AUSTRALIAN HUMANITIES REVIEW

issue
45
2008

Edited by Monique Rooney and Russell Smith

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The Ecological Humanities

Editors' Introduction

Monique Rooney and Russell Smith

Welcome to the new-look *Australian Humanities Review* now co-published with ANU E Press in PDF and Print-on-Demand formats: please visit the ANU E Press website if you wish to order an attractive bound copy of *AHR* at the unbeatable price of $14.95. Also, with the move to the new web address, the online version of *AHR* is now published under the auspices of ASAL, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, and we wish here to thank the ASAL Board for their support.

AHR Issue 45 leads with Guy Redden's essay **'From RAE to ERA: research evaluation at work in the corporate university'** which takes a comparative look at performance-based assessment of research in Australian and British universities. We are keen to publish short responses (500-1000 words) to this or other essays in the 'emuse' section of *AHR*. Please email your response to ahr@anu.edu.au.

This issue also includes two themed sections, the first on the theme of **'Rural Cultural Studies'**. David Carter, Kate Darian-Smith and Andrew Gorman-Murray's **Introduction** contextualises these four essays in terms of the 'cultural turn' in rural studies and the 'rural turn' in cultural studies. Andrew Gorman-Murray, Kate Darian-Smith and Chris Gibson's **'Scaling the Rural: Reflections on Rural Cultural Studies'** discusses the use of ideas of scale in developing a cultural studies approach to rural studies; Kate Bowles's **'Rural Cultural Research: Notes from a Small Country Town'** engages with the pitfalls and rewards of conducting research in small-town NSW; in **'Country Week: Bringing the City to the Country?'**, Phil McManus and John Connell identify some of the factors stimulating new migration flows from the city to rural areas; and in **'Drought, Endurance and "The Way Things Were": The Lived Experience of Climate and Climate Change in the Mallee'**, Deb Anderson draws on oral history to look at changing attitudes to drought and climate change in rural Australia.

Olivia Khoo introduces our second themed section on **'Marketing Asian-Australianness'**. This section includes three individual reflections on the experience of writing and publishing Asian-Australian literature: Tom Cho's **'"No One Puts Baby In A Corner": Inserting My Self Into The Text'**, Simone Lazaroo's **'Not Just Another Migrant Story'** and Merlinda Bobis's **'"Voice-Niche-Brand": Marketing Asian-Australianness'**.

In our book reviews section, Aidan Davison assesses the polemical environmentalism of William Lines' *Patriots*, Caroline Hamilton reflects on Richard Freadman's *This Crazy Thing A Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography*, Melissa Harper reviews Catriona Elder's *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity*, while Fiona Jenkins presents a detailed assessment of Vicky Kirby's book on Judith Butler in Continuum's *Live Theory* series.

From this year on *AHR* will appear twice-yearly, in May and November. We are always keen to receive proposals for papers, initially in the form of a 250-word abstract, and we also welcome readers' responses to any of our published articles: please email the editors at ahr@anu.edu.au.
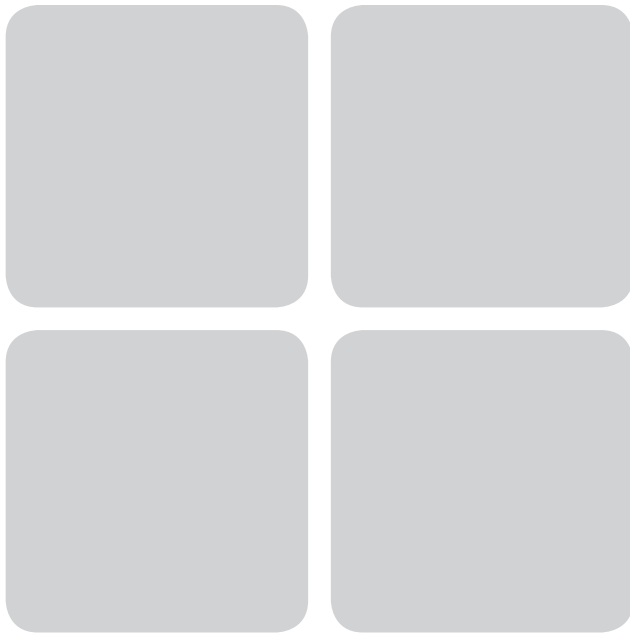
ESSAYS

From RAE to ERA: research evaluation at work in the corporate university

Guy Redden

Recently, while reading *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, I was struck by just how long neoliberalism has been considered a defining feature of our times. Frow and Morris open their introduction with a meditation on a few words uttered by Rupert Murdoch in 1990. In response to a journalist's question about how to 'save the Australian economy', Murdoch replied, 'Oh, you know, change the culture' (vii). Frow and Morris take this sentiment to be indicative of a neo-liberal rhetoric 'now broadly shared' among the governing classes, one that seeks to modify behaviour across social fields so as to realise the imperative that 'fewer workers must produce more for less' (viii).

This paper concerns one manifestation of neoliberal reformism: the pseudomarketization of state-managed higher education through technologies of performance evaluation: those used to measure and fund research quality. In particular, the focus is the publication-related components of such schemes.

With regard to the British and Australian sectors, it appears we have arrived at a point where existing research quality mechanisms are under review, with new systems virtually certain but still under construction. In the UK, the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise)—which determines levels of research capacity funding mainly through peer review of the quality of research publications—is in its last round. In Australia the existing 'quantum' of research activity (the Institutional Grants Scheme, or IGS) allocates research funding to universities in proportion to the numbers of recognised publications they produce, research student numbers and the value of grants they win. It is likewise on borrowed time, being originally due for replacement this year by the RQF (Research Quality Framework, modelled on the British RAE). However, the new government has postponed the change. It is pursuing instead several concurrent reviews of higher education and the development of a new quality framework, the ERA (Australian Research Council, *Excellence*), which will put more weight on ranking of publication outlets by 'quality'.

The results of these processes of review in Australia may define the nature of the academic enterprise for many years to come. It remains to be seen whether they will overturn the legacy of the Dawkins reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s, which created a competitive level playing field as higher education colleges became universities able to compete with the established research-intensive institutions for research funding (through a new set of grant schemes of which

the IGS is one component). What is at stake is not just the nature of the academic vocation and the conditions under which academics work, but also the rationale of the modern university, or differing rationales of different universities: 'diversity of mission', that is, the capacities of institutions to undertake research, teaching and other functions, is an explicit dimension of the recent 'Bradley Review' of Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, *Review*). With this in mind, and in light of cautionary tales derived from the British RAE, my principal aim here is to highlight how research quality frameworks can threaten inclusive, social democratic understandings of higher education. I will also make the contentious claim that in a world where such frameworks are inevitable, the current Australian system is about as good as it gets.

The bulk of the article outlines the evaluation frameworks and provides a discussion of their consequences contextualised by my reading of the political rationalities in play. It is partly derived from my experiences working as a researcher both under the RAE (at Cardiff and Lincoln) and the IGS (at Queensland and Sydney). This necessarily means that some of the evidence presented is impressionistic, but I make no apology for that. In the search for greater productivity and accountability, research evaluation mechanisms discipline workers, and do so in ways that can affect behaviour from the micro level of individual researchers up to the sector-wide patterns of production they foster. Arguing from experience is not to assume all academics will view research evaluation in identical ways, but to bring alternative perspectives to policy issues that are too often dominated by pragmatic and technocratic concerns with efficiency, as though measures implemented are value-neutral ways of making things better. Rather, the structuring of the research environment involves the operationalising of specific values and priorities that should simultaneously be open to debate in considering policy details.

Getting things to work

In deeming research evaluation frameworks neoliberal I do not mean that they are essentially all the same, but that in conceptualising collectivities as comprising actors responsible for governing their own performances and maximising associated outcomes, they are part of a broader cultural shift in the management of people and organisations. Governmentality theorists, influenced by Foucault's later work on the 'conduct of conduct' (220–221), have identified contemporary discourses that depict citizens as self-determining agents and encourage them to use their freedoms to act in ways that bolster the privatisation of responsibility. The rollback of the welfare state—the so-called 'bludger' culture of dependence that Frow and Morris saw as one target of neoliberalism—is one outcome. Another, as writers including Rose and du Gay have shown, is the changes in human resource management which lead to workers being viewed more like entrepreneurs than 'organisation men' with stable roles and fortunes. The worker

becomes someone tasked with realising organisational goals through using their own initiative, tested in this through performance appraisal, and held responsible for results. This is a culture of continuous audit by the organisation, and self-management by the subject, and is based on the supposition that there is always room for improvement. Or, to put this differently, there is a management demand for the 'infinite resourcefulness' of workers in processes of adding value (Costea et al. 250).

Higher education is a distinctive sector in which the traditional model of academic work is that of a vocation often undertaken more for the inherent joys of discovery and circulation of ideas than for financial reward. Andrew Ross has observed how this romantic legacy of working with the gift of knowledge underpins a longstanding tendency for academics to gift production to their employers in self-directed unpaid overtime. When you love what you do it can merge with available leisure time. But universities are also becoming corporatized. This involves greater managerial intervention over what academics do with their time. As Rutherford argues, academic activities are becoming increasingly measured for their instrumental value to the knowledge economy and its need for innovation and educated workers. Corporatization also increasingly opens up academic practice to managerial calculations of the value for money of operations. Ross observes how the tradition of gifted labour is being converted into discounted production as paymasters devise ways to enforce unpaid academic work time via employment conditions. The increased casualization of academic work since the 1980s is one aspect. It most often reduces the financial reward for teaching while relying on the worker's 'self-managed' cultivation of expert knowledge altogether outside of the paid time.

The corporate imperative to enhance value for money is also applied to research, and in some respects it is engendered by government policy. The Dawkins reforms led to a system in which government sponsored research by paying universities for their quantifiable achievements. In recounting the development of cultural studies at the University of Melbourne, Simon During explains that 'By the late 1990s, conditions had changed. New hyper-Benthamite management techniques, new funding models and social objectives, geared toward boosting national economic productivity, governed the Australian university system' (275). He goes on, 'The budget I managed was determined by a formula which allocated money according to performance quantified across a number of variables. Each student, each text written by faculty, each PhD completion, each research dollar won had a money value, so that, at least in theory, it was possible to compute exactly how much each academic earned and to assess whether they were departmental profit centres' (275).

No choice but rationally to choose

This was not always the case. The ideas behind the proliferation of such mechanisms across the public sector had first to be invented. In the 1970s and 1980s, while the ideas of free-market economists such as Milton Friedman led to macroeconomic reforms now associated with globalization, other economists and mathematicians were busy working out how to apply rational-choice models, based on the inherently self-interested figure of *homo economicus*, to a wide range of fields of human endeavour. The 'rational' choice in this view is the self-interested one, as calculable through analysis of the benefits to the self versus the costs of any course of action. Microeconomists, such as game theorist Gary Becker, sought to develop more sophisticated models of cost-benefit analysis that could be applied to understanding people's tendencies to do anything. Activities beyond direct financial transactions in markets could also be modelled in market-like terms, as involving agents' responses to 'price-like' signals regarding whether something is worth doing (see Harford for an account).

This kind of thinking entered into public sector management in the guise of public choice theory, which centres on the use of price signals to incentivise workers. The core belief of this approach is that public officers who are left to their own devices in civil bureaucracies will never perform optimally in the delivery of whichever public good they are supposed to deliver. In her insider's account of the influence of economic rationalism in governmental circles in Canberra, Lindy Edwards cites the public choice view that it is the self-interested behaviour of bureaucrats that leads to such putative 'government failure' (101). It is thought that in conventional bureaucracies, those who run them can too easily fulfil their sectional 'producer interest' of adopting an easy life for themselves because of the lack of market pressures for them to really create an adequate good and exchange it for something else they want. In this view, the key to improving public sector performance is to introduce market forces in order to bring extrinsic motivating factors to bear upon public sector workers: to make high performance the rational choice.

This has led to 'the New Public Administration'. Government is redefined as a buyer of the services it requires from the public sector rather than the centre of operational control and responsibility. This allows for various ways of making the relationships between governments, civil servants and service users (citizens) more like business ones. According to Kaul, some of the key features are that policy formation is transferred away from the public services themselves (including government ministries) to separate executives that are responsible for setting standards, goals and service agreements that effectively act as contracts with the public sector organisations. This distinction makes 'delivery' the main autonomous responsibility of the latter, while the former decides upon the mechanisms through which delivery will be measured (performance targets) and

ways that performance levels of particular agencies will be variously rewarded or punished. These include payment-by-results at organizational levels, and also performance-related pay for staff. Thus government-as-buyer-of-services is, in theory, able to benefit from forces of competition it unleashes within and between organisations, which scramble to deliver up to the mark.

Sweating your assets, UK style

In discussing New Labour's continuation of Thatcher's legacy, Stuart Hall notes how the new managerialism derived from public choice is apparently neutral, but really 'the vehicle by means of which neo-liberal ideas actually inform institutional practices' (n.pag). It is part of a broader diffusion of neoliberal sensibilities through the population creating a new *habitus*, whereby citizens at any given site become self-managers in processes structured through market logic. In incentivising performance, and enjoining civil servants to act and feel like entrepreneurs, 'It replaces professional judgement and control by the wholesale importation of micro-management practices of audit, inspection, monitoring, efficiency and value-for money, despite the fact that neither their public role nor their public interest objectives can be adequately re-framed in this way.'

It should come as little surprise that public choice was operationalised first under Thatcher. Reagan, after all, had no national healthcare or higher education systems to subject to it. Along with the first steps taken towards managing the National Health Service through performance criteria, the UK's Research Assessment Exercise was one of the earliest examples in the 1980s. The RAE promised that research capacity funding would be distributed to institutions on merit, through major peer-review exercises undertaken every few years. As well as reviewing publications in their area for their quality, RAE subject panels considered circumstantial factors such as 'research environment' and 'esteem indicators'. The results were overall quality profiles for research achievements in given subject areas within institutions, with the original scale running from 1 (no effective research culture) to 5* (thoroughgoing international excellence). Funding levels were then determined by the ratings in proportion to numbers of staff who were identified as research active and the relative costs of research in each discipline. Each institution's overall research capacity income was an aggregate of its RAE earnings in the subject areas it had submitted for consideration.

Let us first of all concede that the RAE has had a major impact on British research, and there is no doubt that it 'worked' in the sense that it did boost research performance in the sector. Above all, by dint of the differential funding formula applied to the rating scale, it has succeeded in concentrating funds at the top, helping a small group of institutions in South East England to maintain their

world-class reputations amid a broader decline in per capita funding to universities.

However, rather being taken as an unproblematic boosting of the public good, the success of the RAE has to be understood as something relative to the terms in which the system was configured. Those terms of success are narrow. They take no account of the many negative, unintended consequences of the behavioural change that it causes. The realization that the downsides outweigh the upsides by this point in time is what has convinced the British government, in the very language that it uses in such matters, that it should be discontinued. The costs are greater than the benefits.

There is not space here to elaborate on all of the costs. But from the point of view of someone who lived under the thrall of the RAE, and escaped, they include:

- Distortion of research and its transfer. Because of the valorising of certain kinds of output (single-authored work in prestigious fora likely to impress an expert reviewer working in a specific disciplinary framework upon being speed read), researchers modify their behaviour to adapt to perceived demands. This means they may eschew worthwhile kinds of work they are good at in order to conform. Public intellectualism, collaboration, and interdisciplinary, highly specialised and teaching-related research are devalued.
- Neglect of teaching. In-class contact hours are cut and class sizes increased to free up lecturers' time for research, or contact hours are casualised, or dumped on continuing lecturers whose research is deemed unlikely to earn RAE money. The specific drivers of the RAE thus compound already existing threats to teaching quality caused by underfunding.
- The massive amounts of academics' time the RAE takes to administer. Time used for micromanagement and review is itself non-productive and could be spent on research. Likewise professional research administrators working on RAE compliance and process management cost money that could be spent on direct research support.
- Selective support for research within institutions. It becomes aimed at researchers and projects most likely to yield income. This is de facto infringement of academic freedom, as earning power becomes the rationale for the good of research, and it also damages staff morale and discourages risk taking in research design.
- The transfer market in academics between institutions. The movement of personnel who were already working well *in situ* (and therefore attractive to headhunters) is nice for the academics concerned, but comes with various costs not related to any additional yield: the on-costs of recruitment and relocation, higher salaries required to lure the personnel, investment in

facilities and equipment required, the costs to the former institution as research teams/strengths they cultivated disintegrate.

- Ignoring quality that is not produced in certain quantities. The RAE defines a returnable researcher as someone who publishes at least four peer-reviewed works in a seven-year cycle. Regardless of the quality of their work, the reasons for their modest productivity, or their potential, someone who publishes less falls below the cut-off, and is prone to be managed out of their research career. By his logic, John Rawls, would have become a teaching grunt had he been working in the UK, circa 2000. This is a big equity issue considering many who fall into this category are not sloths or dullards, but early career researchers, academics with caring responsibilities, and those whose employers make significant non-research demands on their time.

- The large amounts of unpaid overtime worked by researchers attempting to achieve their output goals, the associated stress and loss of private time. The RAE exploits the tradition of voluntarily gifted labour in academic work. Its subjects are enjoined to strive for greater quality in publication constantly, while the esteem indicators that are a factor in the overall evaluation provide an incentive for researchers to take on a range of additional activities to show standing in their field, including publishing more than the entry-level requirement. Do or die pressure makes the gifting of 'as much labour is required' to the employer by the academic a *de facto* obligation. Workers adapt the patterns of their lives to the dictates of work, internalizing the imperative always to be available to pursue work projects as personal ones. In adopting this flexible orientation they become the subjects of work intensification, as in many other areas of the contemporary knowledge economy (Hudson 44).

It is not that universities should not change with society, nor that academics should not be accountable for the public good they deliver. Rather, the problem is in the hijacking of change, accountability and value for money by those who apply narrow economistic models of human behaviour to complex organizational operations, and, to return to Frow and Morris's point, do so with the ultimate aim of getting fewer workers to produce more for less, without much care for the real costs of such performance improvement.

The *quid pro quo* between universities and the British Government really broke down with the betrayal experienced in the 2001 round. The 2001 exercise saw improvements across the board. In particular, unprecedented numbers of 5 and 5* ratings were awarded. However, the reality behind the mechanism was soon apparent: the RAE is effectively a zero-sum game. Rather than rewarding the improved departments with funding levels equivalent to those enjoyed in the previous round, units of resource applied to each rating were reduced. Outcomes rated 5 received a 15 per cent cut in funding and 4 recieved a 20 per cent cut,

while 3a was cut by 70 per cent (Goddard). The annual research capacity pot didn't increase with the sector's performance. Instead it was spread more thinly, causing many institutions to incur losses on research having invested in anticipation of reward. The exception was at the top end. Only the top 'starred' rank received similar funding in real terms as in the past. Everyone else who had performed well in the terms of the framework had produced more for less.

Unsurprisingly, the new universities, those apparently enfranchised by being able to compete with the established research universities 'on the same terms', were disproportionately affected. One professor of educational research (Griffiths) calculated that in 1996 the new universities shared less than 5 per cent of the available funding. After the 2001 RAE, they should have received 15 per cent, but the new funding formulas accorded them only about 2 per cent. Subsequently, funding has become even more concentrated at the top. In 2004, funding to 3a departments was cut entirely. Departments rated 4 now receive the entry level of funding, with 5 receiving 3.18 times, and 5* receiving 4.036 times the unit of resource applied to 4 (HEFCE). It beggars belief that 3a research cultures are not supported with a single pound of capacity funding when the descriptor for 3a achievement is '*national excellence in two thirds of outputs and international excellence in some*'.

This manipulation of the prices accorded to the ranks has proven a way of creating teaching-only departments out of ones that, even by the RAE's own quality ratings, were producing research work of national and international significance; or worse, it has been a way of catalyzing their closure. But this was only to extend the ultimate logic of the RAE: the bifurcation of the sector into research-intensive and teaching-only academics, departments and institutions.

The forced drift of new universities back to teaching (with a few islands of funded research) grabs few headlines, and the controllers of the system do nothing to track such outcomes themselves. However, the closure of more prestigious departments no longer deemed profit centres or compatible with the desired research quality profile of their host institution has garnered considerable attention. In particular, the closure of science departments working in fields of national skills priority has become something of a *cause célèbre*. For the cultural studies community one of the most perverse outcomes of RAE-related managerialism was the closure of the renowned Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. The Centre's great sin was achieving a 3a RAE rating in 2001. While, as Ann Gray notes, it continued to make an important contribution to the field of cultural studies, Birmingham University designated any unit receiving under a 4 rating to be underperforming and thus not worthy of investment. In one fell swoop, everything the Centre had achieved (including much of value that was not 'RAE-like') was swept away. And, it is somewhat ironic that the proximate cause of the period of lower research

productivity that had led to the '3a' was that management had, a few years before the RAE audit, ordered the Centre staff to develop an undergraduate degree for the first time, thus diverting their time away from research for a critical period.

This kind of short-sighted distortion is a sad inevitability when institutions are forced to prioritise while scrambling for scarce resources. Equally pernicious is the dividing of the academic research workforce into haves and have-nots because of the methodology used to determine ratings. Just as a unit may be deemed underperforming relative to its ability to attract the desired price in the RAE, so individuals may be too. This is not a matter of the research-qualified-but-inactive 'dead wood' being excluded. That may be fair so far as their inactivity is attributable to themselves and not the conditions under which they work. Rather, in 2001, more than 32,500 research-active staff (40.4 per cent of the research-active sector total) were excluded from being returned to the RAE by their institutions (Corbyn). This is not because their work has no value. Rather, it is a numbers game. If, for the sake of argument, a given department is aiming for a 5 rating and has 20 researchers deemed up to the mark, but 10 deemed possible 4s, it will bar the 4s from the return. It will make much more money with an overall 5 rating funded at 20 heads than if it is rated 4, but funded at 30 heads. Thus those researchers seen as presenting the risk of bringing down the overall rating into the band below are excluded, even if their work is good by sector standards. In turn, this affects the individual's future entitlement to research time and resources, and their career prospects, and it disproportionately applies to early-career researchers and women.

So it is that a mechanism designed to squeeze maximum performance out of human resources works in exclusionary ways. It makes the academic world into a short-termist one of narrow performance cut-off points through which workers are judged in virtually all-or-nothing terms in spite of institutional complexities. Resources follow in line, buttressing the different classes of knowledge workers.

Superficially it appears to be a transparent system for distributive justice. All parties appear to get what they deserve. Yet, like any meritocratic regime, the RAE does not capture the simple reality out there. It specifies and controls debatable definitions of the good, and then places debatable values on them and the things that are necessarily deemed not so good in its terms—values that then determine the reality. In this it seeks to model performance on market lines. But in capitalist free markets, the 'good' is money itself, exchange value. By definition, it matters not one jot to the recipient of a profit what non-pecuniary costs have been incurred along the way. The same cannot be said of university operations. Furthermore, in free markets price values are determined by the balance of powers of supply and demand, not the fiat of politicians. The arbitrary

manipulation of rewards in the RAE makes a mockery of the need for management strategy and planning that the system itself engenders.

In short, the RAE is a quasi-market that revolves around the idea that imitating market instrumentalism leads to an improvement in the delivery of the public good. But it is at least as logical to view it as the importation of market failure into the public sector.

The quantum effect

When I was following the debate about the RQF in Australia from the UK a few years ago, having experienced both the Australian system and the RAE, I wrote to former colleagues in Australia warning them of the psychic costs of the RAE on staff, and how it is divisive, unfair and detrimental to other academic activities while appearing a mechanism that can lift all boats. I might have missed it, but, while there were technical objections, I didn't get the impression that many academics saw it as a neoliberal ruse to squeeze extra out of workers, while rewarding only a 'world class' research elite with any significant resources.

The RQF has now been cancelled (though possibly only deferred while the new government takes views), but a new performance management and funding system for research is in the offing to replace the much-maligned 'quantum' (IGS). The IGS is the method of calculating institutional research grants by a mixture of research income won (60%), research student load (30%) and academic publications (10%), as referred to by During above in less than flattering terms. However, although it is also a performance mechanism linked to competitive, selective funding, that emerged in the same socio-historical context as the RAE, the quantum is essentially a means of indexing funding to levels of research activity rather than quality of research outputs. It is important to stress that the IGS is not a ranking scheme like the RAE, and that it rewards research activity in all its granularity, rather than operating a cut-off logic regarding what outputs can be eligible for evaluation and funding. In an annual round, any unit of activity that has passed a basic threshold of academic peer-review (winning any grant, publishing any article) attracts funding. It does not infringe on academics' autonomy to decide the best form and venue for their work, nor does it require a researcher to achieve a certain level of productivity before their work is credited.

A critique of the quantum is that it just rewards the cranking out of product, regardless of quality. This is the view that encouraged Canberra to develop the RAE-clone, the RQF. A series of studies based on analysis of Australian research output was undertaken under the auspices of the Research Evaluation and Policy Project at The Australian National University. They contributed to the view that the quantum is detrimental to Australia's research performance so far as quality is concerned. In one such paper, Linda Butler estimated the quality of

Australian research publications by ascertaining the impact ratings of the journals in which they were published using Science Citation Index data. She argued that the introduction of the Research Quantum measures in the mid-1990s correlated with a discernable trend in Australian academic publications:

> The reaction of Australians to these signals is entirely predictable — their publication output has increased dramatically in the last decade. But as quality is paid scant regard in the measures, there is little incentive to strive for the top journals, and this paper shows that the biggest increase has been in those journals at the lower end of the impact scale (39).

It would appear to me that Butler is drawing a misleading conclusion from her analysis. In fact, when other factors are excluded, it is evident that the quantum did actually lead to an impressive increase in research at the top end of the impact scale, as well as in the middle and at the lower end. It did indeed lift all boats. Yet a 'dramatic' increase in Australia's research productivity at all levels was explained away as failure because the lower end grew faster than the upper.

It seems logical to deduce that the publication element of the quantum incentivised all researchers to publish, but that, in the same way that, because of their abilities, few students gain high distinctions relative to those who receive other commendable grades, so too the majority of researchers placed their extra publications in less prestigious, 'ordinary' journals. And there are only so many rooms at the inn: how many articles can top journals publish? In essence, Butler eschews the significance of the sector-wide improvements, preferring to adopt a public-choice view that the rank and file of researchers have taken the easy route and published outside of *Nature* and *Science* en masse. Another interpretation is that they all found suitable niches for their work in the broad environment of academic publishing.

The change lobby concentrates on the lack of Australian institutions at the very top of international indicators (like the *Times Higher Education Supplement*'s 'World Rankings', or the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's 'Academic Ranking of World Universities'), and seeks ways to get an Australian elite dining at high table. There's nothing wrong with giving more money to Australian teams while they are doing important work, as long as this is not linked to reductions in capacity funding for others (who knows where the next leading edge of innovation will break out?). And there must be simple ways of reviewing current indicators and supplying additional resources to support excellence without detriment to the rest of the research sector. However, there has been little policy discourse focussing on how the quantum could be modified. The accent remains squarely on devising a wholly new system. But in this the advocates of change have been mandated and commissioned by a former government that sought ever-greater returns for little additional investment. The econometric myth is

that a whole new system of measurement can usher in a whole new world of excellence, even after the historical productivity gains fostered by the quantum.

A new ERA?

Nonetheless, reform is endless in an era bent on the incessant search for greater value for money. The evidence seems to be pointing towards a successor to the quantum that will put much greater weight on measures and bands of output quality. The Butler position seems to be accepted as the prevailing common sense in research policy circles, and by the new government. Although it is not (yet) formally linked to research funding, the Excellence in Research for Australia Initiative (ERA) currently under development by the Australian Research Council is based around three categories of performance indicators: activity, quality, and applied research and research translation. Exactly how these will be measured and weighted is still under consideration. However, publication indicators are proposed for use only under the 'quality' heading, with the principal approximations of quality being citation levels and rating of outlets (journals, monograph publishers, conferences, etc), which are to be divided into four tiers: C (bottom 50%), B (next 30%), A (next 15%) and A* (top 5%).

