

“Modern in Every Respect”: The 1914 Conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science

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Abstract: To recognize the accomplishments of imperial settlement, the BAAS, the umbrella organization founded in 1831, began in 1884 to locate some of its annual conferences outside Britain. Canada hosted the first of these congresses and two more (1897 and 1909), and South Africa held one (1905); Australia’s turn came in 1914. This massive endeavor, held at sites throughout the country, required several years to plan and mobilized a range of resources from the Governor General to the local motorcar clubs. Throughout the new Federation, the event was anticipated as a test of Australia’s modernity, its rise, in the terms of the day, from *terra nullius* to participation in scientific and social developments at the highest global standard. In particular, Australian universities sought full, not provincial, partnership in high-level circulations of information, methodology, and personnel. The timing was unfortunate, of course. The war began while the conference met, creating logistical and diplomatic crises, and, more importantly, a shift—or collapse—in the optimistic envisioning of imperial affiliation and participation.

Keywords: Scientific congresses, Modernity, Eugenics, Imperial networks, 1914

Early in 1914, the young anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski asked his friend Witkiewicz to join him on a trip to a conference in Australia. For Malinowski, a rising star at the London School of Economics, the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) offered important career opportunities. For Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, a despairing artist, Australia represented escape: “Only the thought of traveling to some savage country offers any hope” (Witkiewicz 81-82). A century later, the elements of psychological projection in such a claim are obvious; they would have seemed so in 1914 as well, but we know from other expressions of the time, from *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Rite of Spring* (1913) for instance, that “some savage country” also meant something more objective, an earlier historical period or a geographical space in the current world. In some places, because of recent settlement or contact with “primitive” societies, the emplacement of Western Civilization appeared shallowly rooted and sometimes contested. Witkiewicz’s theatrical acceptance, then, could not be simply dismissed, since it echoed the widely-held judgment of the time, and spoke particularly to the

anxieties of recent establishment and distance from Europe that characterized the British settlements of North America, South Africa, and Australasia. Among the direct strategies for countering that popular view, those societies campaigned for recognition by the BAAS, the umbrella organization that most directly represented, and often regulated, both the spirit and the matter of modern scientific progress: staging an annual conference of the association in Australia became an early goal of the Federation government of 1901, and its efforts came to fruition in 1914.

Malinowski's senior colleague Everard im Thurn regretted the term "savage" but applied it all the same, to substantiate Australia's enrolment among modern societies. Invoking a diffusionist model of development, maintaining that culture originated at a few centers and spread outward, im Thurn reminded the BAAS delegates in Australia that "at an early stage in the history of that race some new idea was implanted [...] in the ancestors of civilised folk, which caused these henceforth to advance continuously, [...] while those others, those whom we call 'savages,' were left behind to stumble blindly" ("Australian Meeting" 68).¹ As diffusionists saw the world, race was the overwhelming factor in determining receptivity to civilization; by 1914, they envisioned a world filled with inferior ethnicities and dying races of indigenes, a world in need of segregation and eugenics, and made it seem all but inevitable. On the enlightened side, there was little question about the general inclusion of white settler societies among "civilised folk," but the challenges they presented were clear: clear in social terms because their recent and marginal emergence permitted instability, and clear in scientific terms because the Law of Entropy demonstrated that dispersal in any system resulted in a loss of energy. The stakes were high for Australia in terms of imperial prestige, public image, and concrete policy, so that a congress of important visitors, a group which the *Times* had earlier described as "the upper thousand of English science," was not simply an academic durbar. Rather, the BAAS meeting would provide controlled settings for expert observation of Australian achievements and potentials, through which the "tyranny of distance," or the degree of attenuation between Home and Away, could be evaluated in both scientific and scientized social terms. The results were expected to be positive, of course, but, as we will see, the rhetoric of critical presentation and observation offered high levels of reciprocal engagement and feedback. I will first characterize this complex undertaking and the various expectations brought to it by the visitors and their Australian hosts. Next, because the sciences were quickly changing in the early twentieth century, I will examine fundamental shifts of discourse networks from asymmetric colonial diffusion toward commonwealth cooperation. Finally, I will examine how the coming of war in 1914 sharply redirected progressive commitments and made earlier visions of modernity difficult to recover.

Visitors and Hosts

The BAAS was founded in 1831, organized in sections representing at first the traditional disciplines and later, gradually, the social sciences (by 1914, twelve in all). The group as a whole met annually in a British city other than London. After half a century, when conferences included several hundred papers and a thousand attendees, the Association began to consider overseas venues, a broadening of scope that, as we will see, represents a wider shift from colonialism toward commonwealth. Before Australia, the Association held four overseas conferences: at Montreal in 1884, followed by Toronto in 1897, South Africa in 1905 (both Cape Town and Johannesburg), and Winnipeg in 1909.² These were massive undertakings. The logistical arrangements for transporting and accommodating 300 to 400 visitors demanded levels

