

It's a Long Way from
Melbourne to Michigan:
Models of Modernity?

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It's a long way... ten thousand miles, actually. A bit too far to drive. Yet the USA and Australia are also intimates, sharing a cultural universe, or parallel models of modernity. Americanism became the global dominant of the twentieth century. Bauman called it Solid Modernity. Its core was Fordism. As there are different models of modernity, or multiple modernities, so there are multiple fordisms.

Melbourne and Michigan mirror each other and the fields of modernity and modernism. Viewed in the shadow of Detroit, Australia may appear as a lazy Fordism; an agricultural Fordsonism, or even as Holdenism, sponsored by the iconic local vehicle build via GM from 1948.

Let's take a tour. Our road trip itinerary has five main stops with a series of visuals which seek to connect the personal, or autobiographical, to the cultural and historical.



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First, we idle with Antonio Gramsci and the foundational semantics of Fordism as a way of life. Second, the city of Melbourne, and the experience of Australia as a social laboratory or alternative modernity since its foundation in Federation, 1901. Third, we meet its early ideological pioneer, father of Arbitration Justice Henry Bournes Higgins, and survey some of the novelties of the local model. Fourth, we touch base with a different kind of legislator, Henry Ford, pausing to visit his utopia and the utopia of Fordism. Fifth, we stop at past tense, as this world has been seriously eroded by globalization, or Liquid Modernity. What is to be learned from antipodean modernity? And, what do we in the south learn from the pioneer experience?

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