At the time of writing, the journal rankings are out to consultation. Most of the debate concerns which journals should be placed in which tier. This is what the ARC wants to determine with the help of the sector. However, we should at least consider the possibility that the ERA may create effects similar to those of the RAE. On the face of it, the ERA does not resemble the British system. It will probably not deploy much peer review of publications themselves, so would waste less academic time on that process. However, it would still fundamentally valorise certain indicators of quality, and as such may bring its own suite of distortions as institutions and individuals modify practices and set new priorities. These might or might not resemble the distortions associated with the RAE.

For instance, the ERA's current Research Outlet Rankings (Australian Research Council, *Consultation*) could lead to unintended consequences. Not only is publication venue a questionable proxy for quality (be advised that the article you are now reading, and indeed any article in *Australian Humanties Review*, is a 'B' according to the current rankings, regardless of what you think of it), but academic publishing is a broad ecology that includes many kinds of publication in which people publish for a range of good reasons. Once the A*, A, B, and C, tiers become a central focus in the micromanagement of research within institutions, that whole ecology could be distorted in ways not yet known. The stampede for A* and A outlets will no doubt produce more Australian publications in them, but at what cost? If applied, the publication criteria of the ERA would threaten academic autonomy of publishing, which revolves around professional discretion in presenting ideas to communities of interest. The kind of work valued would be prescribed, once again, by fiat. Everyone would be

urged to chase the top journals all the time, restricting their work to what they think those journals want. And they would most likely have to bear the psychic costs of frequent failure because of a false performance standard applied to all.

In particular, what happens to specialisms? The lists of rankings privilege high-profile 'general interest' journals within disciplines. If you happen to work in a field with specialized journals ranked B and C, via which your peer community works though its core issues, what will you do? Accept your designation as a second-class citizen, or give up the work you are dedicated to by vocation in order to strategise about ways of getting into the top tiers? For similar reasons, what about interdisciplinarity? And place-specific work? The problem for law, where many publications are directed towards jurisdictions, has been summarized in David Hamer's recent piece in *The Australian*. Most of the 'top' journals are inevitably focused on U.S. law, and the rankings devalue the best Australian journals. This may prove a problem across the humanities and social sciences as publications addressing local issues have smaller readerships/citation counts, meaning they are less likely to be deemed 'top' in their fields. This would appear to be a bizarre bias against important Australian-specific research and associated outlets. Or, just as problematic, journals could be deemed A* just because they are the best in Australia. We are entitled to ask what the public good is of this arbitrary valuation of some kinds of things over everything else.

Despite the differences from the RAE, if the outlet tiers are linked to funding in ways similar to the RAE, such ranking could create large disparities between incomes generated by different academic publications. The ERA maintains the fundamental quality ranking approach of the RAE/RQF. The double whammy could come when politicians decide what price to put on outlets. Who knows what the values will be? They will likely vary with performances and funding levels in a zero-sum game. As with the RAE, such unpredictability of reward would be deleterious to the very strategic planning culture the system requires. For the sake of argument, let's imagine the government rewards publications with units of resource roughly equivalent to those of the RAE, e.g. : C=0, B=1, A=3, A*=4. It is not at all unfeasible that the disparities could be so great. In fact this would be generous to the lower ranks in comparison with the RAE. The RAE has never rewarded the lowest two ranks of quality on its scale, and since 2004 it has not funded the bottom four on the seven-point scale. If this were translated to the ERA, it could mean that 'C' and 'B' performances are cut out of funding altogether. It is at least wise for the research community to envisage such a scenario.

While it would be naïve to suggest the gentle art of performance management is not yet practised in Australian universities, a research framework that induces a cut-off culture as severe as the RAE would intensify it further. In combination

with continued low funding and a zero-sum research pot, it would skew research culture towards exclusivity away from the relative inclusivity of the IGS publications component, which validates and funds any output that has passed academic peer-review (I know many Australian colleagues will baulk at such comparative praise of the quantum, but there you have it). In chasing the much higher incomes that come with 'the best', managers would have a newly narrow, short-term incentive to leave the residuum to rot as they invest in their elite research earners only.

When it is considered that the recent discussion paper of the Bradley review (Commonwealth of Australia, *Review*) makes it quite clear that the specialisation of institutions and the relationship between teaching and research are back on the agenda, there is a real risk that the new research framework could be configured so as to force many institutions and departments to choose between teaching and research on economic grounds. Low or no levels of funding accorded to research performance deemed average or good could force such 'rational choices'. This is what happens to university research under mechanisms like the RAE, which put a low unit price on many valid research outcomes (including academic publications that are rated good, but not excellent). It does not fairly reward all for their efforts and fails to guarantee wide distribution of future opportunities to maintain production, as it does not provide adequate revenue to invest in future operations. It is an under-the-radar way of returning the sector to research and teaching intensive institutions while retaining a patina of neoliberal meritocracy. If the prices applied to B and C are so low that they do not actually cover the real costs of research, institutions that attract those levels of funding in the main will start to lose large amounts in undertaking research, and will have an incentive to give it up.

There is a lot to worry about here from an equity viewpoint. The uneven distribution of capacity to do research between individuals, departments, institutions and types of university is a class issue about who gets the opportunity to work with and benefit from knowledge, and on what grounds and under what conditions they are attributed this entitlement. As Frow notes, to take an example from my discipline, cultural studies in Australia was developed at universities outside the research-intensive Group of Eight. There is every chance that any successor to the quantum forces virtually all funded research back into that consortium, by design.

Such sequestration of research from teaching would have familiar spatial and demographic dimensions. Among other things, it equates to barring all but the most 'educationally mobile' working class students (those who study in the Group of Eight) to access research culture, to experience universities as the sites of the production and dissemination of knowledge, and to get involved in these processes. And those staff most likely to experience the greatest barriers to

performing against the required criteria would be those hemmed in by their lifeworlds, not the least able. Domestic and caring responsibilities, and any other legitimate demand on an academic's personal or work time that inhibits their ability to undertake research (including as unpaid overtime), would become even more inequitous career determinants than they are already. Performance differences are amplified by new ways of expressing them. Two academics produce similar amounts (and quality) of outputs, but one is totted up to earn through publications on average $15,000 a year, the other $5,000. Who gets the job or promotion?

Conclusion: resisting cut-off culture

If the issues are to be judged in terms of the sectional interests of the academics expected to deliver, the biggest externalized cost of the RAE was the crazy work practices it normalized by creating such high-stakes rewards. In my experience, in departments striving for RAE achievements, extreme working hours were quite commonly expected of the individuals with responsibility to deliver, and whose careers depended on it. It is our personal selves, 'us', who pay with our finite energies when we take on the subjective orientation of 'infinite resourcefulness' to meet productivity demands. In doing so we subsidise our employers with nothing in return except the right to win the resources to continue to do our jobs, until the next set of hoops comes along. But if you are unlucky, you pay the ultimate price. You go through all this and fail, not because of your inherent abilities, and often in spite of 'improved' achievements. You fail simply because the system defines success in a certain narrow way and you fall beyond the range. At the same time, there is no easy way for academics to stand outside. The performance mechanisms are wrapped around things researchers care about and do. Academics are implicated by undertaking the very activities that make up their vocation, and they cannot desist without creating feedback for the very system resisted as non-compliance is converted into performance data. To attempt to do so would be to boycott one's own research career.

Of course, governments that are deeply implicated in the public choice approach do little to evaluate its efficacy overall. However, one review that did question the unintended consequences of one scheme was the so-called 'Roberts Report' (Review of Research Assessment). It catalysed the discontinuation of the RAE by highlighting some of the unintended consequences it incurred. However, it did not dislodge the behavioural ideology upon which the RAE was based. There is no sign that any alternative scheme will address the inequities it fostered, or many of the costs. Rather, the aim is only to create a more streamlined version to reduce the operational costs that were seen as a drag on its efficiency. The performance incentives, quality rankings and funding methods are not in question. Likewise it would be prudent to assume, until there are clear indications

otherwise, that the ERA will reproduce the main drivers of the RAE, in a leaner, more metrical package.

The crunch question is, of course, *how should* research capacity funding (as opposed to project or infrastructure funding) be distributed?

Selective funding of some kind is now inevitable. And it is equitable insofar as it is distributed fairly to cover the costs of all valid research undertaken, without detriment to other dimensions of university activity, and in ways that sustain opportunities for individuals and institutions to realize the contributions to education they can best make. The problems come when systems encourage some behaviours at the expense of others and are manipulated so as not to reasonably represent the value of goods produced.

If selective funding is inevitable, no doubt so is a performance evaluation mechanism of some kind. However, naïve as it may seem to resort to a familiar mantra, no such framework can be the magic bullet to make up for chronic underfunding. Australia is the only country in the OECD where public funding of universities has fallen as a share of GDP over the last decade. General taxpayer funding is now the lowest of all OECD countries as a share of public university revenue, standing at 42 per cent in 2006 (Universities Australia, 5). Any new system needs to acknowledge that Australian academics currently perform extremely well in research relative to resources. It is hard to see where the slack is to be taken up, with academics already working at full tilt (see National Tertiary Education Union). There would be huge risks entailed in bringing in a new untested system that will introduce wholesale change in an attempt squeeze a bit more out for the same money. Improvements will not come without funding increases, and if they appear to it will be a false economy in which very specific improvements generate unacceptable trade-offs in other areas.

It may be that the changes are designed to crack the high-end quality nut alone—though you are unlikely to get a politician to admit right out that the intent of the ERA is to divert money back from the new universities to the old, or to force a division between teaching and research functions in the sector. Of course, although the Group of Eight institutions still win the lion's share of funding by dint of the grants component of the IGS, they are not wealthy enough to achieve the very highest international standards judged by research performance indicators. However, the inclusion of the new universities in selective research funding after Dawkins is not the cause of the Go8's relative poverty, even while it has provided modest but significant means to sustain research in the mainstream. The cause is government's decision not to support all research and teaching activity appropriately.

Given that Australia performs so well across the board in research (as indicated by the high numbers of Australian institutions in the top 100 of the THES rankings, and the publication outputs recognised by Butler), it would be a tragic

mistake to introduce a system that boosts the highest end at the expense of the rest. Incremental changes to the IGS could be a platform to build upon what has already been achieved, designing backwards from recognition of the kinds of support that actually make research better. For instance, rather than urging all to scramble for the few available slots in the top journals all the time by making them worth dramatically more than 'normal' academic publications, equal payments for all academic publications could be maintained, but with a single 'A' band covering 20% of outlets also introduced. Publications in them could earn a modest supplement over the norm, rewarded by real-terms increases in funding, not a diversion of support away from the rest. This may well be enough to encourage all Australian researchers to place with 'top' journals when they see fit, without distorting their research habits in major ways, and creating a divided sector of stars and grunts by operationalising perverse definitions of success and failure.

Insofar as performance management systems are structured along the lines of markets, they should aim to reproduce fair markets, not free ones, or ones rigged by price-fixing that undervalues academic production. Markets are prone to externalize failures to deliver the social good because of their brutal pursuit of the bottom line. Profit is not what public sector institutions are for, nor are they for endless maximization of values that act as proxies for profit. They deliver complex, holistic services and need realistic support and security to do so well.

All selective support systems are not the same. Instead of importing a refraction of the British class system that comes shrouded behind a meritocratic neoliberal window dressing, the new Australian government also has the option to avoid sweating its human assets any further through ever more elaborate performance management. By design, it can maintain a broad inclusive culture of innovation for the long term, even as it provides additional support for the 'most excellent'. It can avoid mechanisms that generate the unintended hidden costs that come when individuals and institutions have to play elaborate high-stakes games to win basic entitlements. Instead it can acknowledge the excellent productivity of Australian academics, maintain and refine a simple and relatively fair performance system, and build on it with funding levels that reflect the real value of academic production.

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Introduction: Rural Cultural Studies

David Carter, Kate Darian-Smith and Andrew Gorman-Murray

This themed section of *Australian Humanities Review* seeks to establish the emerging field of 'rural cultural studies' firmly on the agenda of the contemporary humanities and social sciences. This is a timely intervention as rural Australia has featured increasingly over the last decade and especially over the last few years as a topic of national policy attention, public commentary and social analysis. If the notion of a crisis in rural Australia has become something of a one-sided cliché, the changes being faced in non-urban—rural, remote and regional—Australia are nonetheless significant, complex and widespread. For example, one of the topics for the federal 2020 Summit, 'Rural Australia', addressed future policy directions for rural industries and populations. In this wider context, the purpose of the present collection of papers is to argue for the significance of the cultural dimension—and the multiple dimensions of the cultural—in understanding the key issues of demographic change, economic productivity, environmental and climatic crisis, Indigenous/non-indigenous relations and land ownership, and the role of 'cultural' factors in the renewal, or potential renewal, of country towns and communities.

The essays in this collection offer a range of perspectives representing the 'cultural turn' in rural studies and, indeed, the 'rural turn' in cultural studies. Rural cultural studies has been formed from the intersection of cultural history and cultural geography and from new developments within adjacent interdisciplinary fields including cultural and media studies, Australian studies and environmental studies. While cultural history and cultural geography may be interdisciplinary in themselves, they are still often separated from each other by disciplinary or institutional boundaries, perhaps most notably in the distinction that persists between the Social Sciences and the Arts or Humanities. Rural cultural studies offers one way, or rather several ways, of crossing these boundaries and thinking through how research questions, fieldwork and analysis may be enriched through multiple disciplinary perspectives.

The notion of 'rural cultural studies' is nonetheless, if not quite an oxymoron, still a novelty in both cultural studies and rural studies. Contemporary cultural studies researchers internationally and in Australia have been massively biased towards *urban* popular cultures. While recent studies of cultural consumption and participation, for instance, have acknowledged the variable of residential location, they have not given primary or extended attention to what this might mean for those living in rural and regional Australia—whether on farms, in small country towns, or in larger regional centres (Bennett, Emmison and Frow

Accounting for Tastes and 'Social Class'; Mercer; Rowe). Moreover, much research on the cultural changes that are occurring in rural communities has been underpinned by metropolitan norms and systems of value, leading to the assumption that contemporary rural cultures are characterised primarily by limitation or lack.

On the other hand, if cultural studies scholars have been slow to engage with the rural, much research on rural and regional communities has failed to recognise the dynamics of culture. Rural research in Australia has focused largely on the analysis of sociological or socio-economic issues which are generally cast as 'problems' of regional or national significance. In this context, it is not surprising that the kinds of topics that dominate both research and policy frameworks include: changing agricultural and pastoral fortunes; the withdrawal of health, education, government and financial services; unemployment and youth suicide; and the effects of global markets and technological provision on rural communities (Lawrence, Lyons and Momtaz; Lockie and Bourke; Pritchard and McManus; Gray and Lawrence). While these studies have often addressed general aspects of culture and community, the nature or notion of the culture(s) in play has not been elaborated with the kind of complexity that cultural studies has accumulated in relation to urban populations. Elsewhere, political and historical studies have addressed issues of non-metropolitan culture in the broad sense of 'rural ideologies'—ideologies such as agrarianism, countrymindedness, the bush legend or rurality itself—but again only occasionally have the dynamics of culture become the focus of extended analysis (Gray and Phillips; Halpin and Martin; Mules and Miller).

Rural cultural studies, in short, offers to bring the same level of attention to the full range of cultural activities in rural Australia as has been applied to urban areas. It seeks to investigate in depth the differences in the production, performance and consumption of cultures, both the everyday and the 'spectacular', which are the consequence of their location in rural, remote or regional areas. It announces an interest not only in the cultural in 'other' locations but also in the very nature of rurality.

In the Australian case, a cluster of overlapping terms—rural, remote, regional, country, pastoral, bush, outback—has emerged in both official and vernacular languages to account for the diversity of 'non-urban' experiences, economic, political and cultural. Although of necessity certain of these terms are given 'objective' status for the purposes of statistical processing or government policy-making, each brings with it a cultural dimension, an 'excess' of meaning accumulated over time and through the play of political—and cultural—forces. As Andrew Gorman-Murray, Kate Darian-Smith and Chris Gibson argue in the essay that follows, the meanings of the rural also change according to the scale

through which it is produced, whether global, national, state or local or as 'embodied' (literally and performatively) in the individual.

We are familiar, indeed *over*-familiar, with work on the idea of the bush or 'bush legend', but other cultural dimensions of the rural have been less scrutinised. While there are good reasons for the attention which Australian studies, history and cultural studies have accorded to the bush legend—its sheer recurrence in political and popular discourses (and the persuasiveness of Russel Ward's 1958 study, *The Australian Legend*)—it could certainly be argued that the 'fixation' on critiquing the bush legend has obscured any constitutive or positive sense of rural cultures. As John Hirst pointed out thirty years ago, narratives of place and history articulated around pioneering have been at least as widespread and sustained as the specifically democratic sense of a bush ethos delineated by Ward, and probably more so (see also Walker). Recent studies from within cultural history have also worked to 'dissolve' the bush legend back into a broader array of settler/coloniser ideologies and attitudes towards country and towards its Indigenous owners. The range of values that might be summed up in the term 'pastoralism' for example has, again, been at least as influential as ideas of the bush, if not more so (Carter; Hoorn). Images of wheat and the 'Golden Fleece' were much more common in mid-twentieth century Australia than images of bush workers (some will remember the merino ram on the shilling coin and the wheat on the threepence!), while the 'family on the land' soon displaced the iconography of the bushman. Today a phrase such as 'men and women of the bush' need carry very little of earlier meanings of the bush legend, the battler's struggle 'on his selection', or the cosy world of *Blue Hills*.

Environmental history, too, has shuffled perceptions of the bush back into a more complex range of settler perceptions of land and nature. It has also prompted new work, not least in the fields of literary and visual culture studies, that explores the relationships between imperialism and the ideologies associated with agriculture, environment and wilderness (Arthur; Darian-Smith, Gunner and Nuttall; Griffiths; Griffiths and Robin; Harper). Still, the 'constitutive' sense of culture, of production, performance and consumption, of individual and collective meaning-making in rural Australia, both past and present, remains underdeveloped (but see Goodall; Waterhouse).

Two other terms brought under close scrutiny by rural cultural studies are 'culture' itself, and the term with which it is almost always joined in rural research, 'community'. While the broader 'post-aesthetic' understanding of culture that has driven cultural studies forward is invaluable in focusing attention on the forms of everyday cultural practice which are of significance in rural areas, we also need to avoid 'reducing' rural cultures to the anthropological or ethnographic dimension alone. Cultural studies researchers have developed sophisticated languages for analysing cultures as social practices, certainly. But

they have also explored and interrogated cultures as modes of entertainment, self-fashioning, creativity, critique, individuation, group solidarity, professionalisation and public performance; as industries and objects of policy; and as the site of complex struggles across racial and ethnic divides. Rural cultures research would benefit from a similarly multilayered or cross-disciplinary approach. There remains a danger that rural cultures will be identified with certain minimalist, defensive or 'residual' forms of cultural practice only ('holding the community together') while urban cultures will continue to be seen as complex, heterogeneous and perpetually reinventing themselves.

Similarly, rural cultural studies will almost inevitably find itself dealing with issues of place and community—the latter probably the most fraught concept of all next to rurality itself. While being fully attentive to local discourses of community and place, rural cultural researchers will need to guard against assuming that community will always be the goal of rural cultural practices. This is an assumption, again, that we do not have of urban cultures which are often framed in relation to questions of individuation, sub-cultural identity or cosmopolitanism. Studies of rural Australia (and studies of the rural elsewhere) have often been constrained within and by a more homogenous concept of 'community'. Such a conception is cognate with representations of rural communities as self-contained, and relatively isolated or remote from larger regional, national and international networks and markets. Against this tendency, we need to reconceptualise the rural in terms of its participation in these larger networks; and simultaneously in *smaller* regional, national or international networks that cut across community boundaries to connect with similar 'sub-community' interest groups elsewhere. Rural communities are diverse, sometimes more diverse than urban communities, in their mix of Indigenous and non-indigenous residents and/or as a result of particular patterns of 'ethnic' migration. What might we make, for example, of the importance of Italian migration to the canefields of North Queensland? What kinds of transformations of the rural take place if we consider the multi-ethnic communities of places such as Griffith, Mildura, Broome and Darwin? Notions of community can also assume an antagonistic rather than dialogic relation between internally and externally generated forms of culture, emphasising community-generated forms at the expense of those which arrive from elsewhere or move through communities. While there has been a vigorous 'post-structuralist' critique of terms such as community or region, these remain theoretically driven rather than focused on local, located and historicised examples (Bourke; Gray and Lawrence; Mules).

As Kate Bowles demonstrates in her essay below, it is not that rural cultural research has been ignored in Australia, but rather that there has been little communication among researchers. At one level this is precisely because a field such as 'rural cultural studies' has not been articulated and to that extent does

not exist as a place where research from within different disciplines (or cross-disciplinary clusters) could be shared and consolidated through a strong sense of the *cultural*. Rural cultural research, Bowles suggests, has largely been a form of anthropology. While the themes of place, identity and community have become increasingly significant in cultural geography, history and literary studies, and while the representation of rural or bush life has been a foundational concern for Australian studies, Bowles points out that 'disciplines centrally concerned with cultural production and consumption—cultural studies, communication studies, creative industries research and media studies—have so far been less interested in … the forms of everyday cultural practice and experience which matter in rural, regional and remote communities' (Bowles).

Despite contradictions and a lack of communication, within both cultural studies and rural studies, there has been a range of research generating the foundations for a distinct rural cultural studies. There have been several themed issues of the electronic journal *Transformations*: 'Regional Imaginary' (2000), 'Fleeing the City' (2001), and 'Rethinking Regionality' (2005). Other work includes studies of the role of the rural imaginary in Australian political and social life (Brett); the 'lifestyle' dimension in changing rural/urban dynamics and rural demographics (Burnley and Murphy; Pritchard and McManus); consideration of the diverse social and cultural, including counter-cultural, populations in rural areas (Gorman-Murray, Waitt and Gibson; Gibson 'Migration'; Waitt and Gorman-Murray); Indigenous culture in rural, regional and remote Australia (Davies; Lawrence and Gibson); the emergence of cultural industries in music, festivals, art, heritage, and tourism in regional Australia (Darian-Smith; Darian-Smith and Wills; Duffy; Gibson 'Music Festivals'; Mercer; Walmsley); arts provision and participation (O'Regan and Cox; Timms and Christie; Trotter); the role of media including radio, television, cinema, newspapers and internet in regional localities (Cryle; Gibson 'Digital Divides'; Huggett and Bowles; Kirkpatrick *Sworn*, *Country*); and cultural dimensions of human-environment relations across the country (Ashley). This is not an exhaustive inventory, but it provides some sense of the diverse work converging in rural cultural studies. This special issue contributes to the new field, drawing together rural studies and cultural studies, and reworking the distinction between 'rural' and 'culture'.

In bringing cultural studies together with historical and geographical perspectives on rural cultures, this collection of essays also seeks to show the value of drawing together the views and expertise of cultural researchers, geographers and historians. Historical studies and geography have long been seen as complementary, balancing the nuances of space and time, period and place, context and change. For several decades there have also been notable overlaps in the subfields of historical geography, geographical history and environmental history (Baker; Powell). The lens of rural cultural research provides another avenue for dismantling disciplinary barriers between historical and geographical

perspectives while recognising and utilising their respective strengths and the productive tensions of cross-disciplinary work.

One of the resonances thus produced is the interrogation and destabilisation of the rural/urban binary. It is virtually impossible, of course, to speak of the rural without noting its differentiation from and connections to the urban. The essay by Andrew Gorman-Murray, Kate Darian-Smith and Chris Gibson interrogates the rural/urban framework, showing how cultural constructions of the rural and its conceptual relation to the urban shift across different spatial and temporal scales. Phil McManus and John Connell further reveal the complex relationships between the rural and the urban in the recent mounting of Country Week exhibitions, which seek to entice urban dwellers to relocate to rural towns. In an analysis that highlights the flows and counter-flows of people, ideas and images between country and city, this research challenges assumptions about urban-to-rural migration in relation to such factors as lifestyle, class and gentrification.

It is in part the interplay of scale in cultural constructions of the rural that Deb Anderson takes up in her case study. She considers how rural identities and places, as supposedly highly localised phenomena, are also inflected and constituted by inter-connections with broader, extra-local scales. Drawing on research conducted in Victoria's Mallee region, Anderson describes the imbrication between scientific knowledge at the national scale and local lived experience in everyday responses to drought and climate change, and how these tensions influence an individual's expression of her relationship to place.

Finally, Kate Bowles returns to the larger question of the division and connections between the cultural and the rural within contemporary areas of scholarly interest. She indicates the limited degree to which cultural studies has engaged with rural research, not merely in terms of its theoretical or historical models, but also in terms of its actual engagement with rural people, associations, communities or industries. Her essay details the profound institutional disincentives to creative rural cultural research, even as it offers a series of arguments about the protocols, significance and rewards that such research might involve. At its best, rural cultural studies provides an imaginative intellectual framework within which the humanities and social sciences can begin to understand the specificities of rural cultures and to contribute more fully to policy making as well as to 'cultural studies' itself.

As co-editors of this special section on Rural Cultural Studies we would like to acknowledge the Institute of Australian Geographers at whose annual conference held at the University of Melbourne (1-5 July 2007) some of these papers were first presented. Ideas for this collection of essays were also generated at the workshop on 'Collaborative Research in Rural and Remote Cultures' convened by David Carter and Kate Darian-Smith held at the State Library of Queensland,

6-7 September 2007. The workshop was supported by the Cultural Histories and Cultural Geographies node of the ARC-funded Cultural Research Network, convened by Kate Darian-Smith and Chris Gibson, and the ARC Linkage Project 'Popular Cultures and Social Change: Case Studies from Rural Queensland' led by David Carter.

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Scaling the Rural: Reflections on Rural Cultural Studies

Andrew Gorman-Murray, Kate Darian-Smith and Chris Gibson

How can cultural analysis be brought to bear on the rural? This central question for rural cultural studies prompts our exploration of how the rural has been delineated and interpreted in the developed West, as a departure for thinking about new intellectual approaches to rurality that span spaces, times and academic disciplines. In this paper we adopt a broad schema, discussing insights from rural studies, cultural geography and history. As Michael Woods (*Rural Geography*) has handily pointed out, 'rural' is

> one of those curious words which everyone thinks they know what it means, but which is actually very difficult to define precisely. Attempts by academics to define and delimit rural areas and rural societies have always run into problems, sometimes because the distinctions they have drawn have been rather arbitrary, sometimes because they have over-emphasised the differences between city and country, *and sometimes because they have under-emphasised the diversity of the countryside*. (15, emphasis added)

The complexity and variations of rural environments, economies and populations in Australia is illuminated in our discussion of how the rural may be conceived of through five different scales: the global, the national, the state, the regional or local, and the bodily (or at least at the level of individuals). We extend existing debates about defining 'the rural' and 'rurality', seeking a more nuanced *multi-scalar* reading of the meaning of the rural within contemporary Australian culture and society. The spatially specific aspect of this broad sketch is particularly germane to recent concerns in the discipline of geography about the social construction of scale (Marston 'The Social', 'A Long Way'), and it responds to calls to pay greater attention to the role of scale in rural studies (Bell; Little and Austin). It also emerges from claims that the rural has been neglected in recent historical discourse (Darian-Smith) and that as a consequence much academic commentary on contemporary rural issues in Australia is 'strangely disconnected from an understanding of the longer course of Australian rural history' (Davison and Brodie xi). We hope both to draw upon and move beyond our specific disciplinary backgrounds in geography and history to engage with a new framework for thinking about rural cultures in Australia.

Cultural approaches to defining 'the rural': historical and geographical perspectives

In the 1990s rural studies was reinvigorated by the cultural turn and the recognition of the importance of culture within rurality and its definitions (Cloke 'Country'; Rye). Such cultural approaches challenged the definition of the rural as an objectively measurable material or physical space demarcated through quantifiable demographic or social differences, such as population density or distinct economic activities such as agriculture, mining or forestry. As a consequence, scholarly attention turned to representations of the rural, conceived 'as [a] subjective and socially constructed phenomena, located in people's minds' (Rye 409; Cloke 'Country'; Halfacree; Mormont; Phillips). As Mormont (36) puts it, 'rurality is not a thing or a territorial unit, but derives from the social production of meaning'. The rural, then, is a symbolic lens for certain moral and cultural values which vary across time and space. Popular representations of the rural in the spheres of public policy, everyday cultural life and social norms derive from representational processes, as acknowledged by recent work in geography (Little and Austin; Phillips et al; Rye; Short; Vanderbeck and Dunkley).