of comfort high enough to emphasize the hosts' achievements, and the demonstration of civic pride involved thousands of people in public lectures, large formal receptions, meetings with science and trade organizations, and academic ceremonies. For Montreal, the *Times* noted that "Provision has been made for free passages and free living for 50 of the officials," while the Canadian Pacific Railway offered "a free special excursion to the Rocky Mountains" (Rayleigh), a venture highlighting settlement and technological conquest as much as spectacular scenery. With similar objectives, the 1897 *Programme of Local Arrangements* for Toronto ran to forty-three pages of events and social notices: presentations of honorary degrees (9), commemorative religious services, and a garden party at a private estate for 400 guests (12). In fact, the density of the programs indicates basic changes in relationships: when attendees in 1905 were offered reduced fares to South Africa "on the grounds that the enterprise was 'thoroughly in accord with the spirit of Imperialism'" (Dubow 173), the scope of the proposal itself made it clear that notions of imperialism had evolved very far.³ If the transportation of so many prominent people to South Africa was meant to bolster the tenuous cultural truce that followed the Boer War, the 1914 conference in Australia was intended to support the complex Federation. Both of these political reinforcements pointed toward the new orders of unification and progress that science promised empire in the new century.

How, and how broadly, had Australia progressed from a secondary, colonized society? How had the new nation so developed its material and intellectual resources that William Bateson, the BAAS president, could praise it as "modern in every respect" (*Report* 454)? With regard to the early twentieth century, such questions are obviously framed by the First World War, which was erupting just as the BAAS gathered. Citations of Gallipoli and the Somme are valid, certainly, but tend to produce an exceptionalist modernity, conditioned by triumphal violence at the expense of other measures. Even as the armies mobilized, however, the conference hosts offered strong examples of modern organization and efficiency, of collective purpose and civic imagination, demonstrating these values in more generous, more inclusive, and farther-reaching ways. While some visitors, like Malinowski, might be uncomfortably aware of differences between Europe and Australia, others arrived to find continuity and much that was familiar—language, currency, the weather in Melbourne. The host universities were solidly established with state-of-the-art science facilities (Sydney in 1850, Melbourne in 1853, and Adelaide in 1874); their quality supported Bateson's contention as a geneticist that determinant material remains stable, resistant to environment and the "mere ephemeral effects of conditions of life" (13). For Bateson and many of his colleagues, the measure of Australian modernity would be the degree to which continuity had enabled the settler society to move quickly through the initial stages of social evolution: to demonstrate, that is, how little its character had diminished by replicating in *terra nullius* the most sophisticated structures of current British culture and "sharing to the full in the science, knowledge, and ideas dominating the older countries" (454).⁴ Australia's assertion of civilization over savagery could be gauged by its progress toward objectivity, or ability to rise above direct, frontier response to those "ephemeral effects." The comfort of cities and the regularity of railway schedules were part of that demonstration, but as evidence, not as institutional proof. The more precise objectivity lay in the scientification of social concepts: in the progression, for instance, from farming to agriculture, and thence to university departments of agronomy; or in the transformation of Aboriginals from the warriors of Governor Davey's Proclamation into wards of the state, and thence into topics of anthropology—a race in need of study, everywhere said to be "gradually but surely dying out" (Laughton 81).

The stakes were high, and so were levels of self-consciousness among the governments and universities that packaged the invitation to the BAAS. Back in 1884, the *Times* had praised Montreal while doubting sufficient progress elsewhere; although “good work” appeared in “at least some of the Australian colonies,” the BAAS could “scarcely hope ever to hold a meeting either in Australia or India, nor even, we fear, in South Africa.” Yet by 1905, the South African plan to convene in several venues made a virtue of geography; the Australians built upon that success, anticipating the 1914 visit as an opportunity for a full accounting of accomplishment and potential throughout the Federation. Planning for the conference began in 1910, involving the federal and state governments, the Australasian AAS (founded 1887), and the sponsoring universities. A. C. Rivett became the national organizing secretary, and eventually devoted fifteen months of full-time work (*Report* 682).⁵ In all, over 300 delegates were expected, most from Britain but some, by stipulation, from nations outside the Empire; a few were women, some in the classical disciplines of science but more in the sections of Educational Science and “Physiology (including Experimental Pathology and Experimental Psychology)” (*Report* xxvii).⁶ In late July, an advance party of roughly eighty delegates would land in Western Australia, and the presentation sessions would take place first in Adelaide (8-12 August), then Melbourne (13-19) and Sydney (20-26). After that, organized groups would visit Queensland and Tasmania, and one of the homebound ships would call at Darwin. The federal government allocated £15,000 for travel, calculated as round-trip first-class passage for 150 delegates.⁷ State governments offered special trains, while cities arranged meeting facilities, social events, and housing. The New Zealand government appropriated £2000 for a post-conference convocation, and made a point of inviting Americans and Canadians (*Report* 687). Each delegate received specially-annotated maps, itineraries, excursion schedules, presentation abstracts, and baggage tickets; in all, some 24,000 separate documents were distributed (*Report* 690).

