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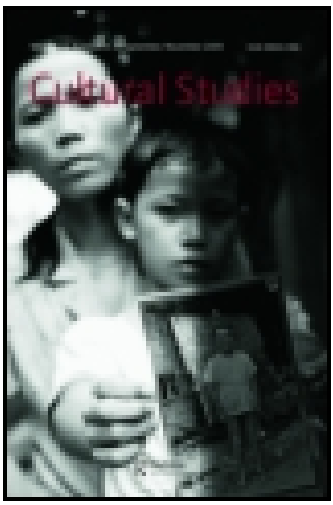

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Dependencia Meets Gentle Nationalism

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Toby Miller

DEPENDENCIA MEETS GENTLE NATIONALISM

The dominant historiography of Australian cultural studies assumes that the south-east of the country, where its major population centres are located, is crucial to the field's formation. That account also problematizes nationalism. This article offers a counter-narrative, based in dependencia theory. It argues for the centrality to cultural studies of two peripheral cities in Australia where Graeme Turner made his mark, and of his particular contribution, 'gentle nationalism'.

Keywords Graeme Turner; Perth; Brisbane; Australian cultural studies; *dependencia*; gentle nationalism

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Introduction

This volume is a critical celebration of Graeme Turner's contribution to cultural studies. As such, it belongs to a particular genre, namely the *Festschrift* or *liber amicorum*. The rules of such writing are fairly straightforward, though they are not generally codified: honour the faculty member in question and take up some of his or her ideas. In that spirit, I'm not going to cite works produced by other folks that form the dominant alternative to my version. So the historiography of Australian cultural studies to which I refer is, perhaps maddeningly, left up to readers to find, should they so wish. Maybe I'm creating this object from a straw man, as one says in the USA, or an Aunt Sally, in a differently gendered British tradition.[1]

This article offers a counter-narrative (if anyone still uses such terms) to the usual ones. It argues for the centrality to cultural studies in the 1980s of two quasi-peripheral Australian cities where Graeme made his mark (Perth and Brisbane) and similarly peripheral institutions nested within those cities (new universities, institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education) along with the work of people who travelled far and wide to transcend parochial norms.[2]

My second argument is that key faculty members who established this initial formation developed and played with cultural nationalism. Such commitments are easy to mock and criticize, but may function quite differently from how they are portrayed. Like many of his era, Graeme's is a (comparatively) gentle nationalism, in contrast to the anti-nationalism that is assumed to be crucial for Australian cultural studies.

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I take him to be both indexical and constitutive of each tendency – a figure from the margins and a critical agent of gentle nationalism. To make my case, I draw on *dependencia* theory and offer an account of his path-breaking work on Australian literature and cinema, *National Fictions* (1993a).

Core and periphery

The basis for my analysis is perhaps the most powerful and enduring theoretical export to have emerged from the Global South: *dependencia*. *Dependistas* took their cue from Raúl Prebisch (1950, 1982), whose theory, research and leadership inspired the Economic Commission for Latin America and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). UNCTAD became the most important international institution problematizing imperial domination. It provided decolonizing nations and recently freed ones with a forum to query the Global North's dominant narrative of development through national institutions and the free movement of capital.

The conventional version of development peddled solipsistic accounts of world politics, economics and culture that extrapolated from mythic explanations for the growth of the Global North. Its economic guide was VietNam War bombing advocate Walt Rostow (1960) and its representatives in political science included his fellow Cold Warriors Lucien Pye and Sidney Verba (1965).

By contrast, UNCTAD, Prebisch, and their kind worked with notions of dependent underdevelopment and structural inequality to explain why many parts of the world had not achieved the economic take-off that was predicted and prescribed by orthodox social scientists. *Dependistas* focused on the expropriation of natural resources and human labour by wealthy nations from poor ones thanks to their historical, military, governmental and commercial dominance and called for a New International Economic Order and a New World Information and Communication Order (Higgott and Robison 1985, Higgott 1993). Their critique of capitalist modernization maintained that the transfer of technology, politics and economics had become unattainable, because multinational corporations united business and governmental interests and power to regulate cheap labour markets, produce new consumers and guarantee pliant employees (Reeves 1993, pp. 24–25, 30).