The variable meanings of the rural are, of course, embedded in wider narratives that locate people as members of spatially and historically diverse communities at local, national and global levels. Since the European occupation of Australia and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the impulse to own land and to render it productive through agricultural, pastoral and mining activities has been central to the development of colonial and national economies, social and political institutions and the dynamics of Australian culture (Waterhouse). The mythology of 'the bush' and the sometimes competing values of itinerant rural workers and the yeoman pioneer, for example, were not only influential in the literary and visual expressions of late nineteenth-century nationalism, but have remained central to evolving definitions of Australian identity and values, and are foundational to Australian nationalist historiography (Hirst; Ward; Waterhouse 166 -193).

At the time of Federation, for example, the Australian economy was dominated by the primary sector, and almost half the Australian population lived in rural towns with a population less than 3000. But the glamorous and gritty urbanism of the capital cities (think of 'Marvellous Melbourne' and its darker and morally deficient underside), their suburban respectability, and their growing manufacturing base, were already well established in the iconography of Australian public culture (see, for instance, Davison 'The Rise'; Forster). Thus, by the late nineteenth century, even as much of the marginally arable land within the continent was still being cleared, there was already a tendency to nostalgia for the heroic feats of the pioneering days, as well as a widespread

acknowledgement that life on the land was potentially one of struggle. By the 1930s, as Depression and drought drove many farming families off the land, the qualities associated with rural populations—especially a capacity for hard work—were increasingly seen to be embodied in those living in country towns, which became symbolic of the stability of 'traditional' agrarian communities (Brodie).

This is not to suggest that the history of agricultural and other primary production in Australia was lacking in innovation. As Heather Goodall has put it, the rural in Australia was 'born modern'. Agricultural, pastoral and mining industries in Australia were, from the early colonial period, associated with experimentation, invention and the scientific taming of a new environment so that it was rendered productive in a European sense. The introduction of the merino sheep, the invention of the stump-jump plough, and the extraordinary discourses of progress that characterised the Murray River towns of Mildura and Renmark in the late nineteenth century (as irrigation made the deserts bloom) are all evidence of the deliberate transformation of the Australian interior into modern cultural landscapes or 'second natures', put to productive use (see Anderson).

The rapid spread of mechanisation in the mid-twentieth century, and the take-up of new farming technologies after the Second World War ensured that primary production, including minerals exploration, boomed in the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, since the 1970s, the primary economy has been shaken by the deregulation of agricultural industries, environmental and climatic impacts, changing consumer demands and global markets. The decades since have seen a decline (with many regional variations) in the non-metropolitan workforce and in the provision of rural infrastructure. With agriculture now accounting for less than 5 per cent of Australia's economic production, over the past decade rural Australia has been widely represented in the media and in government policy as being 'in crisis'—as a 'land of discontent' and a victim of 'global misfortune' in desperate need of 'renewal' (Darian-Smith; Gray and Lawrence; Pritchard and McManus).

Such popular contemporary definitions of the rural in Australia as 'trouble', or at best 'troubled', simultaneously construct it in relation (and often in opposition) to the urban. Of course, this is not new: there is a long tradition of 'objective' definitions of the rural which compare rural and urban spaces, assigning attributes like low population density and agrarian economic activity to the former and high density population and mixed economic activity to the latter. Raymond Williams' classic study of the city and country focussed on the continuing relationships of these two sites in an industrialised Europe (although we note that the city/country terminology also differs in certain symbolic ways from that of urban/rural). The ideal of 'country life', transplanted from Europe

to Australia, has had a long hold on Australian culture ever since colonisation, but always in some tension with metropolitan living (Davison and Brodie). However, the shift in the material realities of rural spaces means that the historical contours of the urban/rural comparison have now taken on different forms. Indeed, the quantification of rural difference has been challenged by demographic movement—including the internal migration of urban-dwellers to sea-change and tree-change destinations—and in some rural areas by the move of economic activities away from primary production to service industries, including tourism and cultural industries. In contemporary Australia the rural has become a symbolic marker of social, cultural and moral values that are defined more by perceived limitations than any sense of agricultural or indeed social progressiveness—it is a spatial imaginary increasingly detached from agrarian spaces *per se* (Bell; Cloke 'Country'; Phillips et al).

This disruption of the cultural construction of the rural can also unsettle the conventional ways rural landscapes and livelihoods have been imagined. As Woods argues, '[a]griculture is one of the most potent and enduring emblems of rurality. For centuries, agriculture was in most rural regions not only the overwhelmingly dominant source of employment, but also the driving force of the rural economy and a pervasive influence in the organization of rural society and culture' (*Rural Geography* 42) . But the link between agrarianism and rurality is not essential (and has been unproblematically essentialised). In Australia, rural economies have not been limited to agricultural pursuits but have encompassed other primary industries such as forestry, fishing and, most importantly with reference to the current resources surge, the mining industries. These sectors have not been discrete, but have often been connected through patterns of investment, ownership and employment (see Woods, *Rural Geography*). Given the recent post-productivist turn, to this mix we can add associations of rurality with tourism and leisure activities, producing further fractures in rural imagery between what we can think of as agrarian 'farmscapes', untamed 'wildscapes' and sporting 'adventurescapes' (Bell, 'Variations'). As a result, the cultural construction of the Australian rural must now accommodate a fluid and diverse range of landscapes, livelihoods and industries.

Studies of rural representations are additionally crosscut by variations in the contours of urban/rural difference in national contexts. Gill Valentine, for instance, describes how 'idyllic' notions of the rural differ between the USA, the UK, New Zealand and Australia. Within these national locations, the rural can encompass quaint villages, fields of broad-acre farms, lushly forested wilderness, and frontier territory. The national context is critical to the social and cultural definition of rurality (Allen; Little and Austin), and in Australia the very distinctiveness of the environment and climate, among other factors, influences how we imagine it. At the same time, the national meanings associated with rurality shift with scale; the English rural idyll is represented differently

on its national and local scales (Cloke and Milbourne; Little and Austin), while both local and national understandings feed into the circulation of global projections of rurality (Bell). Within these jostling spatial scales, there are also distinct historical shifts which adjust the reception of constructions of the rural. For instance the powerful media representations of drought (cracked red earth, starving sheep in the paddock) and the demographic decline of country towns (boarded up shopfronts, and absence of services) that have been dominant in metropolitan media markets from the mid 1990s contrast markedly with images aimed at British migrants in the 1950s and 1960s that depicted Australia through the abundance of its agricultural production and associated opportunities (Darian-Smith, 'Up the Country').

In examining the spatial and temporal scales of definitions of Australian rurality in the remainder of this paper, we turn to some examples drawn from the complex range of tourist imagery about Australia and its non-metropolitan features. Tourist campaigns are particularly apt for this discussion because in themselves they rhetorically deploy (and indeed shape) a multi-scalar approach directed at variously imagined, and highly differentiated, audiences or market sectors—which range from international travellers to interstate tourists to those individuals seeking weekend rejuvenation and encompass family holidays, backpacker experiences and retirees with caravans. This provides an accessible entry to thinking through the interwoven spatial and temporal scales that evoke Australian rurality.

Global, national and state scales

In recent years, scholarly attention has been directed towards what David Bell (154) calls the 'transnational rural' or the way the rural can be imagined globally (see also Woods, 'Engaging' and McCarthy on 'global countryside'). Bell is interested in how certain images of the rural are circulated internationally and in this process become normalised. But how might Australia, with its current urbanisation of 86 percent of the population, be imagined within the framework of the transnational rural?

The persistence of the global view of Australia stems from its history as a white settler colony within the British Empire. From the time of European settlement, Australia has often been understood by its colonial population and within the wider imperial sphere, including North America, as a sparsely settled, wild and 'untamed' continent, as 'frontier' territory—land farthest from white civilisation and metropolitan domesticity. The Australian frontier was, as in other colonial societies, the place where white settlers and Indigenous peoples met, often in violent clashes. Much historical inquiry in recent decades has been directed at exploring the gendered and racial dimensions of these interactions, and what Henry Reynolds has famously called 'the other side of the frontier' (Reynolds). These historical legacies were central to the overturning of the legal dictum of

terra nullius in 1992, and the historicisation of the colonisation of rural (or at least non-urban) Australia dominated the history wars of the Howard era (Macintyre and Clark). The rural imagery associated with the Australian landscape, from the 'bush' to the 'outback' desert, is historically grounded, although the association of the outback with Aboriginal Australia can also situate this landscape as simultaneously pre-historical and post-colonial.

Global imagery surrounding the rural in Australia is also economically grounded, linking rural industries to Australia's international profile as a primary producer. From the colonial period, sheep and wool were the basis of the economy, and by the 1850s the colony of Victoria was the richest gold-producer in the world. Australia was 'born modern' in the sense that its economic development was driven by newly emerging international markets for the export of primary produce. The symbolic values associated with agriculture differed wildly from those of mining, but both drew on transnational histories and experiences. The nineteenth-century goldfields, for instance, were associated with social instability and transient populations, and sustained part of a global diaspora of Chinese migrant labour. In this aspect, there is continuity, although also considerable differences, with the fly-in/fly-out patterns of employment organisation in Australia's contemporary mining sites. Again, the images and practices associated with contemporary Australian mining are not conceived within an exclusively Australian framework, but draw on discourses associated with the global mining industries, in particular in terms of their environmental impact, forms of unionisation, management and operating standards that connect mining operations at the transnational level. While global tourism is also now central to Australia's economy, the images it constructs of Australia as an unspoilt wilderness represent significant continuity with these older transnational rural stereotypes. They draw on the persistent notion of Australia as frontier territory, with a focus on its landscape and natural attributes. Australia is 'sold' to the world through images of the outback; of sand, sun and surf; and through its 'exotic' native wildlife (Waitt).

Bell's idea of the transnational rural is provocative precisely because, in the West, the rural is often equated with regional hinterlands *within* the nation-state. But cultural constructions of idyllic ruralities circulate *across* nations and geographical regions, so that there are certain rural symbolisms which transcend these scales. In Australia, country music and the recent lifestyle trend for idyllic rural retreats—not to mention agricultural technology and ideas about land use management—have evolved from cultural formations originating in Europe, North America and parts of Asia. This global transmission of ideas, culture and technologies to Australia has resulted in their reinvention and innovative applications in accordance with localised situations (Woods, 'Engaging'), and in some instances their global re-circulation.

For instance, recent work by historian James Boyce on Van Diemen's Land examines how early free settlers mimicked an old world sensibility in the creation of Georgian manors surrounded by estates. Max Staples also discusses the way the historical and contemporary social construction of the Tasmanian landscape has positioned the island as a 'Little England', with England imagined as the archetypal 'rural idyll'. While Australia may be seen as the last rural (or wilderness) retreat from an industrialised Europe, and indeed is marketed as such in international tourist promotional material, at the same time an imaginary rural English landscape is cast in a domestic or national sense as the last rural retreat from the stresses of contemporary Australian life. Such an interplay between European notions of rural landscapes and pursuits and their realisation in Australia is also evident in the construction and marketing of Hepburn Shire, Victoria, as 'spa country', conjuring up images transplanted from the 'spa resorts' of nineteenth century England (Gorman-Murray, Waitt and Gibson, 'Chilling Out', 'A Queer').

The international distribution of country music and western films as particular cultural products originating in the US, have also been influential in the way the rural or the country has been imagined in different localities across the globe. Studies of rural festivals in Australia, such as the Tamworth Country Music Festival and the Parkes Elvis Revival Festival (Brennan-Horley, Connell and Gibson; Gibson and Davidson) show how these are dominated by US-imported visual (and aural) imagery associated with what we might see as 'global' country culture. And to take a final example, we might also think of the transposition of 'Bali-style' guest houses to 'idyllic' rural locations such as Byron Bay, or other Asian-inspired tourist retreats in tropical Queensland or places like Broome. Here the recreation of an Asian rurality, whether as a 'generic' or more specific cultural evocation (and at times a combination of the two) can also be linked historically to patterns of migration and the fusion of diverse cultures.

Alongside these global evocations, the rural is often positioned on the national scale as a symbolic site for authentic national values, a 'receptacle for … shoring up what it means to be English, or Dutch, or whatever' (Bell 151). This has certainly been the convention in Australia, illustrated in the way that the values of the bush, for instance, came to infuse the representation of another central national icon, the Gallipoli digger. While contemporary Australia is becoming more cautious about presenting rural images as a distinctive marker of nation, nevertheless in the 'story' of Australia performed at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (and viewed by an international audience of 3.5 billion people) the mounted (male) bush worker was presented as 'a quintessential idea' of national identity (Elder 34), supported by representations of the forces of land and nature, Indigenous Australians, and migration and settlement as contributors to 'being Australian'.

The national scale similarly balances cultural and economic considerations. In the decades after Federation until its dismantlement in the neo-liberal economic reforms of the 1980s, state protectionism encompassed support for the country and its interests. This was underpinned not only by the reliance on the primary economy, but on a political culture that stressed the significance of rural values and the commitment of the nation to populate the continent. This view was exemplified by the ideology of the Country Party, defined by Aitkin as 'country-mindedness', a belief that rural communities should be compensated for their disproportionate economic and cultural contribution to the nation, and that regional equality was a 'right'. As Judith Brett puts it: 'At one time the problems *of* the country were the problems *for* the country as a whole' (14). In the 1990s, as Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party rose and fell, the newer, but deep-seated politics of alienation and discontent among some (but not all) rural communities illustrated sharply how 'the rural' could not be ignored within national conservative politics or indeed across the political spectrum.

At the same time, shifting definitions of rurality are critical to the political and legislative function of the Australian states and territories, with some positioned as 'more rural' within the nation itself. Bureaucratic definitions at the scale of the state, of course, have shifted over time and according to political expediency, and tend to collapse the definitions of state and regional: under the Howard government, the terms 'the bush', 'the regions' and 'rural and regional' were increasingly used in political vernacular to mean the same thing. Nevertheless, official meanings attributed to these categories narrowed considerably in accordance with specific policy frameworks.

Official demographic statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, for example, define five types of census collection districts across Australia according to accessibility to and remoteness from major urban centres: Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia, and Very Remote Australia (ABS, 2003). This has implications for how urban/rural difference across Australia is 'operationalised' in policy frameworks. According to these definitions, entire states and territories are non-metropolitan. The Northern Territory, for instance, is entirely classified as non-metropolitan, ranging from Outer Regional (Darwin) to Very Remote. Tasmania ranges from Inner Regional (Hobart) to Remote. Most of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia are classified as Very Remote. Conversely, only a fraction of New South Wales is Very Remote, and none of Victoria falls into that category. These bureaucratic and demographic definitions of the rural and regional do not always match up to broader cultural understandings of what the rural may be, or to the self-positioning of particular towns or non-metropolitan regions. While it might be relatively unproblematic to view the entire Northern Territory as non-metropolitan, it is more difficult in a commonsense way to equate it with rurality.

Likewise, tourism images of Australia aimed at domestic and international audiences imagine the internal variables of rurality in different ways, with some states and territories being represented as more rural and some as more metropolitan. (Australian state borders were, of course, artificially placed across the nation/continent, and as a consequence border regions offer particularly clear illustrations of the construction of rurality in relation to legislative and social contexts.) The features of the rural invoked in tourist images range widely: the Northern Territory and Western Australia are positioned as 'outback', Tasmania as 'wilderness', Queensland as 'tropical paradise'. Meanwhile, New South Wales and Victoria (as the industrialised, economically diverse states) are often imagined through their large state capitals, Sydney and Melbourne. South Australia appears as the state 'in-between', with a little bit of everything (from the city of Adelaide to the gateway to the outback) but seemingly distinguished by nothing in particular; the ACT as bush capital of international significance. Where rural images of New South Wales and Victoria are seen, they are often the 'cultivated rusticity' of a more Euro-American idyllic variety—vineyards, wine regions, pastoral settings. Perhaps it is no surprise that recent Tourism Victoria advertisements are set in vineyards, using the tune 'Run Rabbit Run' to allude to a non-native animal (the rabbit) as an icon of Victorian rurality.

Regional/local and individual scales

Just as the Australian continent is politically and legislatively divided by state boundaries, so is it internally defined by socially affective regions, localities and communities. Within these (and sometimes across them) there may be regional articulations of rurality. Regions are shaped by their colonial histories, their topography and environment, and their economic, social and political compositions, as much as by their local government designations, which have, of course, altered over time. Such mappings of the continent are transposed over the boundaries of traditional Indigenous territories, which are perhaps best known through David Horton's map of Aboriginal Australia (1994), supplemented by recognised and ongoing Native Title claims. The regional scale of how we might understand settler and Indigenous identities and experiences, and for our purposes the concept of the rural, has been under-emphasised in Australia. But it is in regional histories, more theoretically informed and expansive since the 1980s, that identification with particular places and landscapes and a sense of regional belonging have been expressed forcefully (French). And it is in the vigorous tradition of local histories, many concerned with non-metropolitan localities, that the connections between places and their communities continue to be narrated (Davison, 'Local History').

Since the nineteenth century, these regional and local identifications have often been incorporated in domestic tourism campaigns. As contemporary advertisements such as Tourism Victoria's 'You'll love every piece of Victoria'

campaign suggest, the different regions within states are also culturally constructed in ways that may differ from the national or international representations of the rural, or which may hybridise localised elements with 'travelling' representations of the rural. In contrast to allusions to taming the land or the frontier nation, the *region* in Australia is often represented in terms similar to the Euro-American rural idyll. We currently see advertisements and images for the 'wine regions' of the Hunter Valley, Barossa Valley, Margaret River or Stanthorpe, or 'dairy regions' like the Eurobodalla and the far south coast of New South Wales or Victoria's Gippsland. It is here, then, that what Bell calls the gastro-idyll or pastoral idyll comes into play: the rural as a gentrified and domesticated landscape which yields specialised and desirable cuisine, which might include 'bush tucker' and indigenous flora and fauna. Such regions are often associated with tourism of a more cosmopolitan variety, with city-dwellers retreating to the country, 'chilling out', and reviving body, mind and soul through wine tastings, farm stays and spa treatments. They are also associated with the 'new economies' of metropolitan values transposed to selected rural areas, and not surprisingly they are generally easily accessed (by car) from Australia's capital cities.

The discourse of rurality at this localised scale of gentrified tourism can be seen to be gendered in more feminised terms than the rugged masculinity associated, both historically and culturally, with pioneering, farming and rural labour. Where the Euro-American style rural idyll comes into play, so too do its attributes, with rural communities often imagined as safe, secure, tight-knit and family-centred (Little and Austin; Valentine). These virtues have a long trajectory of being seen as upheld by the community work of rural women—in this instance as nurturers, carers, wives, mothers and community volunteers (Allen; Little and Austin).

The gendered embodiment of rurality is geographically, historically and culturally complex, and in Australia the demographic realities of rural settlement, where white women were (and in many areas remain) under-represented, have resulted in concerted government attempts from the 1920s to improve the 'attractiveness' of rural life through the provision of such services as maternal and child health services and the provision of domestic technology. A study of young women's participation in post-war 'Miss Showgirl' competitions held at annual agricultural shows illustrates how these women were represented as embodying the values of rural femininity on scales that were highly localised while simultaneously conceptualising femininity in national terms (Darian-Smith and Wills).

This introduces us to the final scale of rurality—that of the body itself. Jo Little, for instance, has urged more work on understanding the construction of rural masculinities and femininities at the scale of the body, and argues that embodied

performances are bound up with the rural environment and community. We have seen how the rural can be embodied through both women and men on different scales, producing stereotypes of the ideal country man or woman. The national scale evokes the historical frontier or bush mythology, which in turn idealises the hardened male body as the vector of exploration, conquest and productivity (Cloke, 'Masculinity'). Meanwhile, the regional scale of the rural idyll and tight-knit community and family values evokes the feminine as the embodiment of selflessness and succour (Allen; Little and Austin). But these images, as stereotypes, also draw attention to what is missing from Australian rural imaginaries. Rural bodies are predominantly white and heterosexual, for instance (Gibson and Davidson). They tend towards individualism or an imagined rural 'classlessness' (or egalitarianism) as the embodiment of honest labour. The ethnic diversity of rural towns has been historically obscured, although this may be now selectively celebrated as a marker of the history and the associated economies of particular towns or regions (as in Griffith or Broome), and linked to heritage, festivals and cultural tourism.

Of course, there are other images of rural bodies as well. In Northern Territory and outback Queensland tourism, representations of Indigenous bodies are common, and are always placed in distinctly non-urban settings. It is as if the Indigenous body itself is an exemplar of the 'untouched' natural environment or 'wilderness' of Australia. And just as the rural idyll may be a store for old-fashioned values, the association of the Indigenous body with the landscape also evokes westernised hierarchies of race and culture—these bodies are seen to be at one with a landscape imagined as 'timeless' and 'ancient' (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson; Lane and Waitt). Indigenous Australians are too rarely associated with the promotion of urban settings despite the fact that the majority of the Indigenous population live in major towns or cities. And of course, images of remote and rural Aboriginal communities as places of cultural despair, populated by people who need 'rescuing' through government intervention (Lawrence and Gibson), have been prominent in the media. Such representations gesture towards the continuity of a 'frontier' outside the capital cities. This is in stark contrast, in a cultural, racial, geographical and imaginary sense, to the notion of the packaged rural idyll of domesticated weekend tourism, where the restorative qualities of the rural transform and rejuvenate urban-dwellers.

Conclusion

Here, then, are five interconnected scales of the rural in the Australian context. They are not meant to be definitive, but rather to suggest in a synthetic way how rural imaginaries are put to use and perform cultural work in contemporary Australian society. These discussions prompt greater consideration of the role of scale in how the rural is evoked and experienced, and how that further

multiplies the way the rural can be defined in forms that may be bureaucratic as well as symbolic or representative.

From our perspective, there are (at least) two further queries left unaddressed here, but which in some ways are taken up by subsequent papers in this collection of essays. The first concerns the utility of the lingering rural-urban binary. At the very least, because the rural is often imagined in opposition to the urban or metropolitan, our multi-scalar discussion calls for a further deconstruction of this binary. If the rural can be constructed simultaneously across multiple scales, from the body to the globe, where then is the urban? How can the urban itself be imagined in any fixed sense? And if the Australian nation is imagined in rural terms in a global context, against *what* urban are rural regions *within* Australia imagined?

Our second query is whether cultural analysis of 'the rural' can take up the challenge, one most vigorously articulated in British geographical circles recently, to move beyond deconstruction and reliance on purely representational worlds so as to 're-materialise' rural studies while remaining sensitive to the operation and power of cultural discourse. How do the people who inhabit 'rural Australia' (however defined) make sense of the cacophony of multi-scaled, somewhat contradictory rural imagery sketched above? To what extent are rural idylls, frontier images and pastoral discourses commensurate with, or a challenge to, the everyday lives of contemporary rural residents? Or more modestly, what attracts (or repels) people from all backgrounds to rural culture and places? Much is said about 'living on the land', but what might this really mean for how humans, climate and landscape interact in rural cultures? It is abundantly clear that 'the rural' has discursive power, and hence its deployment by governments seeking to achieve certain kinds of policy ends. But there is more at work and at stake in the cultural construction of rurality in Australia than mere symbolism. Rural people and all varieties of non-human entities and technologies (from new crop varieties to national parks, from tourist brochures to farm machinery and mobile phones) are intricately embedded in the interconnected and historically-grounded production of rural places in Australia.

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Country Week: Bringing the City to the Country?

Phil McManus and John Connell

Recent decades have seen seemingly inexorable population decline in many parts of rural and regional Australia, despite local and national strategies to avert emerging economic and population imbalances (Country Shire Councils Association and Country Urban Councils Association Working Party; Pritchard and McManus). Since 2004 a novel initiative has sought to encourage new migration flows into rural Australia. Country Week, a three-day city fair operating in New South Wales and Queensland, involves rural and regional councils and other organisations publicising the advantages of rural areas and small towns and encouraging households to relocate from cities. Unlike most strategies for regional development, which are usually based on stimulating business activity, Country Week is a private sector initiative (albeit supported by governments), and is targeted at particular households. Country Week seeks to revitalise less obviously attractive regional areas as well as meeting and matching employment demands and opportunities in thriving regional areas. In so doing it has stimulated new ways of conceiving the country, challenged some perceptions of an urban-rural divide and created more flexible images of rural life.

Initiated by business groups from Armidale, in northern New South Wales, Country Week Expo has been held on four occasions in Sydney, and in Brisbane for the first time in 2007. The locations vary—Rosehill Gardens Racecourse in western Sydney contrasts with the inner-urban South Bank location in Brisbane. Entry is free to the public. The event is supported by significant political figures from across the political divide. Former Labor Premier of NSW, Morris Iemma, opened the 2006 Expo, which also featured a keynote speech by then Liberal Party Senator Amanda Vanstone, while the Expo has prominent National Party support. All parties support the notion of rural and regional growth. At all Expos local government authorities, government departments and businesses are represented among the exhibitors who pay to secure an exhibition space. There are also seminars on relevant topics for people who may be interested in moving from urban to country locations. As its 2008 website observes,

> Country Week, the tree and sea change expo is your opportunity to find out about the virtues of living and working in country and regional Queensland or New South Wales. Country and regional areas offer professional and skilled trades people, as well as businesses, a wide

variety of opportunities. Country Week is an easy, direct way to find out what is on offer. (Country Week Expo)

Country Week aims to attract disaffected urban residents to move to rural NSW or Queensland. The Expo is successful to the extent that it has continued for four years in NSW and has expanded into Queensland, although what constitutes success and quantifiable outcomes are hard to assess. Here we explore the theoretical context for this unique activity and seek to understand why some rural local authorities devote significant amounts of promotional time and financial resources to this annual event. In doing so, we shed light on perspectives held by urban residents who may be interested in re-locating to rural Australia, alongside the corresponding perspectives and goals of rural and regional councils, in order to identify some of the key concerns facing rural locations as they attempt to prosper in a highly urbanised eastern seaboard.

Beyond Counter-Urbanisation, Rural Gentrification and Tree Change

Much of the academic literature on rural change has focused either on the de-population of rural areas, or, particularly since the 1990s, on the opposite trend of 'counter-urbanisation' (Champion; Mitchell; Sant and Simons). The concept of counter-urbanisation, an umbrella term with many local variations, usually implies a relatively wealthy middle-class group withdrawing from urban settings to pursue a different lifestyle in a rural location. Much of this could also be described as rural gentrification, whether in Britain (Fielding; Milbourne, *Revealing*; Paquette and Domon) or Australia (Burnley and Murphy; Costello). In Australia, however, this concept tends to refer to permanent long-distance moves, usually described as 'sea-change', whereas in Britain it also incorporates commuting from urban peripheries. All of this literature is centred on assumptions of an urban-rural dichotomy, and therefore of class transformations in rural and regional areas. Milbourne calls for 'researchers of rural population change to engage more critically with discourses of mobilities, which involves them paying greater attention to the inter-connected empirical realities, representations and everyday practices of mobilities' (Milbourne, *Revealing* 382). While our research continues to focus 'on uni-directional flows of people to rural areas' (Milbourne, 'Re-populating' 384) it adds dimensions to counter-urbanisation in seeing this as also an institutional strategy, involving centralised and localised place marketing strategies rather than simply a collection of individual decisions. And it is a strategy that is not solely directed at middle-class migrants promoting lifestyle, but targets 'housing stressed' people who may be prepared to vacate the expensive capital cities for a rural location (Bailey, 'Interview').

In Australia, most urban-rural migration has been characterised as 'sea-change' or, more recently, its inland version known as 'tree-change'. Such terms invoke images of mainly retired or semi-retired households moving to pleasant coastal and inland areas for lifestyle reasons, and labelled elsewhere as counter-urbanisation or rural gentrification (Burnley and Murphy; Sant and Simons). The terms are catchy—'sea-change' being borrowed by the media-savvy demographer Bernard Salt from ABC's popular late-1990s drama series *SeaChange* (which of course had originally borrowed it from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*). The popularity of this trend is reflected in general statistics of people who are contemplating moving from Sydney to rural locations, which according to a *Sydney Morning Herald* opinion poll 'found one in five Sydneysiders are thinking of leaving because of high living costs, better job opportunities, or traffic congestion and overcrowding' (Creagh and Nixon 1). The popularity is also reflected in the emergence of a new magazine, *Live the Dream: Sea and Tree Change Australia*. Perpetuating the rural-urban dichotomy, a phenomenon that pervades much of the academic and popular literature, the editor's letter in the first edition of this magazine begins: 'The city and the bush: it seems there have always been two Australias' (Turner 2). Following Salt, who identified coastal non-metropolitan centres as the site of a third Australian culture, the magazine defines 'sea change' and 'tree change' as 'terms used to describe an Australian 'lifestyle swap'' ('What is it?' 4). City life cannot be country life—the dichotomy is perpetuated.