Anticipating distinguished visitors but also grasping the opportunity for documented self-examination, the Australian government and each of the convening states prepared descriptive handbooks; these surveys of historical, sociological, and economic data were thorough and detailed enough to become “standard works of reference” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1 Apr. 1920). The handbook for New South Wales, typical of these endeavors, is 621 pages long, divided into sections on social and natural sciences, and subdivided into chapters on such topics as dairying, marine invertebrates, and the University of Sydney. Some of the discussions emphasize structural differences with Britain, suggesting that new critical structures might serve Australian experience better than European standards. The chapter on literature, for instance, makes a case for judging a nascent cultural community more for its potential than for its accomplishment to date:

The literature of New South Wales is, critically speaking, more interesting if regarded as a matter of general tendencies rather than of individual achievements. There are a few figures who stand out from among their contemporaries, and these can claim to be judged on the strength of their own performances. But there is also a considerable and growing number of writers of lesser note, men of one book, men who perhaps have not even attained to the dignity of a book. [...] together they often illustrate a phase in the development of literature in this State which is worthy of mention. (MacCallum 76)

The handbooks noted bad practices as well as happy projections. John Monash, in the *Handbook to Victoria*, labeled the railway system “a scandal, of which Australia is justly ashamed” (192). State railways, radiating outward from each capital, used several different track gauges; the situation would allow for civic breakfasts when the scientists had to change trains at state borders, but in terms of modernity and federation, the kinds of vision that would produce seamless transcontinental movement, the gauge differences represented an insular and limited past. Problems of literature and engineering alike, with shifting terms and concrete problems of distance and terrain, illustrate the complexity of the Australians’ efforts to locate their modernity by realistically engaging Bateson’s “conditions of life.” The capacity to adjust methodology registers important claims of self-determination for Australia among the newer nations.

Thorough arrangements, vastly greater in scope and expense than the annual Association descent upon a British city, indicate the deep expectations brought to the conference by the Australian hosts. The British visitors were similarly motivated to recognize Australia’s accomplishment in scientific and educational terms, but also in larger cultural and political frameworks. Small and large, the arrangements involved thousands of people, from the Governor General to the local automobile associations (*Register* 27 May 1914), whose “motor cars were waiting at Spencer-street as each train drew up, and the scientific visitors and their belongings were quickly whirled away to their respective places of domicile” in Melbourne (*Leader* 22 Aug. 1914).⁸ Some of the delegates stayed in hotels, but others were placed with local families, a plan that at the same time reduced expenses and demonstrated the high standard of Australian domestic life. In Perth with the advance party, Malinowski stayed with Ernest Le Soeuf, a zoo curator, and his wife, Ellen, whose fig jam won over the stand-offish guest (Young 290).⁹ Henry Balfour, director of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, lodged with the Dean of the Anglican cathedral and his family. Balfour’s diary appreciates the sociability and effort of the hosts:

Wed. [July] 29: In afternoon went with the Dean to the Zoo [...] Went round with the Curator [...], who is most enthusiastic + showed off the animals well. [...] Dined with the Dean at a restaurant, as there was a juvenile party at the house, to celebrate Miss Kathleen Mercer’s 17th birthday.

Along with local sightseeing, the visitors were offered an extensive schedule of excursions outside the cities. From Perth, the advance party toured mining operations and Aboriginal communities; with this group, Malinowski, who had already written a book about native culture, was able to meet his subjects for the first time.¹⁰ Overnight loops from Melbourne took in all of Victoria, possibly with an unplanned benefit: “indeed, the men of learning from overseas may well be inclined to forget for a moment, in contemplation of the forest glades of Marysville or the mountain slopes of Warburton, the war-laden atmosphere that awaits them in the cities” (*Leader* 18 Aug. 1914). These efforts suggest dynamic changes in relations between Britain and Australia, an increasing mutuality of relations within expanding scientific communities and also, by reflection, in the the wider societies.

Networks

If the Australians played anxious hosts, the visitors likewise betrayed some urgency. British science broadly acknowledged a number of crises, as roughly outlined by J. N. Lockyer, the editor of the journal *Nature*, in his first column of the new century. First, he says, Britain had

fallen behind in technological competition—to the point, for example, that Germany already dominated the chemical industry and the United States was gaining ground in steel. Second, British scientists were pressured toward profitable innovation, not basic research, in a still-familiar argument about the public value of science. Third, and leveraging both previous points, the German and American university systems were expanding rapidly, and were broadening their science programs far more quickly than British schools.¹¹ Unlike Germany and the US, however, Britain had no need to locate new resources or create new markets: the Empire existed already. Efficiency as well as sentiment brought British and Australian interests into alignment; measures that appealed to the British as means for sustaining power likewise appealed to the Australians as blueprints for continuing development within existing patterns of circulation.