For radical intellectuals formed in the 1970s, these were key terms of debate, along with feminism, ideology, hegemony and class struggle. But despite *dependencia*'s analytical force, it never attained hegemony in policy debates, and *dependistas* have taken different turns since. Some moved towards the New International Division of Labor to account for the economic growth enjoyed by East Asian states that mobilized their reserve armies of labour to manufacture goods for the Global North (Fröbel *et al.* 1980). Others were attracted by neoliberalism, because of a desire to elude, by any means possible,

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the horrors of dictatorship and the financial punishment meted out to leftist governments by international markets (Cardoso 2005). A third group favoured a fuller-throated Marxist anti-imperialism (Amin 1997). The theory was also criticized for focusing on state and economy to the exclusion of culture (Mignolo 2012; but see Wallerstein 1989).

Despite this splintering, *dependencia* continues to invigorate debate among progressives. And its awareness of spatially and historically induced inequality offers a means of understanding semi-peripheral, semi-metropolitan nations such as Australia – wealthy but weak, worried and weary, arrogant yet anxious, vexed while vested. The country has dependent cultural relations with the USA and UK and economic ones with those nations plus China and Japan. Born from post-imperial protectionism and dependent for its development on being a farm and a quarry, Australia embodies the Dutch Disease (Ebrahim-Zadeh 2003) so fully that it generated the Gregory (1976) Thesis, which explains that capital investment and state reliance on natural resources preclude the development of industries that add value through the talent of labour.

A variety of cultural analysis has used dependency theory to understand both Australian society and its importation of popular culture (Gray and Lawrence 2001, Cunningham 2008). The centre–periphery axis of power is expressed in terms of capital formation, population, politics and cultural production. Australia's south-east corner hosts its supreme court, seat of political power, media networks and banks, for instance. And it's significant that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has long referred, both dismissively and organizationally, to the 'BAPH states', i.e. BrisbaneAdelaidePerthHobart.

Graeme's scholarly trajectory embodies Australia's place in the world system. His studies took him from Sydney to Canada (Queen's University in Kingston) then the UK (the University of East Anglia in Norwich); a familiar *Bildungsroman*[3] in which heroes and heroines move from the suburbs to downtown to campus, then from a marginal academic country to more powerful ones. Other examples among the founders of Australian cultural studies include Stuart Cunningham going from Brisbane to Montréal before Madison; Noel King leaving Newcastle for Kingston then Adelaide for Cardiff; Bob Hodge ex Perth to Cambridge and Norwich; Stephen Muecke and Anne Freadman heading to Paris after Melbourne and Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton doing so from Sydney; John Frow departing Canberra for Buenos Aires, Ithaca and Heidelberg; Jennifer Craik moving from Canberra to Cambridge; and so on.

What did these travellers encounter and bring back on their return? Foundational figures and debates from Habermas to Halliday, discourse to deconstruction, Foucault to Frankfurt, Lacan to Lyotard, Bourdieu to Baudrillard, Derrida to Deleuze and Birmingham to the BFI. A recombinatory verve saw them look to blend rather than choose between tendencies, formations and schools, thereby evading such banal oppositions as *Screen* versus the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies or comp. lit *contra* comm. studies.