By contrast, Country Week emphasises the diversity of potential urban-rural migration, and the blurring of any urban-rural divide: it is designed to attract younger entrants into the workforce, especially trades people and other skilled workers, by councils primarily from inland areas. Despite partially trading on similar images of rural idyll and lifestyle, the kind of population movement that inland councils seek is quite different from the earlier processes of rural gentrification and counter-urbanisation subsumed under the notion of 'sea-change'. The emphasis in Country Week on employment opportunities and housing prices is designed to attract a working population less able to afford the costs of big-city living. Low income, social service recipients are not targeted in the Country Week marketing. This raises questions about rural identity and the understanding of socio-economic status in rural migration, but also offers insights into why and how people may stay in rural areas despite the apparent presence of better opportunities in large cities (Hoggart). Country Week thus adds another distinctive dimension to counter-urbanisation by its focus on employment and housing issues, rather than simply lifestyle issues.

Amidst a global flight to the city in developing countries, long-distance commuting and counter-urbanisation have become increasingly common in more developed nations. Despite the existence of both trends, Australia remains distinctive as a developed nation where cities are growing at the expense of the

country, and where there is significant but uneven rural population decline. Australia is therefore one of very few countries where there have been recent institutional attempts to 'sell' rural and regional areas to urban households. While Thomas Niedomysl has studied the impacts of place marketing by local authorities in Sweden, a rare example of a similar phenomenon, and has noted increased budgets for this activity given similar demographic changes such as an aging population, neither Sweden nor its regions had a centralised place marketing fair. Country Week thus provides an unusual example of shifting trends in rural place marketing (Niedomysl; Storey). While the concept of Country Week is unique, its expansion, evolution and the changing strategies of participating councils suggest that the concept of a centralised place-marketing fair with localised follow-up activities has potential to develop in many countries.

Country Week simultaneously involves cooperation and competition among representatives of different towns and regions. The concept underpinning the marketing strategy of Country Week, we argue, is the notion of 'country-mindedness'. There are four strands to countrymindedness, all of which are evident in the Country Week literature and at the annual Expos. These are an anti-urban bias, a pro-country bias, a concern about 'imbalance' and a desire to promote national development. While being careful not to denigrate cities, the 2007 message from the Country Week CEO, Peter Bailey, emphasised that in Sydney 'commuting times are getting longer, both partners are mostly working to service the mortgage and a rise in interest rates is a distinct possibility' (Bailey, 'Time' 2). In contrast, the country was said to offer people the opportunity of 'owning your own piece of paradise years before home ownership would be a reality in Sydney; the possibility of only one half of a partnership going out to work; and a healthier and safer environment for children' (Bailey, 'Time' 2). The inferences are that cities such as Sydney and Brisbane are expensive, generate national population imbalances that hamper regional economic growth, challenge a 'proper' family/work life balance, and are relatively unhealthy, even dangerous.

Taking the Country to the City

The methodology used for this research involved both quantitative and qualitative research techniques involving a questionnaire survey, formal in-depth interviews and general observations and discussions at the 2006 and 2007 Country Week Expos in Sydney, and the 2007 Country Week Expo in Queensland (Connell and McManus). This paper primarily analyses material from the 2006 Expo in Sydney. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the reasons for people's attendance at Country Week, identify the perceptions of these visitors about country towns and regions, and identify if and how Country Week Expo had influenced their perceptions. The questionnaire was administered over the three days of the Expo as an exit survey, so that the responses reflect what attendees had just experienced, rather than what they might hope to experience.

Completing the questionnaire was voluntary. Boxes were provided for the completed questionnaires to ensure confidentiality. In 2006 in Sydney some 576 responses were received. Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were also conducted in 2006, with another six follow-up interviews conducted in 2007 in Sydney. The interviews, usually at least 45 minutes in duration, were conducted with local government representatives, and did not include other corporate, state government department or community service organisations that operate across a number of local government authorities.

Two groups of people were particularly interested in moving to rural areas: firstly, younger, often recently formed households, who were particularly concerned about the cost of housing and considered that country towns might offer a better lifestyle for bringing up children, and, secondly, older people whose children were now independent, whose parents did not require significant amounts of care, and who felt able to realise ambitions to move out of the city in the search for a better lifestyle. The first group emphasised economic issues; the second were less constrained.

Particular towns and regions were favoured for relocation (Table 1). There is no pre-Expo survey of visitors' preferred destinations, but it is very likely that respondents were influenced by the presence or absence of particular local governments, and by the displays, messages and general reception given by representatives of various local authorities. Younger and older visitors showed marked differences in relocation preferences: those in the 25-35 year old age category were interested in a variety of locations, although there was a preference for larger towns with diverse services (e.g., Armidale, Tamworth) and places that provided definite employment opportunities (e.g., Tumut, Oberon, Muswellbrook). People aged 50 years and over generally tended to want to move north, partly for climatic reasons. Larger towns, such as Armidale and Tamworth, were again popular. Moree had more appeal for older people than younger people, but less emphasis on employment meant that towns such as Muswellbrook and Tumut were not rated so highly by them.

Table 1: Places to where the respondents in the 25-35 years old age category and the over 50 years old age category were thinking about relocating

Respondents who answered with general areas: (highest response only are shown)

25-35 years old age category		Over 50 years old age category	
Location	Number of Respondents	Location	Number of Respondents
Coastal Regions	2	Central West	3
Far North Coast	2	Mid North Coast	4
Mid North Coast	2	North Coast	4
North Coast	2	North West NSW	3
South Coast	2	Northern NSW	5
Southern Highlands	3	South Coast	2
South of Sydney	2		

Respondents who answered with specific areas and towns (highest responses only are shown in alphabetical order)

25-35 years old age category		Over 50 years old age category	
Location	Number of Respondents	Location	Number of Respondents
Albury	2	Armidale	8
Armidale	11	Boorowa	3
Ballina	2	Canberra	4
Canberra	2	Cootamundra	5
Cooma	2	Crookwell	2
Cootamundra	5	Dubbo	2
Forbes	4	Forbes	4
Grenfell	3	Grafton	2
Hunter Valley	2	Grenfell	2
Inverell	3	Inverell	2
Mudgee	2	Moree	5
Muswellbrook	3	Mudgee	4
Northern Rivers	2	Oberon	5
Oberon	4	Orange	2
Orange	2	Tamworth	9
Parkes	2	Upper Lachlan	2
Port Macquarie	4	Wauchope	2
Snowy Mts	6	Yamba	2
Tamworth	5		
Tumut	6		
Yass	2		

A number of conclusions can be drawn from people's aspirations. Firstly, most people are interested in moving northwards from Sydney, and there is no reason for stopping at the NSW border. Secondly, larger towns with larger, more diverse displays in Country Week, such as Armidale and Tamworth, are perceived as being relatively attractive. Smaller towns with smaller exhibitions, some like Warialda, virtually unknown in Sydney, are perceived less favourably. In large part this is simply because visitors already knew something about or had at least heard of larger towns. Having a well-known Country Music Festival (Tamworth),

or even a Celtic Festival and the Country Week stall decked in tartan (Glen Innes), were major advantages. Thirdly, a large number of people wished to move to places that were not represented at Country Week, notably inland centres such as Bathurst, Mudgee, the Southern Highlands and Orange, and all parts of the north and south coast. Clearly some places were already being considered as possible sites for re-location by people prior to their attendance at Country Week, and the Expo, for these people, is likely to reinforce or clarify earlier perceptions. Fourthly, there was a distinct preference for places that were not too far from Sydney, such as Oberon, the nearest place to Sydney represented at the Expo, while distance was a real disadvantage for such small towns as Warialda and Glen Innes. People sought to move 'out of town but not out of touch'. On the other hand, towns that might otherwise seem relatively disadvantaged but mounted impressive displays, such as Moree (voted the best display by other stallholders in both the 2006 and 2007 Expos), generated considerable interest.

Many potential movers had pre-existing ideas about where they wanted to move and what qualities they were looking for, views shaped by factors other than Country Week. Unsurprisingly these combined a pleasant lifestyle, often seen as being linked to coastal residence, and the continuation of a reasonable number of amenities and services. Country Week is therefore crucial in that it is one of very few opportunities for inland towns to demonstrate that they too have many such valuable qualities and to move people away from perceptions that 'rural' is a negative phenomenon, only associated with what was described to us by Peter Bailey as 'droughts and dead sheep in the dam'.

Many potential movers go through a series of 'stages', which can be loosely described as beginning with being 'interested in learning more' through 'considering moving' to 'have decided to move'. In some cases these stages coincide with successive annual Country Week events. Several people were visiting for the second or third time, often supplemented by visits to one or more towns (sometimes for open days specifically designed as follow-up events). Stages exist because the Expo attracts many first time visitors with relatively little knowledge of country areas, and none with experience across the range of places promoted. Friendliness encouraged return visits; many of those remarked 'we shall be back next year'. One attendee said 'I found each stall that I went to very interesting and informative. I found the people helpful and encouraging about the different resources found in the areas they live in. I will be back next year and I am grateful for the assistance.' Another stated that 'there will be questions in the future. I first have to read the brochures and contact relevant councils and real estate agents. I estimate this will take me through to the end of September'. The Australian tradition of collecting showbags filled with hopefully fascinating brochures, free pens, fridge magnets and so on, ensured a lengthy process.

Continuity in Country Week, and the consistent presence of individual towns over a period of time, was thus essential. Most visitors were challenged by the number of places—'over eighty regional towns, cities and groups are represented at Country Week' ('Country Week' 3)—and to some extent the similarity of each place's marketing strategies. They therefore struggled to differentiate between towns and regions and realised that more time and knowledge (and probably visits) were required to make reasonable assessments. As one put it quite simply: 'I just don't know where to go to'. Others recognised the need to visit a range of places: 'will there be an abattoir in the main street that they forgot to mention?' While this makes evaluation of the success of Country Week almost impossible, one spin-off has emerged. Potential places for relocation become tourist destinations for potential residents. At its most extreme, one mother of two preschool children confided: 'We like to visit a different place every year so that the children will know their country and we will know where to move to when they are old enough to leave home'.

Overall, housing and employment were the main factors that potential migrants sought outside Sydney, and Sydney's expensive housing market was a particular incentive to migration. While most visitors mentioned quality of life as the key attraction to a potential move, this was underpinned by the necessity for housing and usually employment. Urban congestion and crime were rarely mentioned and those who were most interested in moving tended to be either too young or too old to worry unduly about education and sporting facilities. Potential migrants were more discouraged by the costs of urban residence, the main factor that had drawn them to the Expo, than they were lured by some notion of country lifestyles.

The Perspectives of Country Towns and Shires

Not all regional councils were represented at Country Week 2006 and 2007, and numbers have fallen since 2005. Coastal councils such as Nambucca and Coffs Harbour no longer attend because they have little trouble attracting people to that part of the coast, especially as the baby boom generation reaches retirement age. These locations now face some degree of congestion, and issues of service provision for their existing aging populations. Hence they have no wish to attract even more residents. However it is not only coastal councils that have dropped out of Country Week. Between 2005 and 2006 most of the councils from far western NSW (such as Wagga Wagga, Deniliquin and Bourke) dropped out as did several from the Hunter Valley, mostly because they felt that the results did not justify the costs of their participation, although some councils such as Bourke continue to advertise in the Expo brochure. The councils who have regularly attended thus represent a broad band through central NSW, excluding the far west and the coast.

Most local authorities emphasised a range of available jobs in country towns (including skilled, unskilled and professional employment and business opportunities), as did organisations representing corrective services, education and so on, but those councils that had a specific list of particular vacancies available immediately had the greatest success in attracting interest, at least from visitors for whom employment was particularly important. This promotion of specific jobs rather than general employment was one productive marketing trend. One council had what appeared to be a particularly direct and thus useful message with a poster stating 'If You Are a Plumber We Need You'. A visiting dentist was strongly courted by several councils.

Councils attend Country Week for many reasons. The decision is not taken lightly, because it involves a significant cost to rent a stall and because the costs of transport, accommodation, display preparation and the opportunity cost (and overtime) of the labour must be accounted for. To be really effective, the costs might also include producing a special issue of the local newspaper, preparation work (including working with local businesses, including estate and travel agents and also schools, to identify needs and opportunities) and follow-up work (contacting visitors, organising open days and visits, and so on). Some of the councils that could benefit most from being present probably could not afford to attend. Councils usually initially attended the event to observe, and to decide if the investment in time and money was likely to be worthwhile, while internal politics and local financial considerations were a significant factor in whether they would participate. Once again the difficulty in assessing the measurable outcome of participation was problematic for many councils.

There were local benefits. In some cases Country Week was seen as a way of removing people from their communication 'silos' and engaging in a shared, positive activity that would enhance teamwork and yield beneficial results outside of the Expo. This was partly to do with the focus outwards (promoting rural communities in Sydney) in ways that improved internal cohesion. For one council: 'If you are going to solve some of the tough inward problems it is very important to get people to focus outwards. They start to think of ideas, to get recharged, and this feeds back into the community.' Some councils actively learned from others how they might develop more effective strategies and presentations to encourage migration, and were carefully monitoring the benefits of participation. Many stated that the decision to attend was conditional on how well Country Week Expo 2006 went. For example: 'the crowd is down … If we get a few nibbles from this year I think we'll be tempted to come back, but if we don't get anything from this year I think we'll be reassessing our commitment'.

Country Week also promotes the town or region to its existing residents, including both information and a sense of pride, action and achievement. Many

local newspapers ran stories, or produced a special Country Week Expo supplement, that highlighted both what was happening at Country Week and their own previous 'success stories'. In some of the larger towns the media ran both 'before' and 'after' stories.

The availability of competing events or processes, and the inability to engage in all of these activities required councils to make choices about their priorities. In 2006 the Inland Cities Alliance emerged, with aims that appeared to coincide with those of Country Week, though with a more targeted plan to attract residents of Sydney to larger regional centres. Queensland put on its own 2006 Expo at the Sydney Olympic site, barely five kilometres away from the NSW Country Week event. Fission of this kind, and the emergence of alternative events and sources of information, could weaken the significance and influence of Country Week, but currently Country Week still offers something to rural councils—a point of contact with urbanites who for the most part are genuinely interested in relocating.

Simply being there was seen as important by councils. An exhibitor from a relatively small town was sceptical about the benefits: 'We miss out to the big, nearby places so it's hard to say what we got out of it last year—just tradespeople who knew we were here and came to talk to us—but we have to be here—we have to have our image in the market place'. Yet not all councils, presumably including those who dropped out between 2005 and 2006, accept this need to be in the marketplace at some cost. A more effective evaluation of what being 'in the marketplace' actually means, what the real benefits of taking part in Country Week are, and then how a more positive message about these benefits can be diffused to those who have participated and might participate subsequently, continues to evolve.

The more successful councils in terms of population growth saw Country Week as part of a bigger commitment to marketing their town. This in turn influenced their expectations about what could be achieved from Country Week, and was very likely to influence their assessment of the success or otherwise of the event for their council. For some the Country Week Expo was their main marketing tool, and other events such as follow-up tours were closely linked to Country Week. Country Week was seen as a way of making contact with interested people, and the follow-up as being the important work that would not have been possible without the Expo's 'gateway':

> I think the idea is great and coming down here is a better idea than holding an open weekend when we try and say everyone come up here, because we don't have the contacts. We don't know who the people are that are interested. We need to contact them in this environment and then invite them up. (Exhibitor 6)

The importance of the event also varied depending upon the involvement of local businesses in particular towns. Real estate agents have increasingly found Country Week Expo to be particularly important for them. Indeed a number of participants were financially supported by local businesses, including real estate agents. In other instances the importance was related to timing. If there was a particular skills shortage, an impending boom, or a threat to the continuation of services, then Country Week assumed greater significance as a means to address a particular issue.

One important perception of Country Week Expo is that it facilitates the presence of genuine inquiries from prospective migrants, rather than 'tyre kickers'. Many participants were evaluating the success of their Country Week investment on the quality, rather than the quantity, of contacts made. The dilemma for Country Week is how to maintain the perception from councils that people who attend Country Week are genuinely interested in relocating from the city to the country. One response here has been to increasingly promote real estate and employment opportunities, whilst not diminishing the ongoing promotion of lifestyle.

Conclusion: Taking the City to the Country

Country Week Expo is an innovative engagement between urban residents and rural communities. It crosses many perceptual divides between city and country, and encourages direct contact between these groups of people rather than engagement mediated by newspapers, radio and television. The numbers attending the Expo offer clear evidence of the continued interest in moving to rural areas, and neither tree-change nor sea-change are losing momentum. But Country Week offers a new strand in counter-urbanisation, by the deliberate search for migrants who are also workers, lured by lower house prices and employment opportunities rather than by a more intangible 'lifestyle' attraction. Such migrants are less likely to be middle class. Gentrification has been turned on its head.

The decision for urban-dwellers to relocate to the country appears as a staged process, summed up in the 2007 Country Week brochure as from 'Country Week to country life'. Return visits to Country Week, and follow-up visits to country towns to attend festivals and become more familiar with a potential new home, are important elements of the decision-making process. While Country Week Expo is only a three-day annual event, it is at the core of place-marketing campaigns for many country towns because it brings selected residents of rural locations together with prospective urban migrants who are at various stages in the process of relocation decision-making. Without Country Week it is possible that ne'er the twain shall meet.

Council participation at Country Week Expo requires a significant commitment of resources, plus important preparation and follow-up work, in order to be

successful. It is worthwhile to many councils for a diversity of reasons, but importantly because putting themselves on the map of urban consciousness guarantees at least minimal interest and possible tourist outcomes. At the same time the scale of the event demands both cooperation (unusually perhaps between the private sector and the public sector) and, as far as possible, a distinct construction of 'country' as a highly attractive and viable location to live.

Most Expo visitors are genuinely considering moving away from the city, not necessarily out of any dislike for urban areas but because of housing costs. Appropriate employment for most is essential. Equally there is no real 'countrymindedness': most potential migrants simply seek adequate services and amenities—health, education and shopping. Ironically this means that the larger country towns are most attractive because of the range of possibilities they offer, and, rather than promoting the country and portraying large cities negatively as one might expect, councils such as Tamworth are encouraging migration using the slogan 'city style—country heart'. While smaller, more remote towns are benefiting from Country Week by the retention of services through small gains in population (or maintaining a stable population), and geographically specific resource booms are being matched with suitable employees, it also appears that new migrants are boosting the places that are most like cities, especially those closest to 'home': they are taking the city to the country.

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Drought, Endurance and 'The Way Things Were': The Lived Experience of Climate and Climate Change in the Mallee

Deb Anderson[1]

> No one wants to believe that it's going to be dry … I mean, as much as they listen—and they listen—to what the experts say, there's always that dream in the back of their mind that they'll be wrong and that … we will get good rain and … go back to the way things were.
>
> Pam Elliott, 2006

Rural histories of the Mallee have presented spirited sagas of community perseverance in 'battling' a harsh climate. As Tom Griffiths notes, the very word 'Mallee' became 'synonymous for heroic, even bloody-minded settlement' (21). 'Opened up' from the mid-1800s with the establishment and subsequent collapse of pastoralism, and expanded in the wholesale clearing of the mallee forest and advance of dryland (or rain-fed) agriculture from the early twentieth century, European occupation of the semi-arid Mallee has been narrated predominantly as an ongoing struggle on a frontier beset by environmental extremes. Indeed, the Mallee has been singled out as a poignant case of 'struggle country': from photographer Bill Boyd's celebration of settler egalitarianism in *Having A Go* (Bate) to the championing of rural optimism in *The Way It Was* (Torpey)—a collection of *Argus* news articles on Mallee settlers' 'unquenchable faith in the country' (as stated on the book's cover)—to Rhona van Veldhuisen's *Pipe Dreams*, a history of water supply in the Wimmera-Mallee region, 'where coping with disastrous drought was part of the pioneer lifestyle' (cover).

Droughts, much like floods, bushfires and cyclones, have punctuated Australian rural, regional and national histories. As Neil Barr and John Cary write, Australian land use since the import of European agriculture has been a 200-year struggle to 'green' a brown land—'from the early attempts to recreate England in the land of exiles, through the dreams of a sturdy yeomanry and of turning the coastal streams inland, to the search for new crop and pasture species better

suited to our climate' (3). Drought has played a central role in the ongoing social construction of a 'harsh' and 'unpredictable' climate and the mythologizing of rural battlers, shaping foundational narratives of struggle and hope. 'Drought', in this context, can be viewed as a cultural term whose primary connotations are less related to rainfall than to an overarching, mythic narrative of endurance. As CSIRO scientist John Williams argued recently, the Australian psyche remained dominated by 'dreams of water' (40). In 2003 he pointed critically to how such 'dreams' shaped ideas on rural sustainability: 'The critical need is not to drought-proof the inland, for that is impossible. It is to myth-proof Australians' (42). Arguably, however, cultural engagement with climate is under constant renegotiation. Further, as historians have argued, 'recognising the power of myth' opens the door to a broader historical approach (Samuel and Thompson 21).

In this paper, I draw upon oral history material gathered from members of drought-stricken Mallee dryland farm communities in a bid to bring into relief changing cultural conceptions of drought and climate change.[2] Fortuitously, the timing of my research in a period of recurrent drought in southeast Australia, between 2004 and 2007, has enabled the capture of significant moments of reflection and self-reflexivity, marked in public discourse by a pronounced shift in beliefs on drought and climate change. Amid the tide of empirical data being produced on climate and the scientific projections for increasingly severe and frequent droughts in Australia, intensifying a divisive debate over rural futures, the oral histories gathered in the Mallee revealed conceptions of climate embedded in narratives not only of historical rural endurance. These were also narratives of dwelling in uncertainty, even of existential crisis, as rural change (socio-economic, structural, environmental) posed a threat to the identity of Mallee dryland farming people. In these tales of endurance and uncertainty both scientific expertise *and* lived experience were considered valid but inherently partial forms of knowledge.

Here I explore the oral history of just one informant, that of Mallee resident Pam Elliott, whose narrative sheds light on the interplay of lived experience and scientific knowledge in constructing place- and identity-based responses to climate. During the period of my research Pam was working on reception at the Mallee Research Station, the local research arm of the Victorian Government's Department of Primary Industries (DPI). A significant part of her job involved fielding calls from farmers and others from across the dryland agricultural region, and linking those callers to a DPI staff member with expertise in their topic of

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[2] The research was conducted on a Melbourne Research Scholarship (2003-2007), which was a joint sponsorship provided by the Australian Centre (University of Melbourne) and the Technology and Sustainable Futures division of Museum Victoria. Participants were advised from the outset that their recorded histories were to be utilised in my doctoral research, then stored in perpetuity as an oral-historical state resource at Museum Victoria.

interest. Many a farmer had called seeking guidance on weather and climate. In Pam's oral-history narrative, discourses of lived experience and community perceptions of climate intersect with scientific knowledge. Critically, her narrative reveals that discourse on drought *as* climate change has the power to disrupt a narrative of mythic community solidarity. Pam's story alternated between a battler history of Mallee endurance and a more troubling contemplation of a land of evaporating promise.

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Pam Elliott's was one of 22 oral-history narratives derived over four years of interviewing Mallee residents about their lived experience of drought and their perceptions of climate change.[3] My choice to focus primarily on a single person's oral-history narrative in this essay was pragmatic, since Pam's experience explicitly mediates between the scientific discourse of the DPI and local Mallee residents' lived experience of drought. But it also allows space for the richness of detail Pam offered, to analyse the ways discourse on lived experience of climate defines and localises the identities of people and place.

My research, which began in 2003, formed a case study in ongoing dialogue between interviewer and interviewees, prompted by timing, environment and politics. Initially, I intended to wrap up the fieldwork phase in the summer of 2005. By that autumn, however, about half of Australia's arable land was drought-affected. Forecasters predicted 'catastrophic' economic consequences, which included wiping up to a third off Australia's forecast economic growth (Lee). In the Mallee and across the Australian grain-belt, farmers' hopes for crop yields were fading by the day. As then Prime Minister John Howard declared the drought one of the worst 'in our history' (Schubert), discourse on prolonged drought began to fuse with discourse on a far greater, global phenomenon: climate change.

Declarations of drought and government announcements that those afflicted would receive social welfare 'relief payments' made national news headlines on a near-daily basis. As the dry conditions lingered, the historical and meteorological record books were rewritten. Sociologists Brad West and Philip Smith noted in their study of media, political and popular discourses on Australian drought that, in the 100 years to 1995, 'droughts were consistently

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[3] I initially used contacts established by Museum Victoria to locate potential subjects in August 2004. Thereafter, I located interviewees through 'cold calling' or by referral from initial interviewees. I sought a cross-section of perspectives from people in a number of industries and public services. This resulted in a group of 22 interviewees, who typically wore several 'hats' in life: farmers, financial counsellors, members of poverty action and social welfare groups, members of local government, a newspaper editor, a nurse, educators, administrators, agronomists, researchers and people involved in various community-driven organisations dedicated to social and environmental sustainability. Interviews were recorded and conducted face-to-face, on average once a year for three years, between September 2004 and February 2007.

defined as unexpectedly severe in their intensity or duration' (94). As had happened many times before, in 2005 Australia was pronounced as suffering one of the worst droughts on record.

When I returned to the Mallee in February 2006 and 2007, talk of uncertainty about climate change peppered discussion on drought. The interviewees began reflecting on their earlier observations. Some doubted themselves. Others doubted the climate science. All doubted the politicians who had weighed in heavily on climate change debate as a federal election year drew closer. Interviewees were realigning ideas about the past, present and future, reconciling knowledge of climate gained through experience with more abstract ideas received through science and the media.

In this context, this paper utilises oral testimony for its power to challenge accepted categories of rural history. Recollections of a 'golden age' of agriculture still loom large in Australian rural historiography (Davison and Brodie). However, few academic studies have focused on rural people's lived experience of climate—the prominent exception is Daniela Stehlik, Ian Gray and Geoffrey Lawrence's *Drought in the 1990s: Australian Farm Families' Experiences*—and there was little published on drought as a cultural concept as recently as 2003, when I began this project (in stark contrast to the swell in interest in the topic since).[4] By contrast with the 'golden age' histories, popular narratives of crisis and uncertainty have dominated rural Australia for decades. Significantly, those narratives have encompassed struggles with the environmental effects of agricultural practices—the removal of too much vegetative cover, followed by inappropriate land use; soil erosion and degradation through salinisation; loss of biodiversity (Hopgood v)—as well as the impacts of broader economic restructuring upon rural industries (see, for example, Gray and Lawrence). As rural sociologists Lisa Bourke and Stewart Lockie noted in 2001, once-bold introductory statements on rural crisis have become 'so commonplace as to seem clichéd' for scholars concerned with ascertaining the causes of social, economic and environmental decay in the Australian countryside (1).

Oral stories of lived experience—of memory—offer us a powerful means to explore these tensions between the rural past and present.[5] Perhaps historian Alessandro Portelli concretised this idea best in the assertion that oral stories 'communicate what history means to human beings' (42).

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[4] Works published since 2003, when I began my research project, include *Beyond Drought: People, Policy and Perspectives*, edited by Linda Courtenay Botterill and Melanie Fisher (2003), *A Change in the Weather: Climate and Culture in Australia*, edited by Tim Sherratt, Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (2005), and Michael McKernan's *Drought: The Red Marauder* (2005).

[5] Further, oral histories can elucidate the meaning of such a discourse of crisis. For, as historian Melissa Walker wrote of her edited collection of early twentieth-century oral histories of American farm women, people use stories not only to 'educate others about the past—their personal past and the way the larger historical past affected ordinary people'; 'they communicate ideas about how people *should* live their lives and about the range of possibilities for human beings in any given setting' (xvi).