The BAAS thus traveled to Australia with an intention of rebalancing professional relationships large and small. All of Lockyer's observations suggest that imperial discourse networks—circulations of power and money, but also of methodology and employment—were functioning inefficiently. The broad corrective had already been recognized: to modernize the alliances already produced through colonial settlement, redefining imperial bonds of communal identity as commonwealth networks of collective interaction. In 1884, the *Times* had summoned the BAAS, that “Imperial Parliament of Science,” to “extend its functions and endeavour to exercise the same effective influence on the promotion of science in other parts of the Empire as it has undoubtedly done in the past in the Mother Country” (8 March). The language implies mutual benefit, as the *Times* hoped, for example, that the British Association might organize a dynamic network of imperial offshoots, benefitting all by competing collectively with the Germans and the Americans.¹² Simultaneously, then, outworn patterns of colonial domination would be succeeded by more open models, avoiding both redundant work and destabilizing separatism. This realignment was not an invitation to equal partnership across the board, although impulses in that direction were growing in some quarters. More generally, it recognized that British interests were often symmetrical with Australian or Canadian views; even an older model such as diffusionism could acknowledge common areas of address whose factors might nonetheless develop at unequal speeds and intensities, and whose results might vary according to location and surrounding circumstances. The new possibilities were crudely expressed by the *Sunday Times* of Perth, pleased that the scientists would visit “the richest goldfield in the world” instead of wasting their time inspecting “fossilized fish on the coast” (“Ne'er-do-Weel”). Western Australia already had a tertiary School of Mines (1902), while its vast, state-of-the-art mining operations presented Australians as active contributors to global networks of commerce and industry, offering modern advancements in geology, chemistry, and metallurgy. With everyone on best behavior, the visitors complimented the hosts, who in turn properly admitted their shortcomings: “the roads were in bad order [...] but the visitors described the trip as the most interesting they had had in West Australia. This morning the visitors will be tendered a civic reception in the Kalgoorlie Town Hall” (*Kalgoorlie Western Argus*).

Breakfast in a mining town may seem unimportant except that this was the trip of a lifetime for many of the Europeans, and the visit brought recognition by distinguished professionals to many of the Australians. Such broad interactions, in complex patterns marked prominently by the mobility of their terms—with many participants literally on the move—suggest that the participants in 1914 were beginning to observe their experience through analytical models that preferred dynamism and interchange over the fixed values and reductive time-lines described by im Thurn. Dynamic models allow for multivalent, polycentric development, rather than referring

to baseline constants of origin or hierarchy; growth occurs through reiteration and feedback, and is gauged by speed of transmission and frequency of occurrence. This conceptual shift is exactly what the BAAS and the Australian hosts intended to reinforce: in late imperial networks, as David Lambert and Allan Lester note, “these relations were always stretched in contingent and non-deterministic ways, across space, and they did not *necessarily* privilege either metropolitan or colonial spaces. They remade both metropolitan and colonial places in the act of connecting them” (8). The focus shifted, then, from differences and disproportions to the reiteration of similar functions throughout the entire system, like mathematical fractals (Kittler 60). That is, a small-scale event, such as Miss Mercer’s birthday party, revealed the complex interchanges within larger cultural dynamics, such as scientific progressivism and shifting gender roles. Malinowski had already noted the value of these iterations in his book about Aboriginal social structures:

the essential features of the individual family, as of all other social institutions, depend upon the general structure of a given society and upon the conditions of life therein. A careful and detailed analysis of the family life and of the different aspects of the family unit in connection with other social phenomena is therefore necessary. Such an analysis enables us to describe the said unity in a complete and exact way. (*Family* 6)

“Complete and exact” are research goals, not guarantees, but Malinowski stresses here that the recognition of networks forms the basis of modern critical work.

Through promotion and activity alike, the BAAS overseas conferences pressed the overwhelming epistemic shift of the century, the instantiation of “science’s cultural authority as the legitimating sign of rationality and progress” (Prakash 7). An air of optimism thus pervades these events, as science becomes the preferred expression for projecting civic progress. The first two meetings, sponsored by McGill University (1821) and the University of Toronto (1827), acknowledged achieved academic excellence, and more broadly emphasized Montreal and Toronto as complex nodes connecting familiar urban establishments with the unfamiliar and exciting potential of new towns and open land (Worboys 174). The Winnipeg meeting in 1909 was a longer stretch. Rising from the prairie, the University seated its first six professors of science only in 1904, and graduated its first science students in 1907 (Klassen 411). More to the point, Winnipeg positioned itself as an up-and-coming city, a gateway both to the vast Canadian West and to the new century, “seeking political, social and cultural recognition to match its new economic standing” (Worboys 176). The conference there was not a celebration of accomplishment but a hopeful annunciation, confirming the future within imperial discourse networks. Five years later, Australian universities similarly marked both their inclusion and their rich future by conferring honorary degrees, about a dozen in each host city; the visitors were expected to reciprocate by participating in a nearly endless round of public functions. In due course, then, “Professor Penck, the eminent geologist” from Berlin, toured South Maitland and pronounced it “the greatest coalfield in the Southern Hemisphere, and one of the greatest in the world” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 7 Oct. 1921), while “Dr. Luigi Luiggi, a distinguished engineer and irrigationist,” toured the dam at Burrinjuck, NSW, and “stated that he had never seen one carried out so cleverly amidst so many difficulties and with such complete success” (*Irrigation Record* 8).¹³ Malinowski, in a minority opinion, might visit the University of Western Australia

and scoff that “nobody knows anything” (Young 291), but in 1914 that school was all of three years old, and Malinowski’s alma mater, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, had a head start of five and a half centuries.