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Such movements are colonial: they assume in some way that real knowledge – or benefit – exist elsewhere, but that while such folks may leave in order to learn, they will probably also return, whether or not that was their original intention. Because within, they remain what they were born into, however hard to define and appreciate that may be (in Graeme's case and those above, an Australian). It reminds me of Latin Americans undertaking graduate education abroad then going home: Néstor García Canclini (Buenos Aires–Paris), Anamaria Tamayo Duque (Medellín–Riverside), Daniel Mato (Buenos Aires–Brighton), André Dorcé Ramos (Mexico City–London), Jesús Arroyave Cabrera (Barranquilla–Piscataway–Miami), Paula López Caballero (Mexico City–Paris), Bianca Freire Medeiros (Rio de Janeiro–Binghamton), Ismail Xavier (São Paolo–New York City), Akuavi Adonon Viveros (Mexico City–Paris), Olivia Gall (Mexico City–Grenoble), Paulina Aroch Fugellie (Mexico City–Amsterdam), Bruno Campanella (Rio de Janeiro–London), Luz María Sánchez (Guadalajara–Barcelona), Ana María Ochoa Gautier (Bogotá–Bloomington), Aimée Vega Montiel (Mexico City–Barcelona), Erna von der Walde (Bogotá–Frankfurt–Colchester), Rodrigo Gómez García (Mexico City–Barcelona), Guillermo Mastrini (Buenos Aires–Madrid), Guillermo Orozco Gómez (Guadalajara–Cambridge, MA), Benjamín Mayer Foulkes (Mexico City–Brighton) and Claudia Arroyo Quiroz (Mexico City–London).

This pluralism also operated in reverse, among people who moved to Australia, learning about local conditions while holding onto their backgrounds. Consider such names as Horst Ruthrof, Vijay Mishra, Jon Stratton, Tony Bennett, David Rowe, David Saunders, Sophie Watson, Ghassan Hage, Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Lesley Stern, Jim McKay, Pal Ahluwalia, Eric Michaels, Bill Routt, Ron Burnett, Hart Cohen, Alan Mansfield, Gordon Tait, Simon During, Colin Mercer, Noel Sanders, Krishna Sen, Michael O'Toole, Albert Moran, David Wills, Elspeth Probyn, Ien Ang, Alec McHoul, Rita Felski, Susan Melrose, and the Johns Tulloch, Fiske, and Hartley.[4] Each of these folks seemed to appreciate or identify with Australianness in all its polysemic prolixity, and to do so with alacrity and wit as well as critique. And most taught at second- and third-tier schools.

An awareness of core–periphery inequality as per UNCTAD et al. runs through the rich exchanges of this formation. Folks who departed temporarily to test or improve themselves, or who arrived from elsewhere, may not have seen Australia as suffering in the way that classic subjects and objects of empire did, but they recognized and experienced national and international core–periphery relations of inequality, due to their addresses, accents, genders, phenotypes, delights and emotions. That enriched their analyses of class, race and gender in a demographically small nation that was encased in a settled, settler whiteness, but located in a very different part of the world geographically, linguistically, religiously and ethnically. In reaction to this, some (though not all of them) saw a contingent utility in nationalism, of which more below.

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As noted above, these intellectuals mostly worked outside the metropoles of Australian higher education, renowned Research One schools such as Sydney, Melbourne and the Australian National University. Graeme was eventually claimed by the University of Queensland, one of the so-called Sandstone Six (the nation's first universities, one in each state capital). But like almost everyone I mentioned above, Graeme spent a lot of time in an historically subordinate sector that was more open to media, communication and cultural studies than these storied locales.

Until a supposedly meritocratic reform in the late 1980s that in fact did nothing to alter the class divisions of higher education, there were three types of degree-granting institution in Australia, each of them public. (Although education was, and remains, constitutionally the creature of the states, in keeping with the US example, policies governing universities and the funds financing them have mostly come from the Federal Government.)

The three Australian forms were universities, institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education. The first of these groups was meant to create new knowledge and provide undergraduate instruction across the arts, sciences and social sciences as well as doctoral education. The second emerged to undertake highly applied tasks, notably the production of engineers. The third was principally responsible for teacher training. Unsurprisingly, the humanities and soft social sciences in these vocational institutions were subordinate components of sectors that were themselves subordinate – offering the Australian equivalent of breadth requirements. The reforms that merged the three groups a quarter of a century ago have not really erased these distinctions other than in name, although everyone now hands out PhDs and is 'excellent'.

During the 1980s, humanities fields within institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education – to repeat, rather peripheral elements of rather peripheral institutions – were crucial to the emergence of cultural studies, as were two universities (Griffith in Brisbane and Murdoch in Perth[5]) that were 1970s upstarts situated outside the south-eastern corridor of Australian political-economic power. These various schools were dedicated, in keeping with their genesis, to what used to be called 'problem-solving'. It was crucial to their promotion of interdisciplinarity rather than the parthenogenesis of traditional academic subjects.