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The Mallee is an ultra-productivist landscape: driven by forces of capital accumulation, the region is engaged in ever-larger-scale industrial agriculture. As the Mallee Catchment Management Authority states: 'Productive land is the backbone of the economy of the Mallee.' In Victoria, the Mallee covers about 39,300 km^2—or about one-sixth of the state[6]—and it is here that about 2,000 dryland farmers produce half of Victoria's annual cereals crop, which is mostly wheat.[7] Up to one million hectares of land is put in dryland crops each year, and this is achieved on an annual average of 200 to 500 millimetres of rain (Department of Primary Industries).

'Pine Hill', Pam's family's home, sits a few kilometres northwest of the grain-silo outpost of Walpeup, which in 2006 comprised about 100 residents, including those living on farms nearby (ABC Radio Mildura-Swan Hill). The house in which she grew up is surrounded by fields of cereals crop—or, when baking in the heat of summer, by vast paddocks of dirt, fragile and prone to drift. Picture it, she said with a wry smile: with one strong puff of wind, there'd be dust barrelling across the farm—and through the house 'no end' (2007). In recent years, Pam said, successive 'droughts' and 'lean years' of agricultural production had worn many local people down. Amid a marked shift in Australian public debate on climate change, particularly in 2006, the seasons were changing in ways that defied lived experience and local beliefs. Meanwhile, wheat-belt farmers were locked into an economic and technological treadmill of production and an associated cost-price squeeze, as declines in real prices for commodities on the global market drove farmers to continually increase production and efficiency (see, for example, Goodman and Redclift; Bell). For many Mallee farm families, Pam said, the 2006 season of farm production had been 'very trying'. She commented: 'The scariest thing is, we got through this year, but it's *next year*' (2007).

Pam was working on the Mallee Research Station's reception the Tuesday in February 2005 when I first visited Walpeup, and she participated in three oral history recordings over the next three years. By her final interview in 2007, she was working in financial administration at Walpeup Primary School.

She had lived in the Mallee all of her life. Born 30 kilometres away in Ouyen in 1966, she grew up at 'Pine Hill' wheat-sheep farm, attended Walpeup Primary and Ouyen Secondary schools, then undertook a hairdressing apprenticeship at

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[6] The Victorian Mallee (representing about 17.3% of Victoria's total area) is but a portion of Australian Mallee country, which supports semi-arid populations of eucalypts with a multi-stemmed habit (from which the region's name is derived). The semi-arid region also covers parts of New South Wales and South Australia, and extends across the Nullarbor through Western Australia. As such, the Mallee demarcates the edge of the Australian commercial cropping zone.

[7] Farmers also crop barley, field peas, canola, oats, rye, corn, lupins and other pulses.

Ouyen. After a decade there, she married a local wheat farmer, Daryl, and returned to the Walpeup district. Recently, Pam, Daryl and their children moved back to 'Pine Hill'. 'My father actually [still] owns the property that we live on,' she said in 2005.

Also a mother, farmers' daughter, farmer's wife and a farmer herself, she conveyed affection for and attachment to the local community, one she noted had changed significantly in her lifetime. The size of agricultural equipment had increased with the size of farms, while the population of small towns dotted across the Mallee had shrunk dramatically. As she noted of Walpeup Primary: 'When I attended the same primary school, the numbers were huge … lots of kids and lots of families … I think when I was there, there was 63 students, and now there's 14' (2005).

Pam tied the decline in local farming population to agro-economic history, noting 'littler farmers couldn't survive, sold up and moved on' (2005). In other words, over time, economies of scale had forced smaller landholders out of business. Of those who 'survived', local families bought out their neighbours in order to expand their acreage (in theory, this meant bigger machinery became more cost-effective per acre): as Pam observed, 'People that didn't have a lot of land, but could survive on the land, now can't' (2005). And droughts had exacerbated the drop in the farm community population, she believed. She spoke of 'families who stuck it out for perhaps one or two seasons, but then it just got too tough' and of farmers who could survive a year 'having had a thunderstorm at the right time'. In these precarious economic circumstances, 'the littler farmers,' she emphasised, 'really find it hard' (2005).

Here Pam was outlining a battler discourse of agricultural and economic vulnerability that focused on issues of scale—smaller farms were considered more vulnerable to the hazards of climate, while global economic forces were perceived as determining futures for local people—and on her experience of witnessing the loss of social capital that accompanied the drop in farm community population. Small businesses and locally-based government and community services had dried up over the years, too. With fewer families to serve, government services were cut back or moved to larger service centres, while small businesses struggled to remain profitable.

Further, drought was portrayed as exceptional even as the community suffered long-term. She offered the example of sport, a community activity she believed to be very important to Mallee residents, for some residents, the main form of community participation. Yet Victoria-wide, more than fifty country football clubs have folded in the last 20 years, and Walpeup and Underbool clubs were recently forced to combine. Pam noted how the loss of sport effectively diminished the community:

> Your football teams, your netball teams, your tennis teams, your cricket teams, all—sounds silly—but they all survive on us getting rain … And those sorts of things, people start dropping out of, and there's your community *gone*. (2005; my emphasis)

This representation recasts the local community and its mythic solidarity as not only enduring droughts but as predating them.

Concurrently, however, Pam readily linked community life and livelihoods in an environment of 'extremes' and exceptions to a milieu of human hopes and anticipation:

> —*Do you pray for rain?*
> —Oh, I don't know whether 'pray' is the right word. I certainly know that rain is just, it's *the answer* … to most things for us. (2005)

Indeed, she expressed a fascination for the Mallee agricultural environment's capacity for drama or 'extremity'. The effect of water on the dryland Mallee—through perceptions of rainfall, colour, fecundity and plant growth—was dramatic (warmth in the soil, as a by-product of hot days, was integral to the rapidity of groundcover transformation). Indeed, all interviewees in this project stressed the rapidity of this environmental transformation as part of what made Mallee country unique. Pam anthropomorphised the Mallee climate as capricious—'rain can be so choosy when/where it falls' (2005)—the drama of which could only be attested through lived experience, 'something you had to live through to know' (2005). Environmental conditions associated with drought, such as dust-storms, also impact severely on people's hopes and community morale, she said. And plagues of mice? 'There's nothing more *depressing* in the whole world,' she said.[8]

The 'depression' of enduring dry conditions lent an air of nostalgia to her retelling of rain. As Pam's account revealed, so jubilant was the experience of rain in the Mallee that people spoke of it with reverence; it was the benchmark of potential fecundity by which the Mallee was judged. Thus the hardest part of being in a drought was having the knowledge, grounded in local experience, of what the area *could be like* with rain. In this sense, the original settlers' dreams of the Mallee's 'exceptional' potential remained influential in the present.

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[8] Indeed, Mallee stories of mouse plagues can defy belief. Pam said: 'People see pictures and go "oh yeah, right"' (2005). One night at the family farm, she said, during a mouse plague in 1982, she saw the ground '*moving* with mice':

> There was a story about this guy who had ironed a shirt to wear out that night. And by the time he'd turned off the iron and went to put it on, a mouse had actually eaten the shirt — because it was warm … I mean, there was nothing for them to eat, so they'd just eat *anything* … To have to live with that, you know, have to check your bed before you went to bed at night. I mean, we really physically couldn't keep them out of the house. (2005)

As can be seen, a 'local' identity-based response permeated Pam's descriptions of the Mallee landscape and the perceived vagaries of its climate. Such a response elevates an essentialist conception of 'community' in which specific characteristics of climate, geography, history and society—notably, of 'farm families'—underlie community formation. Lived experience of climate and its vagaries defined, *localised*, the identities of people and place. This gave primacy to local, community and family-oriented experience in the formation of knowledge on drought, which lingered as expertise within community-based responses to climate change. Arguably, the social decline Mallee communities were experiencing served not only to amplify nostalgia for the Mallee of the past but also to heighten local identity-based responses to the contemporary experience of change in the Mallee and projections for its future.

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Pam acknowledged that 'everyone's version of drought is different' (2005) and believed her views on climate were shaped by her time working at the Department of Primary Industries' Mallee Research Station. Critically, she had played a local role in the application of scientific expertise, and considered that this experience made her 'more aware' of the many and varied perceptions of climate and climate change in the Mallee (2006).[9] Thus, in Pam's account of drought, discourses of lived experience and of community perceptions of climate intersect with scientific knowledge.

Yet Pam's story retained an emphasis on defining droughts through impacts on *community*, and this contrasted, at times sharply, with the meanings associated with drought in much of the MRS and broader DPI literature, with its fundamental focus on agricultural productivity and efficiency, and on the production of technical, scientific and economic knowledge to support those goals: in other words, seeking to identify and convert potential climate knowledge into a 'value-added reality' (Glantz 47).

A drought classified as 'severe' occurs in Australia once in every 18 years. But, as climatologist Janette Lindesay (39) has noted, a widely accepted definition of drought remains elusive: there exist at least 150 drought definitions (Lindesay 30). Exposure to drought (determined by the meteorology and climatology of a region) and vulnerability to drought (determined by human activity) were key

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[9] Pam said she followed the weather daily on the Internet, on websites such as that provided by the Bureau of Meteorology, for forecasts, as well as the Royal Australian Navy. She listened regularly to ABC Radio (including Horsham 594AM and Murray Valley (Swan Hill) 102.1FM stations), which she said had 'good reception' in the Walpeup district. She read the *Herald-Sun* daily newspaper and the Ouyen-based *North West Express* (a member of the Victorian Country Press Association, it also produces an agricultural supplement called *Mallee Ag. News*, devoted to issues of agricultural research and government policy). She noted that her husband read the rural-issues-based *Weekly Times*, as well as the South Australian weekly *Stock Journal* (also known as 'the farmer's Bible'; South Australia's only rural weekly).

elements to consider in defining drought (39). As the editors of the anthology *Beyond Drought*, Linda Courtenay Botterill and Melanie Fisher, observe, drought can be 'meteorological, hydrological, agricultural and/or socio-economic'(3).[10] Indeed, there are many different stakeholders and each defines drought and views its impacts differently.

It is rather telling, however, that the bulk of literature on the Australian climate remains tied to agricultural production and economic policy concerns. In Australia and elsewhere in the world, governments have traditionally seen drought as a natural disaster, 'recognised as basically crisis management' (Heathcote 19). Critically, in the past two decades, a shift in the management of drought has been gradually reflected in policy discourse—in tandem with the privatisation of agricultural governance in Western cultures per se, focusing on the individual rather than society as the site of regulation (Higgins and Lawrence 5)—away from a welfare-oriented discourse to that of risk management.

Since the early 1990s, in counterpoint to ongoing predominantly political and agro-economic efforts to *redefine* what 'drought' means, rural sociologists have focused on interpreting the predicaments faced by farm communities from their own perspectives. My work similarly seeks to engage local perspectives. In particular, I argue we need to delve deeper into the cultural bases of unresolved tensions over land and water use. In my work, this means probing the discursive ambivalence that pervades debate on rural futures in Australia. Certainly, this means debunking the myths of sustainability promoted in ascendant neoliberal ways of defining drought and climate, which reinforce the ideology of productivism and the hegemony of the agri-capitalist system (as Lawrence, Cheshire and Ackroyd Richards ask: 'Is "sustainable capitalism" a contradiction in terms?' (233)). It also means considering discourse on drought as a site where

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[10] As Lindesay notes, the '*concept of drought* is best understood when definitions are given in general terms'. An agricultural definition might concern 'a protracted period of deficient precipitation resulting in extensive damage to crops, resulting in loss of yield'. However, vastly different definitions would be required for applications such as urban water provision, hydro-electric power generation or wildlife management (31). On this basis, Lindesay outlines the following operational definitions (32-38):

> *Meteorological:* Defined on the degree of dryness, compared to some average rainfall amount, and duration of dry period. 'Periods of meteorological drought,' she wrote, 'are identified on the basis of relating actual precipitation departures from average amounts on monthly, seasonal or annual time scales' for a particular region.

> *Hydrological:* Defined in terms of the effect of below-average rainfall on water supply (stream flow, reservoir/lake levels, ground water levels and recharge rates).

> *Agricultural:* Linking the characteristics of meteorological and hydrological drought with agricultural impacts. 'A good definition of agricultural drought,' Lindesay wrote, 'should be able to account for the variable susceptibility of crops during different stages of crop development, from emergence to maturity.' Typically, she added, the agricultural sector was first affected; thus agricultural definitions of drought have gained some precedence in Australia.

> *Socio-economic:* In short, she wrote, 'when water supply is unable to meet economic demand due to weather-related factors'.

local and external, community and political, agrarian and scientific forms of knowledge on climate intersect. In this sense, Pam's story is illustrative of how discourse on climate sits at an intersection of biography, culture and social structure.

In Pam's narrative, rather than circumscribe drought as an agro-economic or political or even meteorological 'event', drought (and the broader 'Mallee climate') was defined chiefly in terms of lived experience and the perceived impact upon the fabric of community and family life, upon rural communities in general and on her local community of Walpeup in particular.[11] In short, she spoke of enduring drought as a way of life. To survive in dryland Mallee farming, you *survived on little*—even *on hope*. She said: 'It definitely takes a certain kinda person who can, you know, *make do* … survive on little bits and pieces and just hoping that, yeah, the next year will be a better one' (2005). Pam's account, similar to other documented Mallee histories, emphasised a somewhat 'unrealistic' settler discourse on drought, where drought is seen as exceptional, unfortunate, even disastrous, rather than a 'normal' aspect of the local climate. By the same token, however, this discourse provided the backdrop to a 'real' picture of human tenacity and inventiveness in 'hanging on'.

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Battling and risk-taking are no longer enough.

Ian Gray and Geoffrey Lawrence, 165

A poignant sense of uncertainty over Mallee futures emerged amid Pam's historical narrative of endurance, however. In Pam's follow-up interviews in February of 2006 and 2007, her uncertainty appeared to materialise and harden into present or very-near-future circumstance, as the perception of the impacts of climate change loomed ever larger in her narrative (although this presented itself predominantly as a projection, a story told in the future tense). What kind of future was possible? For how long? *How*? She said: 'How do you *not* walk off… If this is how it's gonna be, why stay?' (2007)

The climate is always changing, yet as the Bureau of Meteorology (2008) noted, short-term variations in climate are 'easily noticed by people', while the detection

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[11] It could be argued that the conception of drought as community stressor, prevalent in Pam's interview (and that of all people interviewed for this project), was more directly related to levels of local community involvement. A recent Victorian Government study of indicators of 'community strength' in local government areas reported that, while no single measure could give an overall picture of community involvement in Victorian municipalities, there existed higher levels of community activity in rural areas than regional centres, with even lower levels in metropolitan Melbourne. The Department for Victorian Communities study (2005) indicated 'levels of community activity' based on the percentage of each council's population that had participated in a community event during the past six months. The Mildura Rural City Council, which encompassed Walpeup, reported participation of between 63 and 70 percent (8). Regardless, Pam's focus on community urged us to see drought not just as an agricultural, economic or political issue, but as a social issue and a perceived cause of social problems.

of long-term climate change requires 'long, good quality climate records'. In Pam's story, however, there was one example where decades of local experience provided evidence for long-term climate change, in relation to folk wisdom on annual crop sowing times. In spite of the local truism 'sow on Anzac Day, come what may', Pam said the annual 'dry' of the summer months had been extending further through autumn and into the winter months. This meant farmers did not get the conventional seasonal 'break' of autumn rains (the start of the annual cropping cycle), when cereals are sown with phosphorous fertilizer (this process can take several weeks, usually between May and mid-June).

Pam emphasised the value of lived experience—in defining what 'the local' is and what 'drought' means—in understanding how people conceived of climate change. Simultaneously, she noted how people were (and she herself was) negotiating the value of scientific data on the likelihood of more frequent and severe droughts in the Mallee:

> You get your older people [who] say, 'Oh you know, we've lived through this. It'll come good.' But you don't get many experts—doesn't seem to be many experts saying … 'it'll be right'. (2006)

Yet even as that delay in seasonal 'break' was undercutting inter-generational, traditional knowledge on climate, breadth of lived experience was still considered critical in understanding the local climate and variations in inter-annual and inter-decadal 'cycles' of weather:

> Certainly a lot of your older people will say that they have noticed changes … that they've never known … the heat for as many days, or to be dry for as many days… [These are] people who have been around for 70 years … They've *lived* it, and they've experienced it. (2006)

In effect, this reproduced conflict over a perceived lay-expert divide, both within the local community and without, in that primary experience outweighed secondary or external (scientific) expertise. At the same time, Pam perceived the uptake of external expert knowledge as depending on age and experience (or 'what they've *lived*' (2006)), with the highest uptake of the advice being by younger or 'newer' farmers, who were 'certainly changing their ways, getting ready for perhaps not as much rain and later seasons and, yeah, perhaps preparing the soil better so that it all doesn't blow away … *because* of what the experts are saying' (2006).

Thus she alluded to ongoing tensions between the status accorded to local knowledge and the authority assigned to empirical and scientific knowledge in defining the notion of expertise. In discussions of climate change, people were negotiating not only structures of knowledge, but also of social power—or perceptions of disempowerment (implying the degree of isolation rural communities felt from institutional power). Pam pointed to how the reception

of external expertise remained out of step with the prevailing cultural practice of learning through localised, lived experience of climate.

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The concept of 'expertise' has social as well as intellectual dimensions, as sociologist Rosemary McKechnie notes in her work on public interpretations of science. McKechnie draws attention to how the layperson *and* scientist are active participants in defining expertise and in giving the very concept of expertise 'substance' (127). Debates over modernity and globalism have called into question the meaning of powerful concepts such as expertise, risk and science. 'Within those debates,' McKechnie wrote, 'the "local" has assumed new significance in constituting identity-based responses' (126). Further, as risk theorist Ulrich Beck argues, environmental processes are 'peculiarly open to social definition and construction'; similarly, conceptions of climate are grounds for '*definitional struggles*' (129; Beck's emphasis).

My analysis of Pam's oral history reveals the acute difficulty people have in safely negotiating the local political terrain given the already evident potential for social division based on conflict over political agendas (real or imagined) behind discourse on environmental knowledge. That process of negotiation shapes what she—and many of the other people interviewed for this oral history project—view as politically possible in light of climate change (particularly when Mallee dryland farming communities are in decline). Moreover, Pam's narrative evokes what oral historian Michael Frisch has termed 'multivalence': 'the holding of different values at the same time without implying confusion, contradiction, or even paradox' (par 19). As this essay has suggested, Pam's narrative reaffirms *and* brings into question dominant ideas on the past—a twentieth-century agricultural 'settler history'—and a present marked by a rapid increase in public debate on the impacts of climate change. Arguably, then, the rise of a discourse of environmental crisis relating to climate change has offered people new ways of interpreting their own historical narratives.

And yet, where 'drought' has lingered as integral to the Mallee's remembered past, climate change may have forced little more than its recontextualisation. For 'enduring drought' still formed a dominant strategy of identity through which people re-asserted their lived experience of change, their ability to adapt or provide resistance to it. As sociologist Barbara Adam has pointed out, 'tradition constitutes *renewal* at every moment of active reconstruction of past beliefs and commitments' (137). In the Mallee, people clung to the hope that farming conditions would, as Pam Elliott put it, 'go back to the way things were' (2006). It seemed that the more the future 'predefined' the present, the more intense was people's concern with the past. In light of imminent and rapid climate change, the people of the Mallee were gearing up to endure *more*.

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Rural Cultural Research: Notes from a Small Country Town

Kate Bowles

> Wollongong has sophistication of a large city yet the charm and welcome of a small country town [sic].
>
> <div align="right">(Tourism Wollongong, February 2008)</div>
>
> I live in Wollongong. All I can say is this is a typical Wollongong situation. The city is like a small country town and highly incestuous, especially with long term residents, property owners and business connections.
>
> <div align="right">('Margaret, Wollongong'; reader response to Larter)</div>
>
> 'Wollongong is like a small country town. A lot of people know each other,' was Mr Gilbert's explanation. (Wollongong is NSW's third largest city with a population approaching 200,000)
>
> <div align="right">(Frew)</div>

What kind of denial does it take to look at a major industrial city in the midst of a crisis of self-reinvention involving millions of dollars of urban infrastructure, and see only a small country town going about its business as usual? And how does this relate to the strategic marketing of an urbanised coastal tourist destination that downplays the amenities of urban life in favour of the intangible qualities of small town experience? Whatever its literal dimensions in terms of population or location, the imagined small country town functions—in Australian media and other public discourse—in multiple ways. The country town image is, on one hand, easily dismissed and criticised and, on the other hand, a source of comfort and reassurance. A relatively stable image of the country town continues to make a curious kind of sense, at least in terms of seemingly persistent national myths and ideals. 'Come on,' such an image seems to proclaim, 'we're all Australians, we know what country life is about'. Of course, most Australians don't have direct experience of small country towns. Rather, they have a perverse familiarity with popular Australian television serials and movies—from *Bellbird* to *A Bed of Roses*, as well as imaginary communities from Mt Thomas to Summer Bay (see Botterill)—and how they promote images of 'rural' or regional life in a national context. It's this familiarity with a set of ideas about rural charm and hospitality that makes media promotion of Wollongong as a small country town

an ideal means of attracting tourists. At the same time, less desirable associations—such as parochialism or a town's insignificant profile on the national scene—can be called on to minimise the State political implications of a local corruption investigation.[1] This is only a small country town, after all: charming, harmless and easily misunderstood by outsiders.

In what follows, I want to suggest that the pragmatic use of the image of Wollongong as a small country town in media and tourist promotions has some interesting implications for those of us who research actual small country towns in Australia. I also want to propose that despite its potentially modest national benefit, small country town research is important to Australia precisely because of the political utility of the stereotype. The image of the small country town combines practical assumptions about size, location and isolation, but any *or all* of these may be missing in the definition of a given town as small and rural in character, as the Wollongong case most strikingly demonstrates.[2] It's the persistence of these contradictory reputations—the charm and the parochialism—that should prompt rural cultural researchers to offset the stereotypes with alternative stories about the diversity of contemporary cultural experiences as collected in their encounters with everyday life in small country towns. Such encounters might include the experience of not being welcomed, or of not knowing anyone, let alone everyone—experiences that are part of the changing realities of country towns in which there has been significant in-migration of diverse social groups (from resettled refugee communities to urban treechangers in flight from mortgage stress). Some small country towns have flourished as hubs of regional social mobility, as their natural amenities attract new populations. New educational and employment opportunities begin to flourish, enabling young people to stay. On the other hand, some country towns have struggled to achieve the necessary conditions for either economic or cultural sustainability, and are now dealing with the challenge of supporting an ageing population who cannot afford to leave.

There is therefore no convincing single model of a small Australian country town, nor should it be the mission of rural cultural research to flush one out. Rather, there is an opportunity for rural cultural research to engage with one of Australia's keynote stories of national identity by exposing and exploring the diversity of lifestyles and cultural amenities as well as new pressures and alliances which constitute country town life. This is also an opportunity for cultural researchers to become involved in forms of community engagement that

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[1] In February 2008, the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption's 'Public Inquiry Into Allegations of Corrupt Conduct Concerning Wollongong City Council' was the subject of extensive national media coverage and talkback discussion.
[2] According to the ABS Yearbook 2007, the population of Wollongong is now around 276,000, and the city is the ninth largest in Australia. I am grateful to Andrew Gorman-Murray for drawing this to my attention.

can enhance the existing regional aspirations of our tertiary institutions. Indeed, 'community engagement' has become an important policy emphasis in the university sector, as shorthand for the complex ideals of public good and social wellbeing that substantiate the sector's claim on government funding. This in turn has brought about the renovation of a term which seems recently to have slipped from view: *praxis*. The idea of praxis explicitly connects theoretically informed research to pragmatic modes of cultural learning. It is a style of research that is attentive to the principles of mutuality and participation between researchers and members of the wider community, grounded in respect and perhaps even institutional humility. In the context of rural cultural research, it challenges both metropolitan and non-metropolitan-based institutions to make a reflective and practical contribution to ways in which small country towns can respond to the changes that confront them.

In proposing that rural cultural research—as a mode of engagement with regional communities—might be a useful focus for some disciplines within the humanities, I certainly do not mean to suggest that rural cultural research has been ignored in Australia until now. What interests me is not how much research has been done, but how little communication there has been among researchers with shared interests and shared practical experiences. The explanation for this, I think, lies in the necessarily diverse disciplinary definitions of culture that frame such research, that can make it difficult to find and collate examples of rural cultural research when it is spread across an array of different, often disconnected, journals and publications. Most rural research is produced from the perspective of a single discipline. In Australia, as elsewhere, the assumption has been that the study of rural experience lies within the jurisdiction of the social sciences; and that rural cultural research, more specifically, is a form of anthropology. Sociologists, geographers, political scientists and economists have certainly taken rural life seriously, to the extent that rural sociology is a field in its own right; and in so doing they have often taken cultural institutions and their constituents into account. Cultural geographers have been particularly sensitive to the ways in which interpretations of place, belonging and community intersect with questions of identity and rural cultural practice (Waitt and Gorman-Murray). Meanwhile, literary and film scholars have explored common themes in the representation of Australian rural life. Historians have studied the persistence of these same themes in the institutions of public life which through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries preserved the image of Australia as an agrarian culture, rather than simply an agrarian economy (e.g., Waterhouse). Disciplines with a strong historical focus, including literary studies, have consistently drawn attention to the rhetorical significance of a rural/urban divide in constructing Australian national identity, and this has certainly informed some analysis of Australian films and even television series.

But those disciplines centrally concerned with the production and consumption of contemporary culture—cultural studies, communication studies, creative industries research and media studies—have so far been less interested in moving beyond analysing images of rurality to a more systematic approach to the forms of everyday cultural practice and experience which matter in rural, regional and remote communities. There are important exceptions to this, of course (see Dwyer; Gibson and Robinson; Goggin; Tacchi; and van Vuuren). And there are also valid institutional reasons for the comparatively low profile of rural research in these disciplines, particularly given their core interest in the cultural impact of media forms which are still relatively difficult to access in many country areas. It can be difficult enough to keep up with the cultural impact of new media industries, practices, policy and legislation, without having to track the disconcerting effects of these on the other side of the digital dividing range. Add to this the existing community commitments of the major cultural research centres, most of which are themselves located in metropolitan or outer-metropolitan areas, as are their primary funding partners, and the practical impediments to sustained analysis of media and cultural institutions and practices in small country towns are clear.

It may also be that the convincing case for this kind of cultural research has yet to be made. Media and cultural studies scholars perhaps have less of an investment in reappraising the Australian legend, or its political expression in 'countrymindedness' (Aitken; Botterill), than other humanities scholars. Whereas other national traditions in cultural studies generated by the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson have championed rural working class culture, even in a limited way, as part of a larger political engagement with the ordinariness of culture, in Australia it has been harder to define rural culture as politically progressive. Australian cultural studies has functioned as a significant enabling site for the exploration of identities formed in opposition to the dominant national culture, and it is still too easy to think of this dominant culture in terms of images which have their origins in colonial white pastoralism. It may be that the lingering spectre of rural social conservatism—however fair or unfair this stereotype may be—still limits the opportunity to engage critically with the present-day cultural experiences of rural Australians. But there is a more sympathetic view which we can take of the national deficit in rural cultural research, which is that the current structure of our research institutions, and the everyday realities of our lives as researchers working mostly in cities, makes rural cultural research genuinely challenging to undertake.

I make this observation having spent five years pursuing research in the south coast town of Bega and its outlying villages. Bega is a small regional town, at the centre of dairying and timber industries, which has also begun to experience the effects of statewide population mobility as treechangers and seachangers move into the network of smaller towns and villages in the surrounding Local

Government Area, as well as into Bega itself. It is closer to the Victorian border than it is to Sydney, and there is no rail link, making road and shipping traffic critical to its communications and transport history. I came to research in this region as a result of teaching into an Arts degree offered in Bega by the University of Wollongong. From the community of staff and students involved in this program, I learned about the region and its sensitivities, its contested and cherished histories, its international linkages both longstanding and recent,[3] and its current social issues (see also McKenna). An accidental part of my introduction to some of the key regional media and communications concerns involved simply driving between Wollongong and Bega many times, staying in many motels, experiencing local internet access, and watching local television ads. Further encouraged by informal research already undertaken by students we had worked with, my colleague Nancy Huggett and I prepared to investigate the popular memory of cinema-going in the early twentieth century in Bega and its surrounding villages.