Increasing reciprocity and collaboration strengthened institutional networks of exchange and made the idea of networking more attractive at the personal level of “imperial careering” (Lambert 24). The easier circulation of individuals might suggest that “an Imperial university post was a post on the British circuit” (Keller 31), but the circuit had lost that orientation as Canadian and Australian universities demonstrated equivalency with British ones.¹⁴ Examining such movements with less attention to diffusionist centers in fact expands our “insight into the dynamic trajectories and networks of knowledge, power, commodities, emotion and culture that connected the multiple sites of the empire to each other, to the imperial metropole and to extra-imperial spaces beyond” (Lambert 24). The interconnection of postings and research sites, further, produced individuals who grasped, or thrived on, complex functions and global range. Most of the BAAS delegates, of course, had made the long voyage to Australia, by way of Egypt and Ceylon or across North America, and overshadowed all the while by the anxieties of coming war. Some planned to do research in Australia during conference excursions or afterward.¹⁵ Perhaps the most brilliant career trajectory at the BAAS belonged to Ernest Rutherford. In New Zealand, he studied at a university twenty years old; he went on to Cambridge, and was recruited by McGill in 1898, “to form,” he said, “a research school in order to knock the shine out of the Yankees!” (Campbell). Beating the Yankees meant filling the gap that Lockyer saw in British science education, and the gambit worked: in Montreal, Rutherford did the work on radioactive half-life that won a Nobel Prize in 1908. He was knighted in 1914, deliberately in advance of his visit to Australia and New Zealand. Balanced by “enough democratic tendencies to see the humorous side of this business” (Rutherford 290), he went on to the presidency of the Royal Society and a peerage.

Strengthened institutionally and individually, the professional networks looked beyond civic functions, toward the serious re-conceptions that underlay Locker’s scheme for modernization. While the visitors understood their duties at mayoral breakfasts, this was the age of heroic science: they lived in a world of extraordinarily rapid change and massive new force, much of which they had provoked and sometimes literally named in their own image—a world measured in roentgens, curies, and gigabecquerels.¹⁶ Accepting the scientized notion “that empires were not just structures, but also processes” (Hodge 17), they were accustomed to envisioning an uncertain future. Change would produce feedback throughout many overlapping networks, imperial ties among them, and reiterating feedback would continuously alter the basic structures of scientific discipline and social function. An example: the BAAS first admitted Anthropology as a field, Section H, at the 1884 meeting at Montreal, and thus both organized new professional networks and encouraged, through field work, the development of powerful, decentered models for cultural analysis, the overthrow of diffusionism. In 1914, the Association recommended founding a chair of anthropology at an Australian university, the strongest acknowledgment of performance and potential. Interrupted by war, this took a decade, but after that Australia could train researchers within discourse networks anchored at Sydney and Melbourne, and those centers could reiterate their own networks both internally and throughout the Commonwealth, further breaking up imperial centrality (Hodge 17).¹⁷

Other disciplines found similar benefit in the re-orientation of discourse networks. In modern town planning, for example, factors of recent establishment, often seen as disadvantages of settler societies, could be brought into play as encouragements of flexibility and experimentation. Although systematic town planning “was practically an unknown subject” for the Australian public before the BAAS visitors expounded upon its value (*Register* 6 June 1924), interest grew quickly. The Economics Section devoted an entire session to discussing community development and “the possibility of bringing existing towns into conformity with Garden City principles” (Davidge 481), but the settler societies, with populations growing internally and through immigration, had the advantage over Europe of less existing structure and greater demand for expansion. As interest grew in conjoining newly-built areas with covenanted parkland, “the pioneer settlements in both Australia and New Zealand were in many ways practical forerunners of the Garden City ideal” (480), and offered feedback to European developers in creating the suburban future.¹⁸ Likewise, the BAAS astronomers projected efficiency and mutual increase through reconfigured networks. Potential collaboration in the Southern Hemisphere was a specific factor in the choice of South Africa for the 1905 conference, and the optimism carried through to Australia.¹⁹ Members of the astronomy section visited existing and planned observatory sites and produced “several memoranda” of support (*Report* 715).²⁰ More than that, their suggestions rewrote the discourse of the field: southern observatories were seen as partners with Greenwich and Mount Wilson, providing the entire network of exchange with data—star maps and geodetic observations, for example—that were unavailable in the global north. Again, the factor of distance was turned from hindrance to definitional advantage, emphasizing that networked cooperation was more beneficial than either continued British domination or its counterpart, a restrictive nationalism that would cordon off Australian science.²¹

War

The cluster of expansive overseas conferences ended in Australia. Years later, Daisy Bates recalled the shock of emerging from conference preparation and learning that the war had begun.

