits provide another sphere for the struggle to contain the spectacular and responsibility. “Fight for the Reef” is a campaign jointly established by WWF-Australia and the Australian Marine Conservation Society ([fightforthereef.org.au](http://fightforthereef.org.au)). In April 2014, it achieved substantial publicity by winning the support of iconic US-founded ice cream company Ben & Jerry’s, now owned by global retail giant Unilever. Under a campaign banner of “Reef Scoop Tour”, the company encouraged customers to “Scoop Ice Cream, Not the Reef”.

We'll be travelling across our fair land, scooping out free ice cream and raising awareness of how the Reef is at serious risk from intensive dredging, mega ports

and shipping highways, and encouraging Australians to join us. (Ben and Jerry's, n.d.; see also Unilever n.d.)

Like Tim Flannery, WWF-Australia's CEO Dermot O'Gorman invoked the notion of global shared concerns and responsibility when he described Ben and Jerry's involvement as reflecting "the concern of people around the world about how the reef is being managed. Ben & Jerry's' tour is a timely reminder that the world expects the Queensland and Australian governments to lift their game" (Brisbane Times, 2014).

In response, the Queensland Government suggested Australians boycott Ben & Jerry's ice cream and referred the company to the Australia Competition and Consumer Commission. As in earlier examples of government and corporate responses, the Government's reaction prioritized notions of "truth" and "fairness" as more important manifestations of "responsible" behaviour. This, for example, from the Queensland environment minister:

Ben & Jerry's can campaign on whatever issue they like but as a company they have an obligation to tell Australians the whole truth and nothing but the truth... Australia has strict laws to protect consumers against misleading and deceptive behaviour. These mistruths could cost jobs and development in regional Queensland. It's irresponsible behaviour from a company that should know better. (Vogler, 2014)

And this from Brisbane's *Courier Mail*:

Ben and Jerry's ice cream has been hauled over the coals by the Queensland Government for supporting WWF's "propaganda" save the Reef campaign. Environment Minister Andrew Powell wants Australians to boycott the American company, saying it has damaged the reputation of the Reef and jeopardised jobs and tourism dollars. "Another company has signed up to the campaign of lies and deceit that's been propagated by WWF," Mr Powell said. "The only people taking a scoop out of the reef is Ben and Jerry's and Unilever. If you understand the facts, you'd want to be boycotting Ben and Jerry's." (Courier Mail, 2014a)

The irony of the government's suggestion of a boycott of Ben and Jerry's was not lost on Queensland researchers Kerrie Foxwell-Norton and Marcus Lane (2014), who pointed out that meanwhile the federal Australian government had proposed legislative change to Section 45DD of the Australian Consumer and Competition Act removing exemptions for environmental and consumer campaigns so activists could no longer implement secondary boycotts as a protest strategy. As Foxwell-Norton and Lane write: "Perhaps the Queensland Government missed the memo" (2014).

The principal site for the discursive battle over the Reef has been UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, and specifically meetings in Doha in June 2014 and Bonn in June 2015. While the Australian and Tasmanian government "accepted the umpire's decision" in relation to the "humiliating" rejection by the World Heritage Committee of their attempt at Doha to delist 74,000 hectares of Tasmanian forests (ABC, 2014a), it was reported that Australia's department of foreign affairs had established a dedicated taskforce to ensure that the Reef was not listed as "in danger" by the UN (Guardian, 2014c) when it next met in Bonn. Officials and ministers were dispatched around the world to lobby key countries over the issue, and international journalists and key decision makers were invited to Australia to visit the Reef themselves. Australian ministers also raised the issue with member countries of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee on an opportunistic basis (Guardian, 2014c). For the *Australian* newspaper, lobbying of the World Heritage Committee indicated the existence of "deep international hostilities" over protection of the Reef. Under the heading "Reef rift exposed as campaign goes global", it reported:

The federal government has banned dumping in Great Barrier Reef Marine Park waters and the Queensland government has promised to extend the ban to the remaining World Heritage boundaries that lie within state jurisdiction. The federal government is unlikely to be able to appease green groups, however. The government and resource groups say the true motive of the global campaign to protect the reef is to end coalmining, an issue that also lies at the heart of the UN's response to climate change. Greenpeace listed three concerns with the plan considered a key document in the UNESCO deliberations: it says it still allows coalmining, is silent on climate change and fails to address cumulative effects on the reef. (Lloyd, 2015a)

Nevertheless, the attempts to avoid responsibility for the Reef's deterioration appeared unlikely to succeed if these reported comments from a member of the Portuguese delegation can be taken as representative:

The major cause for the reef degradation is not only a consequence of extreme weather conditions and climate change as Australian Government documents seem to imply, but also due to human causes and interference... We are concerned that not only Canberra is handing over environmental approval powers to the Queensland State Government on a matter of such high national and international relevance, but also other measures that have been taken that can deteriorate the health of the reef even more. (ABC, 2014b)

Finally, after the change of state government in Queensland in early 2015, it was reported that "tough new regulations" to tackle the amount of pollution flowing onto the Great Barrier Reef would be considered, with the state's first ever "reef minister" vowing to strengthen protections to avoid the ecosystem being listed as "in danger" by the UN (Guardian, 2015). Meanwhile, the new Government's decision to again move the dredge spoils dumping site was described by journalists as a "symbolic change" and an indication of continued support for the development of the massive coal deposit. Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk was reported as saying her government "sends a clear message: we can protect the Great Barrier Reef, and we can foster economic development and create jobs" (Lloyd, 2015b). The new government, however, was still attempting to shift responsibility, with journalists reporting that a government department was examining claims that Adani's "chequered environmental and legal history" was grounds to revoke its status as a "suitable operator" for Australia's largest coalmine. The department was reported to be considering an Environmental Justice Australia (EJA) report that questioned how Adani Mining continued to pass its "character check" in Queensland given the alleged role of related companies in "serious legal violations and extensive environmental harm in India" (Guardian, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

If Nancy Fraser is right that "the ground rules governing trade, production and finance are set transnationally, by agencies more accountable to global capital than to any

public” (2014: 23), then perhaps a transnational public sphere in which impact and accountability can be collectively negotiated, allocated and accepted is unlikely to ever fully emerge. While this case study shows that the transnational is clearly an ambition for environmental campaigners and the perception that transnational publics are emerging is already impacting environmental politics, the definition of these publics, their capacity to promote legitimate, effective and equal debate, and their expectations of being heard, in distant conflicts, let alone their capacity to demand accountability, is yet to be empirically confirmed in detail. However, I would suggest that if we continue to follow the “commonplace” in environmental communications research – that is, the generation, circulation and contestation of the symbolic and the spectacular – we have a good chance of revealing at least some of the conditions under which meaning-making, attributing responsibility and collective decision-making are taking place transnationally.

The debate over the Great Barrier Reef provides evidence that a discursive struggle over spectacle is taking place transnationally. Campaigners are regularly “speaking” to the distant, attempting to invoke a transnationalized public sphere. They are doing this when they identify the means for local or international engagement and action for news audiences; when they illustrate the potential reputational and market risks of investment and doing business in Australia to international corporations; when they provide evidence to distant consumers that local communities at the site of procurement have not agreed to a “social license” or support the resource extraction; or when they lobby international decision-making organizations, such as the World Heritage Committee, via spectacular media campaigns.

It is evident when they draw comparisons with distant spectacular places, such as the Grand Canyon, but also point out the rights of others to the Reef as global citizens. They explicitly allocate responsibility to these “global citizens” to act to remind Australian governments and global institutions such as UNESCO of their accountability in relation to the Reef. The spectacular frames this “chain of responsibility” as it travels out from Australia and back again. While the outcomes are rarely certain, the aims of applying pressure to Australian governments and UNESCO are clear and largely dependent on public opinion and voter choice in Australia, and the capacity to influence member country representatives at UNESCO. Elsewhere, the struggle to contain the

spectacular is intense yet more haphazard as messages cross cultural, language and geographic boundaries to indeterminate audiences.

Further evidence of emerging transnational publics is provided by activity in Australia's courts. While there is nothing new in an Australian environmental group taking legal action to challenge the basis on which a government has provided development approvals, the case brought by the Indian environmental group, the Conservation Action Trust, is understood to be the first of its type in an Australian court, and clearly identifies Australian coal as a source of pollution and harm to distant others, in this case, in India. That Australia is also a major supplier of coal to China, where air pollution has entered crisis levels, and to Japan, where there is growing citizen concern about air pollution transported from China, suggests that such actions might become more common in future. Adani's response that it is acting "responsibly" by encouraging economic growth that will improve the lives of "millions" is also likely to be echoed as more corporations are forced to defend their international investments and procurement activities, and seek to share responsibility.