Cinema studies is a particularly problematic discipline for rural research, however, as there is still so little tolerance within its major journals and conferences for research into cinema distribution and exhibition that it is even more difficult to make a case for rural research which explicitly challenges the dominant association of cinema-going with specifically urban modernity (see Matthews). The significance of an Australian picture show operating in a local hall in a village with a population of less than 400, for example, is difficult to promote in terms of its importance to world cinema history. Nevertheless, it is critical not to let the history of cinema's carriage of modern life be modelled only on urban and suburban cultural experiences, as this ignores the fact that for much of cinema's supposed heyday of regular weekly movie attendance, both in Australia as well as the major markets in the USA and Europe, the experience of movie-going was far more diverse, and for many, far less glamorous than that suggested by the typical representation of the metropolitan picture palace.

Our research provides ways of critiquing some of the assumptions inherent in research about cinema audiences in the pre-television era. In particular, it became clear that in rural villages where a single picture show was the norm, there were other reasons for going to the pictures than to escape into the imaginary social world referenced by the glamorous Hollywood movies on screen. In fact, the quality of the film print was sometimes quite poor after its long journey by rail and road around the country exhibition circuit, and in some villages there was evidently the risk that in bad weather the film might not show up at all. There was so little choice, that the movie itself couldn't be seen as the primary motivator

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[3] The Bega-Littleton (USA) international citizens' exchange program is one of the oldest in Australia, for example, having commenced in 1961.

for the occasion. The venue was likely to be basic, often either very cold or very hot, the bench seating was sure to be uncomfortable, and there was little to do during frequent breaks in projection other than duck out for a smoke, or nip down the road to the pie shop. But the social experience of getting together with other members of the community, particularly for women and children who were not in the pub, was a critical element in sustaining modest rural picture shows operating under very marginal conditions. Picture show licensees were also often prominent community figures, either through their association with social clubs and committees, with local newspapers, or with other town businesses. Despite the limited respectability of the movie business when compared with the country press, the Show Committee or the Lodge, these cultural entrepreneurs were often very successful in tapping into the notion of community loyalty and suggesting that patronage of the pictures was part of a larger project to advance the commercial prospects of one village over another.

Memories of rural cinema-goers also suggested to us that a town's isolation from metropolitan centres was a contributing factor in how cinema goers experienced the cinema. This challenges other accounts that have focused, more generally, on rivalry between cinema and the early television industry. City-based media operators have been important to the delivery of new media, whether as transporters of film cans around rural roads in the 1930s, as broadcasters of television signals into rural valleys in the 1960s, or as promoters of digital mobile phone access in country areas in 2008. In our case, we found that the discourses of small town mutuality and economic resilience that had sustained the early cinema industry were equally available to the first entrepreneurs who set about furnishing rural households with television sets or arranging for the installation of aerials at a time when achieving reception could be quite hit and miss. In each case, the late arrival or patchy quality of a new media form signalled the resumption of a familiar local conversation, particularly in letters to the press, about rural service entitlement. What does it mean to be contributing via the electoral and taxation systems to the regulation and distribution of something of national importance, while at the same time being excluded from it by reason of geography? In practical terms, what does it mean repeatedly to read or hear about something which is reputed to be transforming everyday domestic life in profound ways, but which you have little prospect of accessing in your own home? Our research leads us to propose that the conventional single-medium approach to histories of radio, cinema or television does not function well in analysing the distinctive ecologies of media use in rural places, where the rise and fall of particular media might have as much to do with weather or topography as with content (see Bowles).

Glossed in this way, the project seems to have sailed smoothly, with the rapid paddling of the research effort almost entirely concealed beneath the untroubled surface of research outcomes. But in sharing our experiences with others, we

have come to feel that it is important to highlight the critical social and community relationships that constituted the research experience itself, and to think about the possibility that some aspects of this interdependency might be particular to rural research. Again, it is not my intention to suggest that rural cultural research is special, but I want to stress that the ways these issues are overcome provides important opportunities for university-based cultural research to consolidate its reputation for imaginative and politically committed participation in community development. In particular, we can start to appreciate that intimate microhistorical studies of culture matter very much in local contexts, not because they generalise across the nation (of course they don't) but precisely because they retain traces of the discourses which continue to frame local cultural opportunities or exclusions.

There are, however, three key practical challenges which frame the rural research experience: the nature and location of source materials; the need to work across institutions; and the potential gap which may exist between community expectations and university research agendas, outcomes and timeframes. In the first place, most rural cultural fieldwork is carried out at some distance from the relevant archival collections, which are commonly in metropolitan libraries and institutions. This is a problem compounded by the lack of digital access to country press archives, and the sometimes poor condition of older microfilm readers in local libraries. Archival materials which *are* held locally are often in private hands or have been lodged with unfunded historical and genealogical societies, and for this reason they are rarely indexed beyond the capacity of heroic volunteer efforts to keep them safe in folders or photograph albums. Even to photocopy a document or record book held in someone's home means gaining permission to take it away. There is no funding for digitisation, and very little capacity to undertake the collection or transcription of oral histories. For understandable reasons, many local historical societies have focused on histories of work and schooling, of prominent families, or of contributions to war. Neither these nor the heritage studies of landmark local buildings will necessarily have provided a logic for collecting the history of media consumption. Information about local cinema, radio and television—if it has been collected at all—is often filed away with race meetings, balls, and cricket matches. In our search for what little has been collected on cinema history in the far south coast, we have often relied on the superb recollection of individual volunteer staff at the Bega Historical Society as to the possible location of relevant documents.

This relates to the second practical challenge: linkages with such marginalised collecting institutions are less attractive to universities looking to maximise research income—again, for obvious and understandable reasons—than are partnerships with State museums and archives. While these small local institutions are often most in need of research assistance, and universities are surely most able to supply it, these are not financially lucrative contracts, and

the prospects of generating commercial or even conventional academic research outcomes are unpromising. Rural cultural research, particularly with a historical focus, is therefore probably best undertaken by sharing some of the resource implications across metropolitan institutions, both in the higher education sector and with funded collecting institutions. This creation of multilocational joint ventures, however, has the capacity to lead to complex project management issues, compounded by the likelihood that researchers from more than one metropolitan institution are now trying to juggle schedules in order to travel together to a remote location.

The third challenge is in some ways the most interesting. Rural cultural research is heavily dependent on the support and participation of local researchers, many of whom work in a voluntary capacity. Are we sufficiently attentive to their motivation for supporting the research, and conscientious in ensuring that our research outcomes also meet their needs? In our research, for example, we have relied on museum volunteers to remember where a document might have been filed, and their network of local contacts has been our key introduction to the older members of the community who recall the period we are researching. They have also directly facilitated what we have learned as we have travelled around the district, or spent afternoons in the museum. On many of our interview trips we have been accompanied by a museum volunteer whose local social knowledge has combined with an active and well-informed interest in our project to enhance our interview conversations. Where we have failed to pick up on a particular name or reference in a fast moving exchange, our museum colleague has gently and tactfully intervened with a question of her own, the value of which we have later appreciated when transcribing the interview and reflecting on the turns taken in the conversation.

Of course, none of this is exclusive to rural cultural research. Most qualitative research experiences contain a dimension of gratitude to the combined operation of chance and the kindness of strangers; or on the other hand a dimension of awkwardness at the sometimes compromising nature of hospitality (see Huggett). But in any situation where the institutional status of the researcher and the researched is unaligned, or there is good pre-existing reason for mutual suspicion or misunderstanding, these are more than incidental elements. In rural towns, sustained cultural research which is locally credible depends on the gracious and supportive curiosity of those who have made a longstanding commitment to the curation of their own histories. Our reliance on their kindness and perceptiveness takes us into the realm of the difficult gift, described very movingly by Ethiopian scholar Teshome Gabriel in his account of his return from Los Angeles to his mother's home in Africa. His mother's unexpected composure, and the generosity with which her community instate him as a respected elder, cause him to reflect on their gift to him of insights which emerge

from their lived experience, which is 'intolerable' precisely because he can never return it.

> It is this gift that has often been forgotten, as I myself forgot it, thinking that I could stand outside it, recording and analysing it from a critical distance.

> If we acknowledge the gift, will it be less of a gift? Not really. Because the gift is just like an heirloom—it is to be forwarded, to be passed on to the next generation. Or to put it metaphorically, one can join the ends of a braided rope only by overlapping its strands. The gift, then, is not a state of being: it is continually enacted, lived and performed. (83)

This has been a critical reflection for us, as it has also been our experience that the performativity of the conversational gifts that have been shared with us is continually enacted in the ways in which we handle these gifts and pass them on. This places upon us a degree of ethical responsibility which overflows the strict requirements of university ethics clearance—a practice which itself often appears as a self-protective expression of institutional risk management.[4] As all researchers know, compliance with human research protocols is no guarantee against later carelessness in the way that transcribed conversations are selectively quoted, interpreted, summarised or dismissed. Discourteous or self-serving uses of the gift of shared time and ideas sometimes occur simply through misunderstanding and lack of time to reflect. However, rural fieldwork can make it particularly difficult to return promptly for a second conversation, to consult further to check whether or not an inference was correctly understood or a story heard in the spirit in which it was told. The conflict between the need to linger over the careful management of personal memories and ideas and the need to hurry on to the analysis of results is set up by the conventional assumptions of research efficiency, and particularly by the normal timeframes of funded research projects, which produce such a chastened sense of the value of extended consultation and reflection. Under these circumstances, the distorting and distracting impact of the national research economy and its accounting practices create for many academics a very significant disincentive to what we might call slow research. Yet for many reasons, slow research may be the most appropriate means of building effective participatory research partnerships between researchers located in cities and their community co-researchers in rural towns.

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[4] Jonathan Rutherford, citing Michel Callon, suggests that cultural studies itself should seek to return to the overflow which is created by the impossibility of framing all externalities—all 'actors and their relations'—within a market. 'The human attribute of the desire to know, [sic] finds itself displaced and marginalised by the market imperatives of the corporate university. But like Derrida's idea of the supplement, it marks what this kind of university lacks but also what it needs to confirm its identity' (314).

In Australian cultural research, slow research faces a separate challenge, again from an emphasis which is understandable and productive in its own context. The cultural research disciplines have made a clear commitment to achieving meaningful dialogue with government and industry, and it has to be said that slow research is hardly the attribute to promote in seeking consultancy outcomes or policy interventions. The strategic priorities of timeliness and productivity measures find their expression in a dominant institutional culture which considers projects successful precisely because they have *ended*—a measure of success which has some limitations if the goal is to create healthy long-term collaborative relationships beyond the immediate grant life-cycle. It is in part this short-term and self-interested nature of the university funding system that can undermine opportunities to build trust between universities and their research constituencies and can make some of the long-standing sensitivities of rural cultural research—particularly those involving non-indigenous researchers and Indigenous cultural knowledge—very difficult to resolve. Combine the underpinning assumptions of research productivity with the challenge of sharing research income across disciplines and across the university sector, and the cumulative result of all of these pressures, each slight but trying in its own way, is severe institutional constraints on finding imaginative ways to engage with rural communities.

These essentially bureaucratic constraints come into sharp focus within intellectual debates taking place in cultural research disciplines, particularly those concerning the utility of theory and the normative assumptions which may have been made in the past about ordinary culture being exemplary when framed within the lived experience of the first world metropolis and its suburbs. In Australia, many cultural researchers have tackled the entrenched local bias against taking suburban life seriously, but this has not naturally generated a move towards places further beyond the margins of the metropolis. Catherine Walsh writes persuasively that these assumptions perpetuate the experience of subalternity in situations where cultural research and critical pedagogy are being deployed in practical attempts to build opportunities for local social change. Reflecting on the development of a doctoral program in Latin American Cultural Studies in Quito, for example, she suggests that the purpose of initiatives like this isn't simply to expand the market for western cultural studies, but to re-engineer its longstanding theoretical preoccupations in ways that are more likely to create locally relevant outcomes.

> The effort is conceived as a space of encounter between disciplines and intellectual, political, and ethical projects, projects constructed in different historical moments and epistemological places and concerned with the search for ways to think, know, and act towards a more socially just world and towards the comprehension and change of structures of

domination—epistemological as well as social, cultural and political. (233)

African scholars have put forward a similar critique of the generalising tendency in western theories of popular culture (see in particular Tomaselli; Tomaselli and Wright; and Wright and Maton), with a similar focus on community engagement as a form of critical pedagogy. Keyan Tomaselli, for example, offers a rich account of the practical difficulties of taking a group of students to conduct fieldwork in Botswana as a means of illustrating his dissatisfaction with international cultural studies. Cultural studies, he argues, has become preoccupied with its own celebrity, and has stalled in its discussion of the ways in which popular media can be thought about, continuing to position it in theoretical terms which normalise the western urban experience. Like Gabriel, Tomaselli writes about the cultural and economic impact of his presence among communities with whom he works. He suggests that this places ethical expectations on him to respect their relative situations, and to remain mindful of his own limitations.

> How can power relationships be negotiated to the benefit of all parties to the encounter? This is one of many difficult, uneasy, and unclear questions we kept asking ourselves. Perhaps cultural studies scholars should ask them more often than they do. (313)

As I suggested earlier, if we were to ask Tomaselli's question in the context of research into small country towns in Australia, one answer would be that the renegotiation of power can be the means to a re-awakened sense of praxis—a reflective, committed engagement to learning about rural culture in partnership with small town communities and in response to their interests, rather than a selective and short-term recruitment of their cultural knowledge to meet our needs. Handel Kashope Wright suggests that commitment to praxis requires us to be exceptionally mindful of our own autobiographies as research professionals (810), not in order to claim the extra privilege of authenticity but rather to destabilise that part of our identity underwritten by conventional demonstrations of rigour and objectivity, and in so doing to rebalance the partnership between the researcher and the researched (817-8).

In practice, this attentiveness to the character of our relationship to our collaborating research partners, whatever their institutional status, asks us to do four things. Firstly, it requires us to continue working very closely, and sometimes very slowly, with community stakeholders to recognise the existing capacity for rural cultural research in unfunded institutions, volunteer groups and the learning communities which are being developed by ICT networks such as the NSW Community Technology Centres funded under the auspices of Networking the Nation in 2000 (see van Vuuren for a discussion of the objectives of the rural telecentre initiatives enabled by this funding program). Secondly, it entails the sharing of research productivity, particularly in terms of

contributing to local museum displays, promotional activities, small-circulation pamphlets and monographs, or collections of oral histories, which are meaningful to small communities but might not stack up as measurable outcomes in terms of the crude point-driven economy of academic productivity. Thirdly, it suggests that we view rural cultural research as an opportunity to build capacity in the university sector by taking a more open-minded (and open-ended) approach to using digital repositories to share original fieldwork data across institutions, rather than simply publishing that sliver of our fieldwork which typically appears in a conference paper or journal article. This is a critical challenge to oral historians and those of us working with life narratives, as it requires us to think at an early stage in the research design of the potential which transcribed conversations have to be shared with researchers on other projects, in other institutions—for which the appropriate level of permission must be planned from the start.

Finally, we have reached a point when the definition of 'rural', from the perspective of the even more slippery 'cultural', needs refreshing. On the one hand, an entrenched and outdated image of the pastoral sustains a number of urban fantasies and fears, from the faux corrugated iron panels cladding inner city renovations, to gourmet farmers' markets, and ultimately to the idea that a city the size of Wollongong can be thought of as a small country town. The image of the resilient, apple-cheeked and unsophisticated Australian way of life is also relentlessly deployed in the marketing of Australia at home and abroad. But the realities of the networked nation have changed some aspects of cultural life in small country towns in ways that suggest a radical break with the mid-1980s emphasis on 'countrymindedness'. Young media users in country towns are now part of national and global social networks, rather than confined to the subcultures that happen to exist in town; previously isolated rural parents can seek advice and community over the internet; and traditional business owners or even self-employed treechanging cultural workers are able to meet their clients and pay their bills flexibly from a wider range of different locations. There are still very significant limitations and disruptions to the standard of media services in non-metropolitan places, but it is nevertheless the case that the horizon of social relations and cultural experiences in small country towns has changed. This calls for a change to the way in which we approach rural cultural research, and it calls for more effective participatory research partnerships, so that the agenda for this research is calibrated to the extensive cultural knowledge which already exists in the community.

Keyan Tomaselli likens cultural studies to a 4WD which is engineered for tough off-road conditions but never leaves the suburbs (311). This has some resonance for those of us concerned that the cultural research disciplines can look like a fleet of metropolitan hire cars available for the occasional return trip to the country—vehicles which proclaim when parked at farms and on country town

streets that the drivers are passing through, and 'not from around here'. But by asking the difficult questions about institutional power, and engaging in a more direct way with the research expertise outside the academy, we can begin to adopt more sensitive and sustainable practices. The payoff for this should be that we succeed in linking the agenda for Australian rural cultural research both to the longstanding intellectual commitments we have to praxis, as well as to more recent institutional investments in regional community engagement.

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Introduction: Marketing Asian-Australianness

Olivia Khoo

The papers collected here originated as part of a panel discussion at the *Asian Australian Identities 2* conference, 'Marketing Asian-Australianness', which I organised and chaired.[1] The invited speakers were given very loose parameters within which to discuss the topic 'Marketing Asian-Australianness' in literature.

Compared to the field of Asian American literature, Asian-Australian literature is still very new. As a literary category, Asian-Australian writing is slowly beginning to establish itself although it remains far less institutionalised (both in publishing and in academia) than its U.S. counterpart. In many ways, the category 'Asian-Australian literature' is still in the process of being defined. It both straddles, and seeks to differentiate itself from, the sometimes conflicting constellations of diasporic Asian literature and Australian literature. Nevertheless, there is a strong and ever-growing body of works and writings that we might call 'Asian-Australian literature' (literature by or about Asian-Australians) in its own right.

For a body of work as fledgling as this, marketing remains an important and ever-present consideration for both authors and publishers. Asian American literature has already fought (though not necessarily won) many of its battles over age-old questions including the right or the necessity of ethnic authors to write about their identity; that is, their cultural or ethnic identity. Rey Chow calls this compulsion towards ethnic or group identity a form of 'coerced mimeticism' (18). No matter how 'nonmimetic, experimental, subversive, or avant-garde' such writing may in fact be, it is nonetheless marketed, classified and received in the West as corresponding to a preconceived entity known as 'China', 'Singapore', or 'the Philippines', etc. (22). There is always another home, another origin.

In the early 1990s, a heated debate in Asian American literary studies involved Maxine Hong Kingston's acclaimed *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, wherein critics such as Frank Chin decried Hong Kingston's use of fictional (mythic) elements and her distortion of Chinese legends in a novel that was represented as an 'autobiography'. These critics argued that the label was simply a marketing ploy, despite Hong Kingston's assertions that she had

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[1] The *Asian Australian Identities 2* conference was held in Melbourne, 28-30 June 2007, and was organised by the Asian Australian Studies Research Network.

no input into its classification. Over a decade later, similar anxieties continue to haunt Asian-Australian authors.

In his paper '"No One Puts Baby in a Corner": Inserting Myself into the Text', Tom Cho notes the persistence of certain issues plaguing the emergent field of Asian-Australian literature, including the autobiographical 'requirement'. However, rather than attempt to avoid this impulse altogether, Cho finds alternative ways of writing himself, literally, *into* his work, here, through the lens of popular culture. Cho's strategies of 'inserting himself into the text' add layers of complexity to the problem of how to represent one's identity without necessarily reducing it to the form of an autobiography.

Simone Lazaroo's 'Not Just Another Migrant Story' similarly attends to the relationship between autobiography and marketing. Lazaroo notes that books by Asian-Australian authors tend to be marketed as being purely (or predominantly) about migration and identity and are therefore regarded as being limited in their appeal or approach. By 'fixing' an ethnic or cultural location, for example through 'back cover blurbs' and book reviews, novels by Asian-Australian writers are made more easily understandable, and thus consumable, but correspondingly become viewed as being too narrow or specialised to merit wider interest. In her paper Lazaroo very generously attends to the many questions I posed to the panel, sharing her experiences as a successful writer and providing an insight into ways of negotiating the field.

Merlinda Bobis' paper, 'Voice-Niche-Brand', also offers a deeply personal yet carefully crafted critical model through which to negotiate the market. Bobis outlines a three-staged framework, which involves finding a voice, developing a niche, and then moving beyond the niche to develop a brand. Bobis' own 'niche' involves her performing her work, thereby creating an embodied experience for the audience. In order to 'brand' herself, however, Bobis has had to assume different tactics in packaging and 'selling' herself to an international audience. She raises the question of whether we can in fact consider Asian-Australian to be a brand, and if so, what does it mean to the market at this time?

From these different perspectives and positionings, it becomes clear that there is no one way to 'write' Asian-Australianness, meaning there can be no one way to market it. We can only hope that the market itself catches up to this fact. The insights provided by these writers are relevant not only to those working in the field of literature but for any cultural practitioner confronted by questions of value, artistic freedom, and the commodification of their ethnicity and identity.

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'No One Puts Baby In A Corner': Inserting My Self Into The Text

Tom Cho

While there is an increasing body of work that can be described as Asian-Australian literature, at this point in time, it comprises a fairly small pool of authors and texts.[1] In fact, I have often been struck by how Asian-Australian literary production seems to be outstripped by literary criticism on the topic.

At the same time, this small but growing field of literature has been subject to some persistent issues, some of which are raised in the introduction to this panel. They include questions of delimitation, the prevalence of Asian-Australian autobiographical works, and tensions between artistic freedom and a sense of responsibility to Asian communities. Although Asian-Australian literature is in the early stages of its development, it has already become plagued by certain recurring issues.

Over the course of my writing career, I have been encouraged by the continued emergence of Asian-Australian literature but discouraged by the persistence of these issues. For example, at times, I have grappled with the possibility of exploring themes outside of my Asian-Australian identity. At the same time, I have also been excited by the fact that there are very few, if any, precedents in the field of Asian-Australian literature for the kind of fiction I am producing. Perhaps this sense that one has great opportunities to contribute to a developing field also encourages other writers; furthermore, perhaps emerging literatures tend to be especially open to emerging writers. Yet, this potentiality aside, I have often felt that working in this field of Asian-Australian literature requires considerable deftness of approach. Over the years, I have sought to be mindful of this field's recurring issues, yet not necessarily to feel answerable to them. I have also sought to produce work that is distinct from existing texts in the field without simply dismissing the validity of the field.

My own endeavours to describe my Asian-Australianness in my fiction have involved a route as unpredictable as my personal adventures with my identity. Over the last seven years, I have been writing a short fiction collection that explores my identity. However, my identity has changed somewhat during this period, with one of the most significant of these changes being my gender

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[1] For example, the list of 'Asian Australian Writing in English' developed by the Asian Australian Studies Research Network features just 28 writers (http://www.asianaustralianstudies.org/resources.html#criticindex).

transition. As a result, my collection has had to undergo many major changes too. Oh well—that's showbiz. In fact, given all of this, the title of my short story collection (if that itself doesn't change) seems quite apt: *Look Who's Morphing*.

Despite the major changes to my collection, a relatively stable feature of this project is its exploration of my identity via a unique and powerful lens: my engagement with popular culture. As a result, *Look Who's Morphing* includes many renderings of popular cultural texts and figures (primarily those of which I am a fan, such as the film *The Sound of Music*). Consider, for example, the opening of the following piece, 'Godzilla Vs. Me'. This was the first piece that I wrote for my collection:

> *Godzilla Vs. Me*
>
> One night, after an absence of about two years, Godzilla rampaged through Tokyo again. However, this time, Godzilla had changed.
>
> He had acquired a combination of the best qualities of the world's lizards. His eyes now moved independently of each other so that he could follow objects without moving his head. His skin was thornier and he had sharp claws on his hands and feet. As he moved slowly through the busier streets of Tokyo, his skin changed colours.
>
> In addition, Godzilla now had a tongue that was bright blue. Furthermore, this tongue was long with a sticky tip. As he looked down upon the streets below him, Godzilla sent out his blue tongue to capture cars and people to eat. ('Two New Godzilla Stories' 33)

Although my collection is full of such renderings, I am not very interested in examining my engagement with popular culture in terms of popular cultural 'references' or 'allusions'. In fact, rather than focusing on the insertion of popular cultural references in my collection, what especially strikes me about this collection is the literal insertion of my self into the text: in a range of stories from my collection, I appear in various 'universes' derived from popular cultural texts/canons. Thus, my story 'Godzilla Vs. Me' continues:

> The day after Godzilla's rampage, Japan's prime minister telephoned me. The Japanese government was putting me in charge of an operation to capture Godzilla, dead or alive.
>
> I had been appointed to this important job due to my extensive expertise in lizard-catching. ('Two New Godzilla Stories' 33)

Despite the insertion of my self into my collection—and the consistent use of my life as raw material—this paper is not focused on the area of autobiography. This is not due to any uneasiness I have about the preponderance of autobiographical works by Asian-Australian writers. Rather, it is because I am especially interested in examining the very act by which the writer enters the

text, and the dynamics this act creates between writer and text. The remainder of this paper discusses this textual self-insertion as a method of describing my self (which includes my Asian-Australianness).

I will now outline a model that can be applied to this self-insertion. This model was developed in relation to fan fiction. Broadly speaking, *fan fiction* is fan-produced fiction that is based upon pre-existing texts/canons. For example, *Star Wars* fan fiction typically comprises short stories that are based upon the *Star Wars* universe and utilise existing characters and storylines. These days, fan fiction is typically circulated in fan communities via publication on the Internet.

Although I am presenting this paper today in my capacity as a 'writer', my engagement with popular culture in my fiction also makes explicit my position as a reader. Not surprisingly, this collapsing of boundaries between writer and reader is also reflected in fan fiction (which adds the further position of 'fan' into the mix). In fact, academic and fan fiction writer Ika Willis describes fan fiction as being generated firstly by 'a practice of reading' that reorients a canonical text (155). She claims that, through subsequently writing fan fiction, a reader/fan/writer can 'make space for her own desires in a text' (155) and share this reoriented text with others. Yet the reader/fan/writer is also a subject. This point is also evoked by Willis; she argues that this textual reorienting is prompted by 'the demands and desires brought to' these canonical texts by the producer's subjectivity (153).

Rather than taking a view of fan fiction that is overwhelmingly celebratory, Willis states that such reorientation can also become 'a way of negotiating the 'painful gaps' left in the encounter between a reader's 'felt desires' and the read text' (166). Following on from this—and taking into account a long history of questionable depictions of Asians in texts—I am reminded of Jessica Hagedorn's editorial introduction to the volume *Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction*. Hagedorn begins her introduction by discussing Charlie Chan, the fictional Chinese-American detective who was the subject of various novels and films. In addition to employing pseudo-Confucian sayings, Charlie Chan was only ever played by white actors in make-up rather than by any performers of Asian background. Hagedorn describes Charlie Chan as 'our most famous fake "Asian" pop icon' (xxi). She also recalls: 'I grew up in the Philippines watching Hollywood movies featuring yellowface, blackface, and redface actors giving me their versions of myself' (xxii). This comment reflects the pain that we can sometimes experience when we encounter reflections of ourselves in texts. It points to a painful incongruence between one's desires, knowledge and experiences, and the texts that articulate contradictory perspectives.

However, let us return to Willis' article on fan fiction. Although she discusses fan fiction's textual reorientation as a way to negotiate painful encounters with texts, Willis also identifies pleasure in producing fan fiction. She does this in terms of her role as a writer of *slash* (a form of fan fiction that develops same-sex relationships between characters in the original text). Willis describes herself as 'taking pleasure' not only in reorienting canonical texts but 'in scandalously acting *as if* it were natural to do so, *as if* all readings … were equally possible' (168).