I was busy with the compilation of my notes and deep in the joys of anticipation when one day, as I walked along King William Street, my attention was struck by the newspapers announcing the declaration of war—England and Germany, Russia, France and Belgium, the whole world, in turmoil. My own thought had been so remote from international concerns for so long that I stood aghast. (136)

The advance party had already reached Western Australia when the Empire declared war on Germany, but the main body of delegates learned the news at sea. The officers’ first business in Adelaide, then, was to meet with the government and offer to cancel or modify the proceedings. As with Shackleton’s Antarctic expedition, steaming southward at the time, scientific order and prestige were held apart from the war, and they were signaled to carry on (Spufford 252-253).²² In those early days, with the Europeans recalling the summer they had left, there was no reason yet to disagree with the Melbourne *Argus*: “When the rumblings of this colossal upheaval have all passed, the results of these peaceful deliberations will remain to mark another mile post on the high road of scientific advance.” Nonetheless, the physical distance from Europe compounded the visitors’ personal anxiety. Malinowski, from the Austrian part of Poland, was concerned that he might be deported (Young 292).²³ His friend Witkiewicz again externalized his condition: “there in Europe truly great things are happening [...] and I’m here looking at

Australian flowers in the company of Englishmen and I am helpless” (Witkiewicz 97). Those flowers and Englishmen would have been enough for Leonard Cockayne, a botanist in Wellington, who wrote to Bower after the entire New Zealand delegation canceled its trip: “It was one of the disappointments of my life that I had not the pleasure of meeting you [but] it did not seem a time for even scientific junketing” (Thomson 402). When possible, a light tread avoided offense, as Balfour gratefully found on an excursion to the Blue Mountains. “My bedroom at Hotel shared by Dr Goldstein of the Observatory in Berlin (a physicist), a pleasant + genial old gentleman. We did not discuss the European situation!” (22 August).

Official discussion was unavoidable, however, concerning the nine delegates who were suddenly classified as enemy aliens; the claim that science transcended politics still held, and they “were enabled to participate,” at least after questioning (*Record* 697). Malinowski’s *bona fides* was recognized easily. As for the Germans, Albrecht Penck and the anthropologist Felix von Luschan received their honorary doctorates as planned, but Johannes Walther, a geologist, skipped the ceremony because war anxiety “made public appearances almost unbearable to him” (Scott 33-34). Two other Germans were of military age and were detained under loose conditions after refusing to offer “their parole that they would not become combatants” (Scott 34). One of them, Peter Pringsheim, a physicist and military reservist, was allowed to pursue research in Melbourne (Rutherford 296)—until the other, the anthropologist Fritz Graebner, wrote a letter that offended the censors, and both were more closely restricted (Scott 34-35).²⁴ Penck, already under suspicion of spying, was found on departure to have incriminating maps and drawings; he was transported to England, and returned to Germany the following year (Twidale 170).²⁵ Soon all plans were affected, as the delegates’ homebound ships were requisitioned. New arrangements were found, and the *Report* notes with relief that while “these eleventh-hour alterations created a difficult situation [...], it was ably and generously dealt with” (708). By then, of course, everyone was additionally anxious about German warships. Rutherford wrote gaily that “the *Emden* & the *Karlsruhe* appear to have had a happy time on some of the trade routes” (297); undeterred, he made his triumphal journey to New Zealand, and returned to England by way of North America.²⁶ In a nice gesture before they left Australia, the delegates collected £614/8 for the Patriotic Funds (*Report* 703-704). All reached home safely. It was early yet.

On 25 August, Malinowski delivered his paper, “A Fundamental Problem of Religious Sociology. “Is there,” he asked, “a pronounced dualism in the social and mental life of the savage, or, on the contrary, do the religious and non-religious ideas and activities pass and shade into each other in a continuous manner?” (Malinowski 534). Like other scientists, Malinowski saw modernity through dualism, with its processes of objectification and categorizing at the very basis of distinction between the savage mind and the modern. With the war, however, the dangerously “continuous manner” of totalizing and ideological entrenchment was quickly becoming the order of the day: that is, the descent of Europe into “savagery” had less to do with outright violence than with the the collapse of conceptual boundaries into “all-out” conflict. The first conceptual casualties of the war, then, included the death of scientific neutrality, the claim that the discourse networks of science did not overlap those of politics and the military. The war now redirected scientific processes to coincide with other intentions, whether general inflections of national interest or specific responses to military demand. Of course, that overlapping had been latent all along in the twin aims of the BAAS to recognize modernity and strengthen

imperial networks, but often-honorable expressions of generous objectives and benign progressivism had suppressed the cynicism of power. By the end of the conference, however, and certainly by the end of the year, political urgency became scientific patriotism. Not many agreed when, early on, “German scientists like August Weismann and Ernst Haeckel publicly renounced their British academic awards and honorary degrees” (Becker), but the tone changed very quickly as the professors began to tell one another of colleagues and students they had lost. “Nobody thought that such rare skills should be husbanded. As a result, in the early years as many brilliant physicists were killed in action as brilliant poets” (Keller 206).