The level of transnationalism of individuals and corporations involved in the conflict over the Reef is notable. Barack Obama's invocation of his and his descendants' stake in the Great Barrier Reef moved climate change mitigation from being the responsibility of "others" and "all" (Olausson, 2009; Robertson, 2010) to the Australian government and its electors, a move vehemently fought by Government ministers in a range of national and international forums in the days that followed. Ben and Jerry's, and parent company Unilever, faced intense opposition for their involvement in the Fight for the Reef campaign, with legal and reputational issues raised by Queensland government ministers in an attempt to contain the clear transnational capabilities of the corporate giant.

Meanwhile, the growing transnational nature of investment in Australia's coal and related industries makes environmental campaigning increasingly complex. Adani Ports, for example, the key player in the Abbot Point development, has major shareholders from eight European, Asian and American countries. Overall, while the US and UK remain the major sources of foreign direct investment stock in Australia, Japan (now 10% of the total), Singapore (4%) and China (3.3%) are rapidly catching up. The networks of public diplomacy, trade and investment are expanding, alongside the expectation of foreign governments and corporations that the Australian government

will listen and respond to their concerns about security of supply, and the capacity for this to be disrupted by local environmental conflict. Nevertheless, nervous corporations might be visible in Japan, but changes in consumer or political behavior are not so clear. Japanese environmental activists might focus their activities on Australian and other transnational issues, targeting the companies investing and procuring internationally, but their memberships are likely to be only in the hundreds and their impact – either direct or mediated – on the broader Japanese public and its attitudes remain minimal to date (Lester, 2014).

It is here, in the disjuncture between the real and imagined, we find notable similarities to other mediated conflicts over resource procurement in Australia. As outlined in detail elsewhere (see, for example, Lester, 2014), terms such as “sabotage” and “terrorism” are used regularly within the Tasmanian forests conflict to describe campaigns run by forest protesters that directly target Japanese corporations buying Tasmanian timber products. Recent heavy-handed attempts to contain such campaigns include the proposal to outlaw secondary consumer and environmental boycotts (Denholm, 2013), legislation to massively increase fines and introduce mandatory jail sentences for environmental protests that impact workplaces (Martin, 2013), and a proposal to revoke visas of international environmental protesters (Colbeck, 2014), whose participation has been key to getting campaign messages circulating within international blogs, social media and news coverage. In New South Wales, the Japanese-backed Whitehaven Coal faced continued national and international publicity over hundreds of arrests in the Leard State Forest where its \$767 million Maules Creek coal project is located (see, for example, Daily Telegraph, 2014). This company also suffered a temporary fall of AUD \$300 million from its stock price when a protester – since convicted – circulated a fake media purporting to be from an Australian bank that it was withdrawing financial support for the development (Hall, 2014). In turn, Japanese companies have expressed deep concern about unwanted publicity, delays and uncertainty, placing pressure on the Australian government to respond to guarantee security of supply (interviews June 2014). And much is at stake in the close relationship; in April 2014, the countries signed a free trade agreement, which will provide Australian products with preferential access into the tightly controlled Japanese market.

It is clear then that a transnationalized public sphere now appears as a spectre in the imaginary of industry and governments. They expect distant publics to emerge, and

are taking sometimes extreme legislative and communicative measures to restrict any potency that might be achieved. This is evident in legislative measures to prevent protests that generate spectacular images that flow transnationally on the web and cross cultural and language barriers; the banning of consumer boycotts of Australian products that are associated with or perceived to have caused environmental harm; and the suggestions of limiting visa access to international protesters. Less formal attempts are also made to contain environmental politics and its accompanying spectacle within state bounds, so that a state or nation's reputation is protected, nervous transnational corporations are presented with a stable investment environment, potential tourists can feel comfortable that their travels are not supporting unethical or environmentally damaging states, and distant consumers can purchase goods without being confronted with images of bleached coral or logged forests. This is where the struggle to contain spectacle is at its rawest and least visible, and where it is imperative that we work to identify the mobilization of constraints and reach within contemporary environmental debate and politics.

A complicated story is unfolding; on the one hand, there are new complex and multidirectional flows of meanings, images and messages across the internet; on the other, we note the continued presence and viability of the old restraints to free flows of information that have always existed when it comes to environmental campaigns and concerns. Language, time zones and cultural factors remain a factor, as does the well-worn paradigm of questioning the credibility and legitimacy of debate that is based on spectacle or emotion. Does this constitute polite "civil society"? Do environmentalists who peddle the symbolic have any place in decision-making processes in a contemporary civil space? Nevertheless, it is clear that the spectacular is crossing language and cultural divides, conjuring a spectre of a transnational public sphere where "distant others" demand a say, and that is both a real ambition and a real threat.

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