This bittersweetness, this combination of pleasure and pain, can be found in many of the pieces in my own short fiction collection. I would now like to present the opening to another piece from this collection. If you are a fan of the film *Dirty Dancing* (and who among us is not?), you may especially enjoy this excerpt:

Dirty Dancing

This is the summer of 1963 and everybody is calling me 'Baby'. I am at a resort with my Auntie Feng and Uncle Stan for a holiday. The resort is on a small island that is located 10 miles off the coast of North Devon where the Atlantic meets the Bristol Channel. My auntie and uncle think the resort is very exciting and they soon start getting involved in all the resort activities—golf, macramé, etc. Me, I think the only moderately interesting thing about the resort is Johnny Castle. Johnny is a dance instructor at the resort and he has a very nice body. As it turns out, Johnny and I end up rehearsing a mambo dance number together for a forthcoming show at the resort and so we start spending a lot of time with one another. In fact, one night, Johnny and I find ourselves alone in his cabin. At first, we are just talking about our favourite 80s television shows and pop songs. But there is something in the way that discussions of popular culture can bring people together and thus our discussion soon leads to Johnny and I having sex. The thing is, while Johnny looks very nice and all, I do not really feel very 'in the moment'. In fact, as Johnny is panting and thrusting, I feel very detached from the experience. It is like I am a bystander, looking on as someone else completely different is having sex with Johnny. And that someone else is a Caucasian man with a moustache. This man is tall and very well-built. He is wearing a leather cap and leather chaps. His name? Bruce. As Bruce reaches for Johnny's wrists, I take the opportunity to watch Bruce. I find myself admiring how Bruce makes his masculinity so overt. I also find myself admiring Bruce's muscular body. And Bruce is so confident when it comes to sex. He doesn't say anything; he just pushes Johnny's face into the pillow. In the end, I watch as Bruce and Johnny spend all night having the hottest sex you can imagine. ('Dirty Dancing' 163)

Various layers of self-insertion are present in this piece. For example, I change roles to become a bystander who watches a sexual encounter between two men. In doing this, I begin a new story—one within the original story—that I insert my self into. Outside of the story's frame, I—the writer—have inserted my self both into the universe of the film *Dirty Dancing* and into my short story 'Dirty Dancing' (and thus into my short fiction collection).

An intermingling of pleasure and pain is reflected in the various layers of textual self-insertion in this story. For example, in the story itself, I seem detached from experiencing sexual pleasure and in fact I end up watching as a tall and well-built Caucasian leatherman steps into my place to have sex. Yet, in the final section of the story, I have not only become good friends with Bruce and Johnny but I triumphantly come of age in a parallel version of how the film *Dirty Dancing* ends:

> After the resort holiday, Auntie Feng and Uncle Stan head back to their home in Hobart. I am due to catch a plane back to Melbourne. It is hard saying good-bye to Bruce and Johnny, who are staying on at the resort until the summer is over. We promise to keep in touch. My parents meet me at the airport. They are very happy to see me. As always, they literally pass me around like I am a baby. My mother holds me in her arms and exclaims over my fingers and toes and then she passes me to my father. As my father cradles me, he starts talking baby-talk. He says to me, 'What's your name, hmmm? What's your name? Can you say your name?' and then he tickles my foot. Given that my parents call me 'Baby', none of this is surprising. They have been treating me like this for years and I have never felt that it would ever change. However, this time, it somehow annoys me more than usual. I tell my parents that I am not a baby. But my mother only pokes at my belly button and tells me that I am a little Buddha. My father then holds me up in the air and proclaims that I will grow up to be prosperous and lucky. I find myself being unsure as to what to do. The insecure part of me tells me to keep the peace and go along with everything, the ambitious part of me tells me that being prosperous and lucky would be very nice, and the part of me that learnt dancing at the resort tells me that dancing—like pop culture discussions—brings people together. In the end, the part of me that learnt dancing at the resort wins out, and so I jump out of my father's arms and I say to my parents 'No one puts Baby in a corner' and I perform a big raunchy dance number after I say it and everyone else at the airport joins in and starts dancing in a raunchy way too.
>
> My parents have no comeback for all of this. As a result, they have no choice but to come to terms with the fact that I am an adult. ('Dirty Dancing' 164-65)

In addition to the pleasure and pain described in the story itself, a combination of pleasure and pain is also present outside of the story's frame. This piece is a comedic short story that has brought me artistic satisfaction, as well as professional achievement. In addition, it was pleasurable for me to 'slash' the overtly heterosexual overtones of the film *Dirty Dancing*—to turn this film into a decidedly more queer story. I am also a fan of this film—I own it on DVD and video and have watched it multiple times. I enjoy it both as an 80s film in which dancing provides a way to triumph over hardship and also as a coming of age story that I can, in my own way, relate to. However, to recall Willis, this film also evokes painful discrepancies between its textual content and my own experiences and desires. My self-insertion into this text is thus an ironic contrast to my inability to see other aspects of my self—including my Asian-Australianness—reflected in this film. This act of self-insertion may have an air of mischief and even defiance—'No one puts Baby in a corner'—and yet one cannot forget that it is also a response to pain.

Textual self-insertion is a powerful form of literally 'inhabiting texts' to respond to what can sometimes be painful subject-text relations. In the case of my creative writing practice, this self-insertion speaks to my role not only as a writer and a reader but as a subject. Just as my engagement with popular culture in my creative writing makes explicit my position as a reader, the insertion of my self into the text makes explicit my position as a subject. For now, this self-insertion—with its strong engagement with popular culture, its method of making texts literally accommodate my self, and its ability to both articulate and respond to pleasure and pain—is the best way I know of to write my identity into being.

Tom Cho's short fiction collection in progress, Look Who's Morphing, *will be published by Giramondo in 2009. He is writing this collection as part of his PhD in Professional Writing at Deakin University. His short stories have been published widely, with more recent pieces in* HEAT *and the* Best Australian Stories *series. Visit him at www.tomcho.com.*

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Not Just Another Migrant Story

Simone Lazaroo

This paper addresses some of the questions put to fiction writers when we were initially invited to discuss the marketing of Asian-Australian literature at the Asian Australian Identities Conference in June 2007. My responses, which follow here, are largely anecdotal and based on my observations and personal experience as a published fiction writer.

Q: What are the limitations of the term 'Asian-Australian' in marketing literature?

I realize that I've rarely, if at all, referred to myself during interviews or public discussions as an 'Asian-Australian' writer. Why? I wonder if it indicates insubstantial identification on my part with my locus of origin, the Eurasian community of Singapore. I migrated with my family to Australia in 1964 at the age of three and made only a few trips back in adulthood. In fact, I have at least two other reasons for not using the term 'Asian-Australian' in media interviews and the like. Firstly, though convenient, this term risks reducing so many very diverse cultures to one apparently homogenous grouping. (Despite this, I'm going to have my cake and eat it too—I'll use the term Asian-Australian in this article for convenience.)

My second reason for not using the term in publicity and press releases about my own work perhaps relates more directly to issues of marketing. Based on earlier experiences, I worry that categorizations such as Asian-Australian, Eurasian-Australian, Chinese-Australian or Italian-Australian, may lead to one's fiction being dismissed as just yet another example of 'ethnic minority' or 'migrant' writing by reviewers, publishers' marketing departments and readers. These kinds of categorisations often exclude considerations of other arguably more significant issues in one's fiction.

Tseen Khoo points out that reviewers placed Hsu-Ming Teo's Australian-Vogel award winning novel *Love and Vertigo* 'constantly in the categories of immigrant tales and confessionals' (158). This is despite the book's title and its obvious engagement with issues of gender and romantic love, which are just as important themes in the novel as immigrant issues such as racial identity, assimilation, and inequalities of power between mainstream and minority cultures in Australia. I found Khoo's observations interesting because I'd previously noted the tendency of several Australian newspapers' and journals' literary editors and critics to review two or three novels within the same review based on cultural associations, such as 'migrant' or 'ethnic minority' experience. In 2000, my

non-autobiographical novel *The Australian Fiancé* was reviewed in *The Weekend Australian* in the same article as a novel apparently based on the story of Italian migrants, under the subheading 'The migrant's tale is already a well-worn route—two new novels take the theme around the block once again' (Elliot 13). I couldn't help but wonder how my years of researching and writing about the effects of World War Two and the White Australia Policy upon women such as my novel's Singaporean Eurasian narrator had led to such an appraisal. Were my narrators' socio-historical circumstances and interpersonal struggles in each country so insignificant or poorly written? At least a few subsequent reviews suggested otherwise.

Why do so many Australian reviewers tend to categorise such novels in this way? Perhaps it's partly due to a reluctance to look beyond the most obvious details of setting, character and plot. Perhaps, too, some non-Asian-Australian reviewers have to engage more fully with some of the issues Asian-Australian writers address in their fiction. In a mostly fair-minded review of my most recently published novel *The Travel Writer* (2006), reviewer Kerryn Goldsworthy implied that my central women characters should have made better choices, and that she was longing to read a novel 'in which the heroine grows up secure in her happy childhood, does well at school, goes out into the world and kicks arse, falls reciprocally in love with a nice bloke and lives happily ever after' (Goldsworthy 11). I understand this reviewer's desire. Such a narrative would be satisfying, but far-removed from the reality of *The Travel Writer*'s central characters. Perhaps Goldsworthy and I had observed very different subcultures and ways of being in the world. We certainly have very different views of the way historical circumstance and culture inflect gender and identity. I raise this example to illustrate that, sometimes, reviewers bring inappropriate criteria to bear on their judgements of literature outside their own cultural milieu. Although some reviewing in Australia is insightful and thorough, maybe this disjunction is indicative of a more widespread problem faced by other Asian-Australian writers. Tseen Khoo, for example, implies similar mismatches were present in some reviews of *Love and Vertigo* (158).

I also suspect that the ways in which publishers categorise a novel has considerable bearing on the way a book is perceived by writers of literary book reviews in newspapers and magazines, and by readers generally. It's easier for readers to recognise publishers' summaries of novels such as 'this is a story about resilience, a story about migration,' which appears at the very end of the back-cover of *Love and Vertigo*, than it is for them to interpret any longer extract from the book itself, which might suggest themes and categorisations with which they are less familiar.

Q: How is Asian-Australian literature currently marketed?

Many of the procedures used to market Australian literature generally apply. But it could be useful to reflect a bit here on the 'back-cover blurb,' an aspect of marketing that sometimes contributes to imprecise and stereotypical categorisations of Asian-Australian literature.

Firstly, the back-cover blurb is used in several stages of a book's marketing. It usually appears in the initial publicity material sent to media and booksellers, and in advertisements, and interviewers and reviewers often paraphrase it. Secondly, reading publishers' blurbs from the back covers of recent Asian-Australian fiction gives some insight into what publishers see as the selling points of particular books, and provides a point of comparison with the marketing of Asian-American writing, which we might possibly glean a few tips from, despite the obvious differences between Australian and American publishing climates and audiences. Finally, I suspect most Australian publishers would be amenable to utilising authors' input in their back-cover spiels.

In my experience, the back-cover blurb on the first edition of a book is often written by the publisher, sometimes in consultation with the author. In some cases, publishers include a positive review of an author's previous work or of a previous edition of the book. I've already indicated that Australian publishers' blurbs often tend to categorise Asian-Australian novels as stories about migration, even when the novels are arguably more concerned with issues such as assimilation and identity, emotional vulnerability and the exploitation by more powerful individuals of that vulnerability. The word 'exotic' appears on reviews and back covers of more than one contemporary Asian-Australian literary work, too, perhaps further emphasising a book's foreignness. My intention here isn't to criticise Australian publishers. Arguably, emphasising a book's foreignness or exoticness might be a deliberate marketing strategy. But I'd suggest that some Australian publishers have tended, perhaps inadvertently, to emphasise Asian-Australian novels' foreignness in their back-cover blurbs, to the exclusion of more topical or familiar issues that readers might engage or even identify with. Asian-Australian authors' access to both Western and Eastern experiences is potentially a source of great richness for their writing. Perhaps these authors' access to *both* the 'familiar' and the 'foreign' is a strength that might be better tapped by publishers' marketing departments, too; though I confess I need an expert marketer to show me how.

Q: Can we learn anything useful about the marketing of Asian-Australian literature from the marketing of Asian-American literature?

It's difficult to make direct comparisons between the marketing of Asian-American and Asian-Australian literature because demographic, economic

and cultural factors differ so widely between each country—for example, the percentage population of Chinese-Americans alone is considerably greater than Chinese-Australians. I believe there are many complete university courses in Asian-American studies in the United States, whereas only very few Australian universities offer a full course in Asian-Australian Studies. But I think we can at least learn a point or two from the marketing of Asian-American literary works that we might consider applying to the marketing of Asian-Australian literature. Examples I've seen of Asian-American novels give a short summary of setting and plot before a brief concluding statement of central themes and issues, as is the case for many novels in Australia. But it seems to me that in the recent past, American publishers have often identified different kinds of themes and issues on their back covers, and they often relate these to broader and, arguably, more topical issues. Let's consider just those concluding brief sentences about central themes or issues from the back cover of just a few Asian-American novels. Bear in mind that all concluding statements I'll quote from here come after a brief synopsis of the books' plot and setting, which I won't include here, due to their length. The back cover of Kiran Desai's Booker award-winning novel, published in 2006, states *The Inheritance of Loss* 'is a story of joy and despair. Her characters face numerous choices that majestically illuminate the consequences of colonialism as it collides with the modern world.'

Or consider the back of Amy Tan's *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005)

> Filled with Amy Tan's signature idiosyncratic, sympathetic characters, haunting images, historical complexity, significant contemporary themes …

And here's the back-cover blurb for Tan's much earlier and ostensibly more biographical novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*:

> Her vivid characterisation, her sly and poignant humour, and her sympathetic insights into human relationships—give us a compelling novel, both painful and sweet, suffused with hopes universal to us all.

These quotations demonstrate what interests me about their publishers' back-cover blurbs: that is, relating a book's geographically and culturally specific details of plot and setting to more global or universal issues and themes. Assessing the ideological implications of these American publishers' blurbs is beyond the scope of this article. It's enough to say that some of them sound at least a little contrived, if not downright cheesy, and might be accused of erroneously attempting to universalise culturally specific experience. But, rightly or wrongly, the back-cover blurbs of the American examples I've quoted from do seem to encourage 'non-Asian-American' readers to find these Asian-American authors' fiction somehow relevant to either their own experience, or to broader human experience generally.

But perhaps it might be said that writers such as Amy Tan and Kiran Desai are more discernibly concerned than many Asian-Australian writers with relating their Asian characters' experiences to broader human experience. Quite possibly there are clues here for aspiring Asian-Australian writers, that's if American publishers' and literary readers' tastes are anything like their Australian counterparts. Regardless, these Asian-American publishers' blurbs suggest an interest in fiction that is both concerned with detail about distinctive regional social and physical settings and historical circumstances, yet also relates to broader human experience or more global issues. Don't get me wrong: I don't intend here to be prescriptive about what we should and should not write about, or to dismiss the possibility of other thematic concerns.

Q: What other lessons might we in Australia learn from the marketing of Asian-American or Asian-British fiction?

Despite the differences between the American, British and Australian scenes, it could be instructive to note some of the strategies American and British publishers use to appeal to groups of readers such as book clubs and classes. While Asian-American works of fiction are more regularly set as secondary school and university texts in the US, and book clubs in the US are bigger business than they are here, there are strategies that might be applied to Asian-Australian fiction in order to appeal to collective audiences such as book-clubs without blowing Australian publishers' smaller marketing budgets. For example: included at the back of some recent Asian-American and Asian-British novels are reading guides, in the form of questions, that direct readers to significant aspects of the novel (for example in *The Inheritance of Loss*, which bears the message 'Reading Group Guide inside' on the back cover). While this will doubtless make some purists wince, such reading guides suggest to buyers that a book is eminently suited to reading by larger groups of people. These two- or three-page guides tell potential readers about more of the book's concerns than the limited space on the back cover can possibly do.

According to publicists of Australian publishing companies I spoke to in 2006, Australian readers are also interested in knowing the inspirations and processes followed by authors as they wrote their book. A relatively inexpensive way of doing this is the inclusion of a brief interview with the author at the back of the book, such as the one in the Malaysian-British writer Tash Aw's first novel *The Harmony Silk Factory*. Such guides can help readers of literature set in Asian contexts to make connections between the familiar and the foreign.

Q: How can we 'write Asian-Australianness into being', or describe an Asian-Australian identity in our literary writings?

I don't wish to underestimate the importance of such aims, but I suspect that the quality of fiction often suffers if one writes with too narrow a prescribed agenda in mind, and that attempting to 'write' Asian-Australianness, or describing an Asian-Australian identity, might not on their own be the most productive triggers for writing really engaging fiction. I believe good fiction writing is often triggered by a combination of several concerns important to the author, and some of them might arguably be broader or narrower than how to write Asian-Australianness into being. For example, concerns about what it is to be human and how people operate in the world; or about injustice; or memorialising particular places, cultures, eras and individuals; or crafting a story to give readers pleasure or anxiety or entertainment. Of course, such aims are not incompatible with describing Asian-Australian identities into being. For many emerging writers, so-called 'broader' concerns are often conveyed in narratives that are developed utilising the details of one's culture of origin. And for the literary offspring of various diasporas, an imaginative investment in the familial past they've known about only through parental anecdotes may be a fruitful and necessary step in their development as writers.

What I'm suggesting is that the project of writing Asian-Australianness into being, or describing an Asian-Australian identity, might be an incidental rather than pre-meditated outcome of writing the most interesting story that an individual writer can tell at a particular time. That doesn't mean both general and academic readers can't interpret our writing as describing an Asian-Australian identity. After all, one of the roles of the reader and critic is to interpret.

Q: Should Asian-Australians feel compelled to write about their identity?

Though writing about identity has been a necessary stage in my development as a writer, I certainly don't think Asian-Australian authors should feel compelled to write about their 'identity'.

I do agree, however, with the view that the story of individuals' struggles for identity as they negotiate different cultures is arguably one of *the* stories of our times. But anyone who's read, say, Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* will recognise it as being one of the most finely written renditions of certain kinds of Anglo-Saxon British character, with not an Asian-British character in sight. Such books suggest to me that Asian writers of the diaspora can be well-placed to write about their adopted culture, or cultures elsewhere in the world. So long as writers from any culture are prepared to research and observe their subject thoroughly, shouldn't they be entitled to write about anything they choose?

Q: Is the autobiographical impulse still present (and a curse?) for Asian-Australian authors?

Writing about autobiographical issues is a reasonably common and sometimes publishable starting point for many fiction writers, regardless of their cultural origins. Obviously this is at least partly because autobiographical experience provides one of the most accessible sources of the kinds of details we need to write creatively. Is this autobiographical impulse a curse? Yes and no. At least two Australian publishers have told me that there continues to be strong reader interest for work perceived as autobiography or memoir, and their publicists have been keen to know if there are any autobiographical links in all three of my novels. In America, Maxine Hong Kingston's prize-winning book *The Woman Warrior* (1977) was written initially as fiction, but marketed by her publishers with the subheading *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, because they perceived memoir and autobiography sold better than fiction. I understand this perception continues to exist amongst many American and Australian publishers. But several Chinese-American academics, including Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan and Benjamin Tong, have accused writers such as Kingston and Amy Tan of both Americanising and Orientalising Chinese family stories, by publishing them for the American market (Shu 200). It's possible some Asian-Australian writers face similar dilemmas. I've engaged in my writing with related issues of commodifying Asian culture. Dorothy Wang pointed out that my first novel *The World Waiting to be Made* shows 'how "Australianness", and "Asianness" and individuality are commodities to be bought and sold' (44-9). In my forthcoming novel *Unexpected Guests,* the central character, a Eurasian cook in a Balinese hotel catering for Western tourists, tells a lifestyle magazine writer 'You think Asian culture is a line you can make a quick buck from'.

Q: How open is the field to new and emerging Asian-Australian writers?

Many of you will have read newspaper articles in the literary pages on the difficulty both new and many established writers are currently having getting published in Australia. A quick scan of the web sites of many of the reputable Australian literary agents shows that they are 'not currently taking on new clients'. When an emerging writer I know asked one agent why, the agent replied that it's largely due to the current difficulty in finding publishers for unsolicited manuscripts. Literary agents, it seems, are reluctant to spend time trying to find publishers for little-known writers in the current publishing climate.

English and Australian literary agents and publishers I've spoken to say the publishing industry is in recession worldwide, and that nowadays, in England and Australia at least, decisions as to which literary fiction manuscripts will be published rarely rest with the literary editors of publishing houses, as they often did five or more years ago. A London-based literary agent told me recently that

in England, at least, the accountants of publishing companies usually make such decisions these days, often based on their judgement of whether a book will be saleable on supermarket bookstands. So I suspect that new and emerging Asian-Australian writers seeking publication can expect as tough a time as anyone else, if not tougher, partly for the reasons I've already mentioned above.

However, I don't wish to discourage new or established writers. Many of us are aware of the relative scarcity of published literature about the whole range of cultures categorised as Asian, and of the misinformation about these cultures in Australia. We need more fiction of various genres not only to dispel this misinformation, but to appeal to readers on other levels, too. And there are glimmers of hope. I understand that an English publishing company is working on publishing a list of fiction and non-fiction books about Asian subjects. It will be interesting to see if this works as a marketing strategy. If so, perhaps we'll see literature by Asian-Australians travelling overseas.

Q: So what advice might be given to unpublished, emerging literary fiction writers of Asian-Australian literature hoping to write for publication by mainstream publishing houses here and in England and America?

If we consider several of the most successful recent novels about Asia generally, they more often than not explore the interface between Asia and the West, often through interactions between Western and Asian characters. This is hardly surprising; more than one critic has suggested that the story of individuals living between cultures is one of the most significant stories of our times. It could be argued that fiction about being Asian-Australian is by definition about such individuals. Good quality writing such as Hsu-Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo* and Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* found a publisher and prizes. But for British and American publishers, it seems that literary fiction about Asian or Asian-Australian experience might have a better chance of being published if it's perceived as being more global in its appeal. Here, a comment from an English agent regarding my latest manuscript *Unexpected Guests* is perhaps illustrative: 'If this were just a little novel about an Asian-Australian living in Bali, our chances of selling it over here would be low. But I think this novel is making important comments about Western tourism in third world countries, and has a good chance of selling.' It's too early for me to say if this English agent's judgement is correct, but her comment is at least slightly indicative of an interest in 'other' cultures and places within the context of currently topical issues.

Q: Any concluding comments on what might improve the marketing of Asian-Australian literature?

Perhaps it goes without saying that not only do we need more publishers with reasonable marketing budgets and cultural sensitivity to give Asian-Australian literary writers of merit a go, but we also need more critics knowledgeable of the great diversity of Asian-Australian cultures to review those writers' work in 'mainstream' newspapers and magazines, not just academic journals and books. One can only hope that Asian-Australian literature will be reviewed more often in more informed ways in such newspapers and magazines, rather than according to culturally inappropriate criteria.

Simone Lazaroo won the Western Australian Premier's Award for Fiction for all three of her novels, which have also been short-listed for national and international literary awards. The World Waiting to be Made *has been translated into French and Mandarin,* The Australian Fiancé *is optioned for film, and extracts from the manuscript of* The Travel Writer *won awards including the David T.K. Wong Fellowship at the University of East Anglia, England. Simone's short stories have been anthologised in Australia and England. She was a judge of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Pacific /South East Asian region) in 2006, and lectures at Murdoch University, Perth.*

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'Voice-Niche-Brand': Marketing Asian-Australianness

Merlinda Bobis

The key words of this panel cause me discomfort: MARKET and ASIAN-AUSTRALIANNESS. According to Mexican poet and Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz, 'The market has no soul.' He writes:

> Today literature and the arts are exposed to a different danger: they are threatened not by a doctrine or a political party but by a faceless, soulless and directionless economic process. The market is circular, impersonal, impartial, inflexible. Some will tell me that this is as it should be. Perhaps. But the market, blind and deaf, is not fond of literature or of risk, and it does not know how to choose. Its censorship is not ideological: it has no ideas. It knows all about prices but nothing about values. (144)

In the twenty-first century, right after your book comes out, the computerised Nielsen BookScan tallies how many copies you sell, much like a bean counter. Publishers refer to this 'infernal machine' to assess your fate as a writer, and awards are not significant if they do not translate into sales.

The other word that I am ambivalent about in this business of writing is ASIAN-AUSTRALIANNESS. 'Asians' cannot be lumped into one heap, like a hyphenated brand of jeans, because Asia is a large continent of diverse cultures. Moreover ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN evokes a broken, halted negotiation between the Asian and the Australian in the writer; and/or between the Asian writer and the Australian reader. This state of play is anathema to the fluid delivery of a story or a poem.

So how do I sell my hyphenated sensibility? This question may be answered using the framework of VOICE-NICHE-BRAND, the inevitable progression of a writer's career.

VOICE is the timbre of the text that is created by the writer's style. Style is how the writer writes what literary theorist Frederic Jameson describes as 'a certain type of sentence'. About Hemingway, for instance, he argues

> it is a mistake to think … that [his books] deal essentially with such things as courage, love, and death; in reality, their deepest subject is simply the writing of a certain type of sentence, the practice of a determinate style. (409)

My 'certain type of sentence' springs from how I sense and live the world, influenced by the culture of my first home, the Philippines, where I spent my first 31 years before I came to Australia. The streets, birds, colours and flavours, the sound and feel of the air, the inflections of affection and grief, the voices around me, the myths that I heard as a child—all these left an indelible mark on my sensibility. These experiences cannot be erased, not even by a Western university education in English that tells me I have to write a sentence in a particular way. My voice is culturally specific: it is *not* Asian-Australian. It is a Filipino sensibility cross-pollinated by Western writerly strategies, and of course by the rules of the English language, with which I play and which I even break to accommodate my Filipino sensibility. However, what if the resultant voice is too alien to the Western ear?

In my short story *White Turtle,* a Filipina chanter performing at the Sydney Writers' Festival conjures a white turtle in her poetry, and a real leatherback materialises in the festival room. The chanter and the giant turtle sing in a voice frighteningly alien to the audience, and eventually the turtle is taken away by the police. At this point, the story makes a case for migrant writers in Australia:

> [The chanter] wanted to explain to the men in blue that it did not mean to cause harm or any trouble … She wanted to plead with them to be gentle with it. It was very tired after a long, long swim. But how to be understood, how to be heard in one's own tongue? (52)

This is the perennial difficulty encountered by the migrant writer: how to be understood, how to be heard in one's own tongue? By *own tongue,* I mean native sensibility more than native language. The migrant writer transplants her sensibility, shaped by the mythologies of her first culture, in the new home. But how to be understood here—how to be accepted?

The answer is embedded in this argument of Filipino writers Cordero-Fernando and Zialcita:

> A myth makes up the unwritten charter of a people; the model for their everyday behavior; and the embodiment of their most basic values, ideals and aspirations … it is accepted on faith. (28)

How can I, as migrant writer, be accepted on faith by this new home, Australia, when it has its own sensibility, shaped by its own mythologies so alien to mine? The migrant writer has to work extremely hard to woo and win this faith of the publisher, the reading public, the critic, the writers' festival directors. Eventual success in this 'long courtship' means that hopefully the writer will be accepted not as a token ethnic in a gathering of the mainstream, but because the mainstream has truly connected with her sensibility.

A few years ago at writers' festivals, Asian writers were sometimes lumped together to speak on being Asian-Australian or a migrant writer, while

mainstream Australian writers discussed narrative, politics, voice, etc. In this instance, I wanted to put my hand up and say, 'Please, I can also address those writerly topics quite well'.

My Filipino voice, written in English, is peculiar to many Australian readers, and was once critiqued as 'Not English!' I thought in this so-called postcolonial era we were over such a discourse. But then again I wonder if the danger sometimes for the monolingual speaker is that hearing can become just as impregnably monolithic as speaking. Sometimes I also sense an Australian wariness about my 'big emotions'. Years ago, an Australian poet explained that Australian readers are suspicious of emotion; he advised that I should keep 'training their ear' to my different voice. The worst comment was from someone editing my work, which afterwards bled with endless marks from his red pen. He asked, 'Who wrote this shit?' This, of course, reduced me to tears. So what did he want me to do? Write with Australian inflections, phraseologies, or with a British stiff-upper lip in 'The Queen's English'?

I have been in this business of writing for a long time. I have stuck to my guns despite the piles of rejection slips that come with the market's fears: this is too literary, too culturally specific, it does not quite fit our list of titles. Why not name the biggest fear? This is too alien. However, in the face of these fears, the 'alien voice' can strategise, perhaps through the second stage of my framework: the NICHE.

In practical terms the way to market your voice is to make it accessible to your audience, before they can learn how to enjoy it—hopefully with as little damage to or betrayal of your artistic and cultural integrity. A word of caution, though: when you turn your voice inside out to suit the fickle market, it can keep asking you to change according to its whim. When you play into the market's game, you will inevitably betray the voice of your grandmother, or the boiling of the rice-pot before rice cookers were invented.