On 1 December 1914, the physicist Hans Geiger, then a German officer, sent greetings to Rutherford through an American friend: “He asked particularly to be remembered to you and sent his kindest regards to you and your family” (Rutherford 304). Personal gestures might be made, with strain, but the public face of science grew far grimmer. Some newspapers denounced Arthur Schuster, who succeeded Bateson as BAAS president, for his German birth (“Germany”); Schuster’s address to the 1915 conference, “The Common Aims of Science and Humanity,” described a Germany maddened by materialism. Enrolled in the war effort, scientific networks pulled into alignment with military discourse, and the commonwealth nodes that had recently made such progress toward reciprocity deferred to command structures that had little to do with redistributing power. Not only were German scientists declared the enemy, but a terrific effort was made to demonstrate that German scientific practice itself was inimical to the open inquiry and free expression that characterized pure knowledge. Ideological factors exaggerated procedural differences, and “*Nature* published the polemics of well-known scientists as though they were the results of carefully considered experiments” (Becker). Such developments had been much on the mind of Bateson in his 1914 presidential address, where he warned against the subordination of science to nationalism. Bateson’s particular topic was the projection of human improvement—he had coined the term “eugenics”—and he properly foresaw that scientific development under the sway of invidious social goals might be taken too far, producing “awful mistakes” (*Report* 29).²⁷ Nor was Bateson merely restating the obvious in observing that “whether we like it or not, extraordinary and far-reaching changes in public opinion are coming to pass.” For a good scientist in a civic role, it was easy to see that the collective paradigms of “public opinion” were shifting massively, and that scientific purposes were following those shifts. As they welcomed the BAAS conference, Australians embraced its modernity and the promise of replacing backward-looking diffusionism with the flourishing of new centers. There was great hope in “Australia Helping Science,” as the *Adelaide Advertiser* proclaimed, but soon enough it became clear that, with the war, the reconfiguration of networks would henceforth include the discursive overlapping of nationalism and scientific progress. That linkage would only harden during the decades of recovery and hardship that followed, as Australia increasingly directed the scientization of social programs into the defensiveness and isolationism of White Australia, and farther still from the claims of cooperation and benevolence that had measured the hopes of science early in 1914.

Notes

¹Diffusionism dominated the public view of the time, but was losing credence among professionals. For example, the American anthropologist Franz Boas had, by the turn of the

century, “rejected claims that all societies necessarily followed the same course of development or that all societies necessarily moved from simple to more complex conditions” (Patterson 47). Nonetheless, many who challenged diffusionism celebrated the emulation of European values in the settler societies as a measure of progress.

²See Worboys (170): only two meetings took place overseas after 1914, suggesting that goals and relationships had changed; the period under consideration is only 30 years.

³Dubow quotes Sir Donald Currie, owner of the Union-Castle Line.

⁴Bateson’s dismissal of environmental influences was not universally accepted, especially in the Australian setting; the botanist F. O. Bower, for one, found Bateson damagingly limited, “hardly to be able to entertain any other idea” (Boney 332).

⁵Returning from a Rhodes Scholarship in 1911, Rivett was appointed Lecturer in Chemistry at Melbourne University; he completed his doctorate while planning the conference (1913). He also became the son-in-law of Alfred Deakin, the former Prime Minister. Before their marriage in 1911, Stella Deakin “studied at Melbourne University and overseas and became a research chemist” (“Alfred Deakin’s Family”).

⁶The BAAS began admitting women as full members in 1900, and offered discounted Ladies’ Tickets to the public. The *New York Times* managed to encapsulate the paradox of gender in a headline: “Scientists Admit Women. British Association for Advancement of Science Open to Fair Sex.”

⁷Office holders in the BAAS umbrella organization and the separate discipline sections had their conference expenses covered. Sections typically had eight to ten officers; Malinowski, for one, was enabled to attend when his mentors at the London School of Economics arranged his appointment as Recording Secretary of Section H (Anthropology).

⁸In Brisbane, this transfer was accomplished “within eight minutes of the arrival” (“British Association in Queensland” 205). Automobiles were deployed as obvious signs of status and modernity; “in the five years from 1911 to 1916 motor vehicle numbers in New South Wales almost quadrupled from 3,978 to 14,973” (Lee).

⁹Non-affiliated visitors such as Witkiewicz had to make their own arrangements; Malinowski noted Ellie Le Soeuf’s great effort to cheer up his doleful friend (Young 292-294). Another unofficial guest, the anthropologist Daisy Bates, moved into “the most expensive hotel in Adelaide” (Salter 171).

¹⁰Malinowski based *The Family among the Australian Aborigines: A Sociological Study* (1913) upon the published research of others. Nonetheless, its rigorous methodology made it clear that “the Australian monograph was not so much an armchair exercise as the prolegomenon to his future fieldwork” (Stocking 249).

¹¹Every American state, for instance, supported at least one public university, so that westward expansion steadily produced new programs in science and engineering. The institutional affiliations of the American delegates at the conference represented this dynamic growth.

¹²The Australasian AAS was founded in 1887, the South African in 1902, and the Indian in 1912; these paralleled groups in Italy (1839), the United States (1848), and France (1872) (Gingras 1). Canadian scientists tended to join the British or the American group, or both, without separately “forging a Canadian intellectual space where they could meet on a national basis” (Gingras 3-4).

¹³The German’s praise was reported in 1921, suggesting that its local value outlasted wartime antipathy.

¹⁴The changing nature of circulation is evident in Keller’s examples from this period, the physicists William Henry Bragg at Adelaide and Ernest Rutherford at McGill, who conducted a

detailed correspondence about radioactivity: that is, the most innovative ideas of the day were exchanged without passing through a British center.