As such, they recruited people from the cutting edge of cultural studies. For example, Fiske left Britain for the Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University), where Graeme also worked. Kress, King and Muecke taught at one of South Australia's federated colleges of advanced education. Frow, Melrose, Mishra, O'Toole, Moran, Bill Green, Mitzi Goldman, Johnny Darling, Rod Giblett, Niall Lucy, Stern, Ruthrof, Felski, Hodge, Hartley, Ang, McHoul and Tom O'Regan were at Murdoch. Ian Hunter, Bennett, Cunningham, McHoul, Stratton, Saunders, King, Sylvia Lawson, Pat Laughren, Jonathan Dawson, Dugald Williamson, Moran, Mick Counihan, Stern and O'Regan were

at Griffith. Like Graeme, Cunningham moved to Brisbane's Queensland Institute of Technology (now Queensland University of Technology).

As part of these peripheral trajectories, the founders of Australian cultural studies were heavily involved in teaching undergraduates rather than graduates, and generally published without articulation to research grants. They were closer to the productive marginality of cultural studies in the US communication studies of big mid-western state schools than the headline-grabbing but derivative textual analysis proliferating in the Ivies.

In keeping with that lineage, we might consider here the creatively synthetic side of Graeme's publishing output, which exemplifies his experience teaching large undergrad classes. The popular and effective textbooks *British Cultural Studies* (Turner 2002) and *Film as Social Practice* (Turner 2006) have been revised and reprinted, and his edited collection on cultural studies (Turner 1993b) is also influential.

Scholars like Graeme frequently blended appearances in leading overseas journals and monograph series with participation in and administration of alternative, activist publishing projects that were neither for profit nor recognition, such as the late lamented *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* (http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/serial/AJCS/AJCSindex.html). Scholarly specialization, self-promotion and parthenogenesis were not goals, as far as I could tell. These folks made their careers and names by accident, collaboration and productivity rather than design, desire, calculation or competition. Put another way, the scientific metrication of pedagogic and publishing quality and quantity and accompanying *assujettissement* as 'early career', 'junior' or 'research' academics that govern so much of contemporary higher education did not determine their activities. Rather, a can-do spirit of invention, brilliance and commitment did so. Teaching and research were inextricably linked, and hierarchies among faculty were resolutely disobeyed.

The conditions of existence for such tendencies formed a peculiar conjuncture: Murdoch, Griffith and some of the institutes and colleges were planned and built in the late 1960s and early 1970s – years of plenty. But their doors opened around the same time as oil shocks and stagflation broke down the post-War Keynesian consensus, ushering in austerity. The fiscal crisis meant that jobs at established universities were hard to find for emergent Australian intellectuals. Then the anti-university policies of the Thatcher government drove UK-based scholars abroad. The combination of these two forces was paradoxically bountiful for the periphery. They let young people in young institutions (somewhat) loose beyond the romper room. Courses were taught, often collaboratively, by folks whose knowledge arched across ethnomethodology, literary theory, art, political economy, performance, women's studies, public policy, communications, history and philosophy. Filmmakers operated alongside critics, ethnographers next to semioticians, *littérateurs* with political economists. People enjoyed the contestation of differing perspectives. Buying

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out of teaching – or not teaching at all – was inconceivable and teaching without requiring students to do large amounts of reading was implausible. Work that abjured simultaneous theorization and empirical grounding was unthinkable.

And these folks were driven by an implicit leftism. They were mostly pro-democratic, pro-popular-culture feminist socialists, and they liked, as much as they doubted, the institutions of learning and pleasure that employed them and they were deconstructing. Core–periphery inequalities were constitutive components of these formations, interpersonally, intellectually and institutionally. How odd what I have just written may seem today, when the new right of cultural studies parlays the creative industries, film people favour apolitical formalism, cybertarians celebrate every Australian firm in the newer media while abjuring elderly and middle-aged ones, and leading scholars cannot find the large lecture halls on campus.

Gentle nationalism

The other crucial element that connected many, if not all, these thinkers, was their interest in the Australianness – whatever that might mean – of literature, film and television. They took their distance from US and the UK jingoism and were closer to critical Mexican cultural nationalism's wry, ironic, yet respectful stance towards foundational mythology and its cynical use by élites (García Canclini 1982).

Nationalism is routinely and rightly damned for its maleness, brutality, warmongering and other failings. But it has another history, as well, of longing for self-determination and resisting imperialism. The nation has been a core of post-colonialism, providing a means of registering claims for inclusion in both narratives and institutions.

I became aware of cultural studies and indeed Graeme's work in 1986, when his first book, *National Fictions*, appeared. In this last segment of the article, I'll focus on that volume's second edition (1993a). It sold many copies over an extended period in a successful career shift from topic-book to textbook, via the remarkable blend of original thought and exegetical expertise that is associated with Graeme.

It's strikingly apt that *National Fictions* underwent a visual transformation, from a K-Tel *Happening* '72 cover bursting with flags and a photo-montage of canonical masculinities, in edition one (figure 1) to edition two's Magritte/Escher-like painting by Julia Ciccarone (figure 2) of a prost(r)ate man lying on his carefully chiselled floor, pulling a mountainous drape over himself from across a window pane that seems to be part of the bush. This is a movement from mo to pomo in the substitution of a supine, counter-realist figure for jingoistic kitsch, binding urban style to rural ideology.

Graeme's cultural nationalism is always conditional, careful and open-ended. His revisions underscore the contingent nature of semi-peripheral

nationalism – why it can be democratizing and enabling as well as exclusionary and repressive. Graeme wants to know the morphology and life-course of the nation as they are realized in fictional narrative, a project that measures the country's desirable qualities against its less appealing ones. So his 1993 preface drew attention to the masculinist limits *and* utility of the bush *ethos* and how the increasing velocity of global cultural exchange brings into question stories of national identity.

National Fictions acknowledged the nation as a productive, not necessarily a good or bad object. This is somewhat counter to popular fabulations of cultural studies, which are woven around an anti-chauvinism that conventionally distinguishes itself from such affiliations. Graeme recognized that the concept of the nation, whilst always up for grabs, can be usefully redeployed in cultural policy, queer theory, racial diasporas, alternative television, small cinema and globalization.

National Fictions was before its time and set a standard. It spoke of an 'Australian accent'. This was not an expressive totality that encompassed the entire demographic reality of Australian life, a sign of organic harmony. Such claims are always forced and mystificatory. Rather, it was a metaphorical encapsulation, and the passage of time between 1986 and 1993 loosened Graeme from his formalist self and keen to identify the tropes that encouraged Australians to 'accept our social powerlessness' and 'inequities and divisions' as 'cause for concern' (1993a, pp. xiii–xiv; also see Turner 1994). This is a gentle nationalism.

The working assumptions underpinning *National Fictions* shift between a universal structural basis to narrative and the specificity of Australia as an axis of articulation and inflection, a site of 'values and beliefs' that take eponymised form in the book's title. This series of movements between the generic and the particular, the global and the local and the laws of narrative and their give-and-take (law and lore, *langue* and *parole*) provides a structural homology for the 'individual and society' debates that were conducted over utopian notions of Aboriginality in nineteenth-century European social theory, where human ideals were located in a lost past rather than an imagined future. For just as the Edenic primordialism of 'the first Australians' has long exercised cathectic extrapolations theory (Miller 2002), so the lost innocence of 'man' has been nostalgically positioned by local criticism in Australia's countryside, an organicist metaphor of equality, honesty and the coterminous ownership, control and practice of production.

National Fictions argues that film and literary criticism and history have extended these tropes into Australian binaries that encompass rurality and urbanism/nature and society and are outcomes of invading settler peoples making their way in a harsh landscape. But these binaries are again quite European. The book rightly invokes Romanticism as a way of conceptualizing an artistic and social disharmony of exile and discovery, of penury and pleasure.