¹⁵Bower energetically collected specimens, especially eucalypts, during the excursions (Boney 6-7). Malinowski stayed on and used Melbourne as a base for research trips to New Guinea and the Trobriands that resulted in the groundbreaking *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). In 1919, he married Elsie Rosaline Masson, the daughter of David Orme Masson, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Melbourne and general chairman of the conference.

¹⁶Units of measurement named for Wilhelm Röntgen, Pierre Curie, and Henri Becquerel already existed in 1914; Rutherford was similarly honored later with a measurement unit (now obsolete) and an element, rutherfordium (Rf).

¹⁷The founding Chair was A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, who is considered, with Malinowski, a pioneer of functional anthropology. The substantiality of non-European networks was recognized by the 1923 Pan Pacific Science Congress, which resolved that ethnographic study of Oceania should be based in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States, with assistance from Great Britain and France (Gray 50).

¹⁸After the conference, the Australasian Town Planning Tour of 1914-1915 promoted Garden City schemes of clustered housing within parkland. The prominent British planner William Davidge joined the tour, prompting a wide civic response “to form committees in the various centres with a view to taking advantage of Mr. Davidge’s presence whilst he is in the Pacific” (Perth *Daily News* 28 Jan. 1914). Charles Compton Reade, who organized the tour, later developed an important model community, the Colonel Light Gardens, in Adelaide.

¹⁹The Central Organising Committee for South Africa was chaired by the astronomer David Gill, who was known for international projects that emphasized cooperation and efficiency. Bateson’s 1914 presidential address acknowledged this direction in eulogizing Gill, who had died earlier that year: “His greatness lay in the power of making big foundations. He built up the Cape Observatory; he organised international geodesy; he conceived and carried through the plans for the photography of the whole sky, a work in which Australia is bearing a conspicuous part.” (*Report 3*)

²⁰These visits were anticipated in the original planning: in 1912, the Adelaide *Register*, for example, expressed hope that the BAAS would recommend the establishment of a Federal Solar Observatory (15 Oct.). As late as 1947, discussion of Australian astronomy included regret that the First World War had delayed implementation of the visitors’ advice (*Sydney Morning Herald* 24 Jan.).

²¹Nationalistic appeals were strong, however. The explorer Douglas Mawson, for example, spoke of Antarctica in pointed terms at the Australasian AAS conference of 1911: “Can our scientific societies remain content to allow distant countries to poach on their inherited preserves? Can Australians remain heedless of this land of great potentialities lying at our doors? Can the national conscience remain unstirred in the face of achievements to be accomplished, achievements such as have ever formed girders in the constitution of nations (Loud applause.) [sic]” (*Advertiser* 12 Jan. 1911)

²¹Shackleton’s group went out of communication in October 1914, still believing that the war would end quickly (Spufford 252).

²³Malinowski later learned that several friends, including Joseph Conrad and his family, were stranded in the Austrian sector of Poland (Young 292). Keller notes that “the war might have caught a sizeable proportion of Britain’s scientists on walking tours through the more scenic parts of Germany or Austria, had they not been that summer on the high seas, on their way to the

British Association meeting” (205). Niels Bohr returned to Denmark from Germany just as the border closed, and the Yale University physicist Bertram B. Boltwood was sailing to Germany when his ship turned and “raced back to America through darkness and fog” (Rutherford 298).

²⁴*The New International Year Book* for 1916 cites continued attacks on Graebner’s diffusionism, “though the detention of Graebner as a military prisoner on Australian soil renders the discussion of his theoretical views a somewhat one-sided affair” (Lowie 35).

²⁵The exceptional opportunities of visiting Australia were brought to Penck’s defense. He “had never been to Ballarat before, and might never get the chance of going there again; the geological structure of the neighbourhood was peculiarly interesting to a scientist of his training; and he preferred to examine earthfolds and quartz ridges than to eat the mayoral lunch!” (Scott 34). Returning from Sydney, Witkiewicz was mistaken for Penck and arrested at Alexandria (Witkiewicz 102). Quickly released, he went on to become an officer in the Imperial Russian Army; after the war, he emerged as a major painter and writer of the Polish avant garde.

²⁶There was reason to be anxious. The German cruiser *Emden* ran the Indian Ocean at will, prolifically sinking ships before it was finally brought to bay in November 1914 by HMAS *Sydney*. Balfour’s diary on 24 Sept., out of Sumatra, nicely caught the mood: “A flutter was caused after lunch when we saw a white vessel carrying guns coming straight for us. Visions of German armed merchantmen + cruisers arose. She came close to us + fired twice across our bows, evidently a 4.7 gun, of which she had eight. Relieved to see the white ensign.” Despite the reassuring flag of the Royal Navy, the war unexpectedly encompassed all oceans, reminding the Empire that separation and distance still mattered.

²⁷Bateson saw the United States as a likely site of this disaster: “the remedies proposed in America, in so far as they aim at the eugenic regulation of marriage on a comprehensive scale, strike me as devised without regard to the needs either of individuals or of a modern State. Undoubtedly if they decide to breed their population of one uniform puritan grey, they can do it in a few generations; but I doubt if timid respectability will make a nation happy, and I am sure that qualities of a different sort are needed if it is to compete with more vigorous and more varied communities.” (*Report* 28)

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