This metaphor contrasts with the class-laden dross of urban existence. The exotic is brought to bear on the definition and survival of the familiar, such that

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Australianness is found in the desert as well as the south-eastern seaboard. The natural environment's 'callous indifference' is a *leitmotif* (Turner 1993a, pp. 25, 28–29, 49).

National Fictions carefully traces the lineage of Australia's pastoral: authentic::urban:inauthentic divide while avoiding simplistic entrapment within it. Graeme is dubious about a critical and authorial preference for the rural as a proper site for metaphysical speculation. He sees equally useful stories emerging from the urban or post-apocalyptic world, often connected to the carceral history of the state. That is the site for civilizing influences and policies in the eyes of most critics, enacted on a slate of subjects, forced migrants, who are horrified by their testing-ground and conditions. The legacy of this history is a dialectic that mythically endorses 'the inevitability of subjection' even as it signifies freedom from the baleful Euro past and present that birthed and developed this escape/incarceration (1993a, pp. 31, 51, 54–55, 74–75). Graeme's appreciation of carceral life as central to society and ways of understanding it provides a valuable application of theorists as distinct as Michel Foucault and Angela Davis.

So, in some sense, he sets the pattern for Australian cultural studies seeing whiteness, confronting the alterity of the land and reminders of its 'clearance'. The nationalism he and others described may have been brutal, but their critical engagement with it supported a gentler, more self-aware form, just as their location in less populous and powerful parts of the country is an implicit metonym for Australian higher education and their own field.

Conclusion

Graeme Turner is a major figure of cultural studies, probably Australia's most-read exponent. His achievements and influence arch across numerous fields, and his syncretic innovations have enchanted – or at least focused – generations of undergrads. The fact that he does new thinking and synthesizing is a product both of years standing in front of hundreds of engineers and their vocational kind forced into humanities courses, and of the urge to meaningfulness and originality. In turn, those achievements derive from the contingencies and exigencies of core–periphery relations within Australian higher education. And the thoughtful, gentle nationalism that underpins Graeme's engagement with violent traditions of racial and gender domination permits a critical renovation of theories and commitments that will not disappear, despite myths of anti-nationalism, globalization and technological determinism.

And cultural studies in peripheral Australian institutions? It no longer relies on or thrives in them. Cultural studies has been successfully incorporated via the standing and hard work of Graeme and others into the Cultural Studies Association of Australia (http://www.csaa.asn.au/) and major institutions such as the Australian Research Council (http://www.arc.gov.au/media/releases/

media_27aug09.htm) and the Australian Academy of the Humanities (http://www.humanities.org.au/Fellowship/DisciplinarySections.aspx).

The older universities caught on and caught up. The stars I have listed generally left marginal places, where promotion was tough and they and their loved ones sometimes felt isolated. New funding schemes and managerial fashions militated against the cluster hiring necessary to regenerate what had been lost. As with many formations, it was transitory, fleeting even – but its mark can be seen in Graeme's work as a scholar, teacher and advocate.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to the editors for helpful criticisms and to an anonymous reviewer, who let me know that the essay's 'scholarship is pretty minimal' and its prose 'breezy'.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1 My distinctive knowledge of Australian cultural studies is active up to 1993, when I was last a resident.
2 Subsequent cohorts have tended to study domestically, perhaps missing in the process the engagement with other languages and norms that were so crucial to this earlier group, while the belated but significant institutionalization of cultural studies in the nation's more venerable universities has seen some earlier pioneering places lag behind the status their avant-garde innovations merit.
3 Perhaps it would be appropriate to term this an Erziehungsroman.
4 As with other lists I have made here, I apologize for the exclusion of any other significant actors.
5 I worked at both of them during this period and am now employed by Murdoch for seven weeks a year.

Notes on Contributor

Toby Miller is 20% a Professor of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd and 40% Sir Walter Murdoch Professor of Cultural Policy Studies at Murdoch University, 20% Profesor Invitado at the Universidad del Norte. He lives in London. We can follow his misadventures at tobymiller.org.

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