In the '90s I built my niche, not by changing my voice but by performing it—bringing to my audience *the body with the text*. A body-to-body encounter. They 'tune' their ear to my tongue in a direct and immediate process. The sensory impact of a performed text is sudden and surprising. At the moment of delivery the audience has a more immediate surrender. After all, it is harder to re-read the bodyword in performance. Of course the audience/critics/scholars can pick my story to shreds later on: conceptualise, re-conceptualise and problematically negotiate through the usual cultural hyphen. After all, critics and scholars also want to tell their *own* stories.

If it is a good show, the hyphen becomes a delicious bridge for these readers and following creators of narrative, not just in sensory but especially in conceptual terms. However delivering the text with the body that is obviously inscribed by its ethnicity and gender has its own problems. The body is in itself

a text which might be misread, but that is another sticky story. Let me proceed now to the final stage of my framework: the BRAND.

A niche is small and snug, and you can be content to play in it. Then a big publisher picks you up and wants to turn you into the next big thing: the brand.

The brand of ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN. What is it to the market?

1. A little Asian flavour but set in Australia will sell, thus there is a market for the Asian migrant story—but keep it simple, easy and with exotic flourishes that are comfortably *knowable* to the reader.
2. A story set in an Asian destination for Australian tourists has also a good chance. The Australian reader *knows* this space.
3. A story about India or by an Indian writer is marketable, because of the Rushdies, the Mistrys and Roys who have paved the way for Indian literature's place in the international literary canon. Readers *know* this landscape now.

In these examples, the reader wants the easy passage through that cultural hyphen in 'Asian-Australian'. No doubt passage is 'easy' if the Asian part of the brand coincides with how they have framed 'Asia' in their imagination—this generic, amorphous, vague 'Asia' that I do not recognise anymore, because of the way the market has turned it into a one-size-fits-all, ready-to-wear garment.

To make it even easier for the reader, if you write about 'your Asia', do so in a voice that is close to the tunings of the Australian ear. Perhaps sound more Australian despite the Asian content? At least you can sell more books before you win that international award. When you do, the mainstream will claim you as an Australian writer and drop the 'Asian' bit of the brand.

Make sure you change your voice to suit the market's ear.

It is sad that some writers, who have blown readers away with their early books and distinct voices, now repeat themselves. I wonder if it is because of publishers breathing down their necks with the big cheque, saying, you have done that so well, so do it again, and do it again. This is your voice now, your *only* voice.

Nothing is more terrifying than when the imaginative limbs atrophy in the safe and narrow path. Fewer muscles are used; the others forget their function. When such atrophy hits the heart, creative embolism is inevitable. Then, paralysis. Even if we flail the imaginative limbs, how can we be saved from the same fate? The safe road, too worn or grooved by constant passage, could give way. The groove could capitulate into a grave. Death and burial.

There are writers who find a particular voice or style or story that perfectly fits the teat of the market and they milk it for all it's worth. They repeat themselves and repeat themselves and repeat themselves. Find your own niche, build your own cliché—but maybe there is no death in this comfort zone; instead, endless

nourishment by a market made lazy in its satiation. No diverse tastes, please. Focus the palate. Give us *one* safe, easy text. As Octavio Paz writes, the market's trend is towards uniformity:

> The ideal is one and only one public: readers who all have exactly the same taste, who all read the same book. That book is many books: a new book by a different author may be published every day, but they are all really the same book. (113)

Thus, a Filipino, Chinese, Indian, Malaysian book is only one Asian-Australian book? Has the market hijacked our identity into a brand? In our giving ourselves this hyphenated label, have we in fact been complicit in our own branding? What is our chance to keep the integrity of our own voices?

I would like to cite a case study of an Asian-Australian book and the market: my first novel, *Banana Heart Summer*, which I thought I wrote to subvert the market. I wrote it under a different title, *Not Hunger*, a protest against hunger, poverty and child labour. These social issues and the wish to write the old street from home were my major concerns—but I believed I could also accommodate the desires of the market. If I write about hunger, of course I cannot but write about food. So the novel is also a 'food book', a popular genre. It is highly flavoursome, sensory and exotic to those uninitiated to Philippine cuisine. It will sell, surely.

My initial intention was to strategise: to lull the readers into 'exotic delectation', then hit them with social issues—in my own voice. I decided I would not write about the Australian landscape at all. This would be a Filipino food book. I would play with food imagery and metaphor, and tell a good story, but the dream did not proceed as planned. My original subversive intent was, in fact, 'subverted' by the stronger need to get published and to please a difficult market, if not to crack it.

Soon the wheels of the market began to turn. My agent and publisher asked me to change the original title *Not Hunger*, because it was too negative. I chose *Banana Heart Summer*, not my favourite title but at least I could live with it. Besides, it promised easy, safe fun (especially for readers who are suspicious of difficult books), and 'it's funky', a friend assured me. Then the book was packaged into this beautiful pink artwork. Do not get me wrong—I am very grateful for this 'little gem', which was what the publisher promised in the hope that the novel would become a bestseller. It never did. Worse, it barely got reviewed. As the publicist said, 'They [the media] do not want to talk to you.' The book's short-listing for the 2006 Literature Society Gold medal did not translate into sales. Then my Australian publisher pulled out of our agreement to publish my proposed second novel.

After a year, though, a little miracle happened. I received a call from the fiction editor of Bantam, Random House in New York, telling me that she was 'utterly enchanted' with my novel and that she wanted to publish it—and what else was I writing? The advice of my American agent, who had primed me for this call, was: 'If she asks about your other writing plans, give her something closer to the current book that she's buying, *Banana Heart Summer*.'

The market's wheels were turning, so I had to pitch my proposed second novel, *The Solemn Lantern Maker*, along the lines of the first. However, this next novel wrote itself out differently. The style turned out spare, the content grim, so unlike the lush, lyrical and playful rendition of the first book. Moreover, the narrative became highly political and critical of American foreign policy. I was biting my nails, wondering how my US publisher would respond to this different voice. Had I shot myself in the foot, in my biggest break?

This little story has a happy ending, though. After I signed the US deal for *Banana Heart Summer* and the as-yet unwritten *The Solemn Lantern Maker*, my Australian publisher decided to bring me back to the fold: they signed up to publish the second novel that they had rejected. *The Solemn Lantern Maker* has now been launched in Australia. My US publisher is happy with the new book, which they will publish in 2009 after the publication of the first novel this year. Moreover I now have a UK literary agent who likes this second book more than the first, and who wants to sell both in Britain, as well as a third novel that I have just finished. In this respect, the story has not ended.

The wheels of the market are still turning, and will continue to turn. I will write more books, new books. I will receive new rejection slips. In order to get my voice into print, I will vacillate between the demands of the market and my literary, cultural and political convictions. But I will eventually keep my own voice and play with new voices. I will shed off the Asian-Australian brand. I will write books which, at my deathbed, will not accuse me of betrayal of the things I hold dear: social and political issues, basic decency and human rights, and 'the suppressed C word' in our terrified discourse in global politics: compassion. I will try not to forget that the unguarded surge of empathy for the other, this fluid connection, is not hyphenated and has no price tag.

Merlinda Bobis has written prose fiction, poetry and drama. She has received the Prix Italia and the Australian Writers' Guild Award for Rita's Lullaby, *the Steele Rudd Award for the Best Published Collection of Australian Short Stories, the Judges' Choice Award (Bumbershoot Bookfair, Seattle Arts Festival) and the Philippine National Book Award for* White Turtle *or* The Kissing, *and the Philippine Balagtas Award, a lifetime award for her fiction and poetry in English, Pilipino and Bicol. Her poetry book* Summer Was A Fast Train Without Terminals *was short-listed for* The Age *Poetry Book Award. Her plays have been performed in*

Australia, Philippines, France, China, Thailand and the Slovak Republic. She has published two novels: Banana Heart Summer *(2005), which was short-listed for the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal, and* The Solemn Lantern Maker *(2008). She teaches creative writing at the University of Wollongong.*

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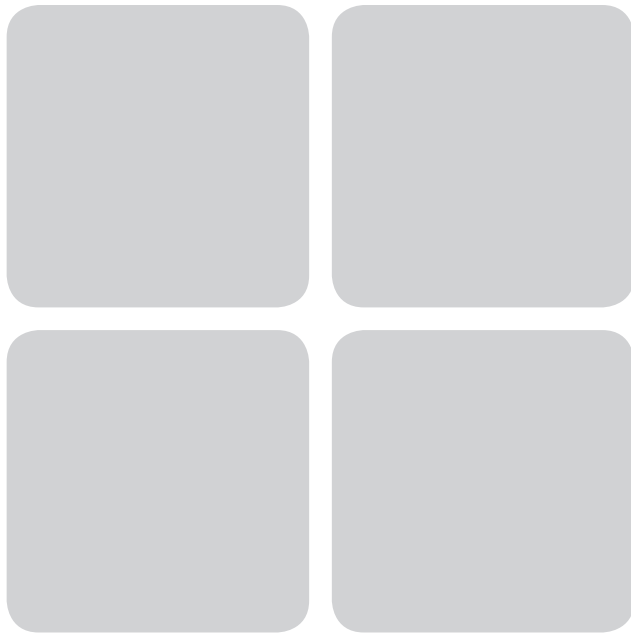
BOOK REVIEWS

The nature of environmentalism

Patriots: Defending Australia's Natural Heritage, 1946-2004
By William Lines
University of Queensland Press, 416pp, $34.95, 2006.
ISBN 978-0-70223-554-2

Reviewed by Aidan Davison

Over the past two decades, Australians have become more informed about environmental problems, more familiar with environmental discourse, and more likely to identify themselves as at least some shade of green. Yet dialogue between proponents for environmental movements and the broader public has ironically become, if anything, more difficult over this period. Reflecting this, membership of environmental organisations has remained in a range of around two to five per cent of the population. In 2004, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported a steady decline in the proportion of the population concerned about environmental problems. Although the recent conversion of many Australians from climate change sceptics to carbon cops is likely to have heightened levels of environmental concern, the evidence does not suggest that there has been a significant increase in trust for environmental groups. Australian environmentalists may not yet be debating the death of environmentalism, as are many of their American counterparts. Yet, one environmentalist has commented on a general mood of unease amongst fellow activists following the victorious wilderness battles of the 1980s: 'it is clear that the Australian movement's performance is weak when viewed against the challenges it faces' (Christoff 1).

William Lines' *Patriots: Defending Australia's Natural Heritage* offers one explanation for the failure of environmentalism to realise the promise of the 1980s. Ostensibly telling the post-war history of Australian nature conservation, Lines seeks to convince readers that environmentalism has lost its way because concern for nature has become muddled with and complicated by unrelated social concerns such as justice, racism, multiculturalism and reconciliation. 'People who advocate social justice and human rights' asserts Lines 'speak a different language and subscribe to a different worldview than conservationists' (312). The word environmentalism is, for Lines, irredeemably anthropocentric and an indicator of a dangerous shift in focus in Australian nature conservation activism around the mid 1970s. The word '[n]ature, in contrast, is an altogether different utterance. One of the least ambiguous words in English, its meaning is very clear and ancient … [Nature is] the living and non-living world that came into being without the help of humans' (121-122). This shift from nature

conservation to environmentalism was, apparently, brought about largely by left-wing academics who 'tend to be conformist and cowardly by nature' (185) and who have corrupted students with their humanism. The result was distraction from the task of 'saving nature from humans: environmentalists were more interested in saving humans from themselves' (169). And why does nature have to be saved from humanity? Because 'all *Homo sapiens* have interacted with the world in destructive ways, including Australia's first human inhabitants … The struggle for conservation is not a struggle against "forces", "structures", "social constructions", or "cultural artefacts", but a struggle against human nature' (243, 264).

I could hardly disagree more with these claims, and, more especially, Lines' simplistic reading of nature. Like Raymond Williams, I include nature among the most multiple, accommodating and puzzling of words. Lines' use of the idea of human *nature* as the nemesis of nature conservationists seems proof enough of this. The final sentence of the book is a fitting tribute to the incoherence of *Patriots*. The first half of this sentence makes a predictable exhortation to nature's patriots to 'mount a militant defence of what remains'. The second half, however, inexplicably cuts away a satisfying chunk of the book's argument by suggesting that conservationists also actively 'begin re-wilding the continent' (355). I do agree with this closing injunction, but take it to be the beginning of an entirely different argument, not the logical end of Lines' longing after pure nature.

Not only do I take issue with Lines' diagnosis, I suggest *Patriots* is itself evidence in support of a more plausible—if still partial, the matter being immensely complex—explanation of the failure of environmentalism to broaden its social base. For *Patriots* is a particularly disturbing example of a strident, dogmatic and un-reflexive tendency, a fundamentalist energy, that has been on the rise during my 20 years in environmental groups and that has alienated many Australians. As environmental issues have been drawn into the mainstream, environmentalist narratives have been disassembled and recomposed by those with different ideological and moral concerns—the re-invention of nuclear energy as greenhouse saviour, for example—that greatly increase the complexity of environmental debate. Like Lines, a growing number of conservationists appear weary of such complexity and yearn for the simplicity that comes from locating the political authority of concepts such as wilderness, nativeness and biodiversity in a realm beyond all politics, beyond contest, qualification and re-invention. In public discourse this transcendent realm—this timeless, universal Nature—is channelled by conservationists with the dispassionate help of science. In private experience this other-side is channelled through the deep subjectivities, the aesthetics, morality and spirituality, of embodied experience.

I think it inevitable that many Australians will baulk at the prospect of reorganising their lives around unquestionable received truths about 'Nature'.

And while Lines sees no problem in the fact that nature conservationists have 'commonly combined both romantic and scientific sensibilities and overlooked the contradictions' (68), the fact that such truths are delivered in such a riven, internally contradictory way, surely explains why many regard nature conservationists with suspicion, even while sharing many of their practical concerns. Although sympathetic to the fact that fatigue shadows activism, I think the complex contestation that follows the mainstreaming of environmental issues is vital to the democratic constitution of sustainable futures.

While *Patriots* contains well-composed and interesting historical material, the writing moves erratically between laborious detail and graceless polemic, with the overall direction of the empirical inquiry unclear. Often mean-spirited, the text stands in contrast to Lines' much more constructive environmental history in the early 1990s. It is understandable (but no less disturbing for that) that praise for the 1991 *Taming the Great South Land* commands the back cover of *Patriots*. I am disappointed that Queensland University Press judged there to be a market for Lines' divisive misanthropy and that they were willing to satisfy it. And I am concerned that a review of *Patriots*, published in The Greens magazine, concluded that despite his sour criticism of environmentalist pioneers such as Judith Wright and Bob Brown, 'Lines' critique—particularly his argument that the environmental movement has allowed its nature-based core belief to be compromised by anthropocentric language and worldview—deserves much more internal debate' (Harries 25).

I am not suggesting that *Patriots* is a straightforward or uncomplicated book. Indeed, as the following passage shows, it offers insight into problems flowing from the strong alliance of ideas of nature and nation in Australia:

> The cause of conservation arises from and fosters a concrete patriotism derived not from abstract discourses about freedom and rights but from living and breathing a physical, tangible, sunlit Australia … Conservation was parochial, geographic, and territorial; its success depended on the nation-state. (312-313)

Despite this concession to the limitations of nationalism, Lines fails to reflect on the role that Australia's unique status as a continental nation-state has played in the environmental movement. Australia's colonial-settler heritage—and its subsequent development from a frontier culture to a predominantly suburban nation—has shaped the middle-class politics of Australian nature conservation. Further, Lines subsumes the tremendous span of Indigenous Australian cultural history within an unexamined 'fall from nature' narrative and dismisses all efforts to build a coalition of Indigenous and conservationist interests. He puts his faith instead in a version of liberalism closely related to American republicanism—this is a book about patriotism, after all. The genius of Western liberal democracy is, we are told, that it respects 'inherent differences between

humans' (218) by building local and 'lively civil society' (134) within 'an overarching solidarity achieved through patriotism' rooted in nature (218). Seeing scant evidence in *Patriots* of respect for social difference or creative contribution to environmental groups, I am entirely unmoved by Lines' appeal to an eco-nationalist solidarity. Writing before *Patriots*, Mark Tredinnick generously described Lines as 'Edward Abbey on steroids, but without the sense of humour … I wonder sometimes if we are tough enough to take him. And I hope like hell we are.' (n.p.) My hope is that *Patriots* is enough to change many minds about the value of Lines' tough talk.

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The Experience of Experience

This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography
By Richard Freadman
University of Western Australia Press, 319pp, $39.95, 2007.
ISBN 978-0-98029-6-426

Reviewed by Caroline Hamilton

In his essay 'History Talking to Itself' Francis Russell Hart notes that particular modes of autobiographical writing can be related back to specific periods of cultural life. With his survey study of Australian Jewish autobiography Richard Freadman demonstrates that autobiography can be understood as a product of particular *cultures* as well as particular eras. *This Crazy Thing A Life* is Freadman's study of autobiographical writing by Jewish Australians throughout the nation's history.

The subject of Jewish identity is rich territory for the scholar of autobiography: in these life stories there is ever present an attempt to chart and make meaning of the literal and figurative journey to Australian shores. In this respect the Jewish Diaspora is an instructive lens through which to view the complexities of identity, and writing about the self.

Freadman is a scholar of literature, with a special interest in biography and autobiography, and his discipline has influenced his approach and structuring of the collection. The book is divided into three parts.

The first section offers an extensive examination of Australian autobiographical writing in terms of Australian Jewish history and the important contribution of Jewish Australians to our cultural landscape. Interestingly, the bulk of these writings have come to light in the last 10 years or so, a fact that is consistent with the mainstream popularity for autobiography and memoir in the international bookselling market. Freadman does not directly address the recent popularity for life-writing but it is apparent that the autobiographical impulse at work in these Jewish life stories is linked to a drive to document the 'experience of experience'.

To address the reasons for the recent resurgence of interest in autobiography in the mainstream we might speak not of popularity but of *legibility*: the ease (or otherwise) with which we can read and understand the stories of others' lives. While the public taste for autobiographies in recent years is very likely connected to the insistence on the scrutinised, interactive existence encouraged by our modern media, there is a very different kind of 'bearing witness' exposed in Freadman's collection. His work examines the multifaceted experience of

Australian Jews as they grapple with questions of testimony, family history and the Holocaust.

Given that Jews have been in Australia since the First Fleet, Freadman's task is a large one and his approach is comprehensive. Freadman examines Jewish identity before the Second World War and its significant transformation after the postwar influx of central-European refugees. Questions of citizenship and statelessness are examined in the context of what it means to be Jewish from the vantage point of the southern hemisphere.

In the second section of his book, he offers nuanced readings of works by Andrew Reimer, Susan Varga, Lily Brett, Arnold Zable and others. These separate essays are complemented by another on the Makor Library's 'Write Your Story' project, recounting its work in facilitating the writing of autobiography in the community. As if in demonstration of the drive to document collective experience, the Makor Project offers assistance to Jews of all backgrounds and ages to tell their life stories. Through these focused studies Freadman is able to trace out recurrent themes relevant to the genre of Jewish autobiography in particular, and the life-writing form more generally; especially identity issues such as race, gender and sexuality.

Freadman also tackles the problems of autobiographical writing: the question of whether or how language can accurately capture experience. Perhaps most illuminating and useful is Freadman's contention that 'What we call "personal identity" can take a first-person form which refers to the person I take myself to be, but also a third-person form which concerns how others see me.' What makes this study strong is Freadman's ability to move deftly between both the first and third-person identities that together comprise the authors he has chosen for examination.

The last section of the book is an anthology of sorts, featuring extracts from the works of 66 writers and arranged according to particular themes and issues Freadman has covered in his analysis. This is an idiosyncratic and effective approach. Freadman not only allows these writers to speak for themselves but, in compiling such a rich collection of source material, serves to introduce readers to a wide range of excellent, varied life-writing styles.

Of particular interest in the collection is Freadman's focus on the question of 'Australianness' in the context of Jewish identity. Freadman acknowledges this to be a classification almost as amorphous as 'autobiography'. What constitutes an Australian, let alone an Australian Jew? For Freadman's purposes his definition of Australianness is loose: anyone who has spent at least a year or more in Australia is deemed to be Australian. This in itself brings up some interesting questions about the melding of national and personal identity—how much of national identity is a state of mind? How much can it be measured in terms of years, decades, generations? Is geography destiny insofar as identity is

concerned? It would be interesting to revisit Freadman's work in another 10 or 15 years when the landscape of Australia and the figurative territory of autobiography have both been further shaped by technological shifts and global discourses to see just how national, ethnic and personal identities have been influenced by these forces.

This Crazy Thing a Life offers a landmark study of Australian Jewish writing. Freadman's focus offers an entirely fresh approach to Australian life-writing and his study engages with important issues surrounding testimony and truth.

Caroline Hamilton is a researcher at the University of Sydney and has written on the subject of autobiography and contemporary culture. She most recently edited a collection of essays entitled The Politics and Aesthetics of Refusal *published by Cambridge Scholars' Press.*

Reinventing Australia

Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity
By Catriona Elder
Allen & Unwin, 400pp, $45.00, 2007
ISBN 978-1-74114-9-289

Reviewed by Melissa Harper

When Richard White wrote *Inventing Australia* in 1981 he noted that Australia, more so than many nations, had developed something of an obsession with defining its identity. It is a national obsession that has continued to flourish. With the challenges posed by more complex understandings of Australian history, the demands of Indigenous Australians to be fully recognised in contemporary Australian life, and ongoing concern about immigration levels and the relevance of multiculturalism, Australians are, more than ever, engaging in conversations about what it means to be Australian. Debates about Australian national identity continue to be the fodder of television current affairs, political discourse, coffee-table books and university courses.

Catriona Elder's *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity* weighs into this familiar but complex terrain. Elder writes that her purpose is not to find the 'real' Australia nor the 'real' Australian but to examine how such ideas form and whose interests they serve. In doing so, Elder acknowledges her debt to White. As she rightly suggests, in the intervening 27 years since *Inventing Australia* first appeared, ideas of Australianness have been reshaped by a whole range of new events and issues and new theories have emerged to frame such discussions. The time to critically revisit and update the subject is thus long overdue.

Elder is largely concerned with twentieth-century Australia and she takes a thematic, rather than a chronological approach. Central to her methodology is the idea of stories—she analyses the ideas about Australian identity that are produced, reproduced, and also contested in the narratives we tell ourselves and others about what it means to be Australian. As she suggests, these narratives of identity are created in a number of domains: in political debate and government policy, in books, film, television, magazines and music, in exhibitions, street marches and sporting contests but also in everyday dialogue, from discussions in school classrooms and around the dining table to debates over a beer at the pub.

Elder draws easily and confidently on this diverse material and on a wide range of scholarship to weave together an impressive narrative of her own. *Being*

Australian is divided into two parts. The first is concerned with the particular ways that class, gender, sexuality, indigeneity and ethnicity have shaped stories of being Australian. A chapter is devoted to each but the strength here lies in the connections she draws between these factors both within and across the chapters. In the second half of the book the focus is on the places where national narratives are produced, whether in media texts, landscapes, public holidays, museums, the sporting field, on the streets or in everyday backyards. The obvious candidates make an appearance, including Anzac Day, the National Museum, Uluru and the Cronulla riots. Yet it is here that the book also analyses some less familiar, even surprising cultural phenomena for the contribution they have made to understandings of Australianness. In a chapter on the use of public space, Elder explores labour protests, Reclaim the Streets parties, Critical Mass, and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. She acknowledges that such events are not necessarily national in intent—they do not set out to tell a national story—but suggests that they nevertheless provide insights into how the nation works.

Just as *Being Australian* is concerned with the dominant narratives of Australian-ness and the ways that those stories are produced, Elder is also keen to examine contesting national narratives—the counter events, places and texts that suggest other ways of being Australian. This is perhaps the book's strength. Here Elder teases out the many areas of Australian life where the Anglo-Australian male, the 'Aussie bloke' that has for so long epitomised understandings of national identity, is challenged by an increasing awareness that Australian-ness is a complex and multifaceted beast.

The academic already well versed in historical and contemporary debates about Australian identity may not find anything particularly new here but for those looking for an engaging text for introductory courses in Australian Studies this promises to be a valuable addition to the classroom. Elder skilfully brings together a large amount of diverse material and for the most part the arguments are cogent and the writing accessible. At times the politics is a little too heavy-handed and this does run the risk of alienating an audience that (unfortunately) already feels that the teaching of Australian history has become an ideological exercise pandering to minority interests. But with its extensive use of popular culture references, its analysis of the 'serious' and the 'fun' places where stories of 'Australian-ness' are produced, and its acknowledgement of the genuine emotion that people attach to national identity, *Being Australian* also has the potential to re-engage 'Howard's children'. Hopefully it will encourage students of the need to think critically about the vested interests that so often shape stories of identity and belonging. One thing is certain: Elder's book won't be the last word on the subject.

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Giving an Account of Butler

Reviewed by Fiona Jenkins

This book contributes to a fast growing critical literature assessing Judith Butler's writings as a whole. Butler's wide renown owes most to her oft-cited and often misunderstood account of gender performativity. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) has been a hugely influential text, seminal in the development of queer theory and of critiques from within feminism of identity politics. It is also significant—more broadly—for its central emphasis on identity as something that is 'done' rather than being something that 'is'. Misunderstandings and radical simplifications of that central thesis concerning the performativity of gender have prevailed, however, in much of the reception of this early work. A key claim of *Gender Trouble* is that it is necessary to *deconstruct* the nature/culture opposition that has been foundational for accounts of gender (by showing that 'nature'—or 'sex'—is itself discursively constituted and cannot provide an unproblematic point of reference). Despite this, Butler's thesis is often read as some version of radical constructivism. Hence multiple objections to her thesis have assumed that she is denying the existence of nature or of sexed bodies rather than interrogating the discursive and normative work that assumptions about their originary or self-evident character have been made to do. Butler's focus on 'doing' rather than 'being a gender', meanwhile, has very frequently been taken to entail possibilities of freedom no more demanding than the choice of attire or behaviour, despite Butler's explicit and forceful rejection of such an interpretation.

In subsequent work, beginning with *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler has sought to philosophically extend and refine her account of the socially inscribed body and of the subject generated by social norms and practices of identification and address (or 'interpellation', to use Althusser's phrase). Her work is throughout characterized by its concern with political potentialities, and thus with the problem of what kind of agency is available to a subject whose normal assumptions about freedom and individuality themselves belong to highly problematic forms of social interpellation (on this theme, see especially *Excitable Speech* and *The Psychic Life of Power*, both 1997). More recently, Butler has focused on questions of ethics construed, on the one side, as the problem of living life in relation to, but also in excess of normative claims; and on the other,

as centrally bound up with issues of responsibility, and thus of answering the address of another (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 2005). The question 'whose life matters?'—a question Butler has always addressed in terms of both that which 'matters' (in terms of value) and as that which materializes in a recognizable and persisting form—animates a series of interventions into politics, law and culture; providing a critique of contemporary geopolitics (*Precarious Life: Essays on Mourning and Violence*, 2004), as well as of legal and political interpretations of hate speech, pornography, homosexual self-declaration and censorship. The philosophical depth of her discussion comes through rich and nuanced readings of theorists of the self and sociality, notably Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Foucault, and Althusser. An interest in theorizations of violence and non-violence within a modern Jewish tradition also especially marks her recent work, and here Butler references Adorno, Levinas and Benjamin.

Such range and influence, as well as the philosophical subtlety of Butler's writings, clearly warrant the focused attention her work is currently receiving. Judging by other volumes in the series, the aim of Continuum's 'Live Theory' is to highlight and interrogate thinkers whose work has just this kind of interdisciplinary resonance and a particularly contemporary life and significance. A sense of live and productive engagement does come through strongly in what is often Kirby's fairly critical, but also rich and nuanced reception of Butler's work. A concluding interview also adds to the 'liveness' of Butler's voice. There is much useful work done here in terms of laying out Butler's distinctive debt to and take upon a range of critical theorists. The reading offered stresses Butler's limitations as well as her useful contributions and does so from a perspective informed by Kirby's own ideas on embodiment. This leads to an interesting angle on certain key issues, but one that nonetheless tends to reiterate and seek to confirm some well-rehearsed objections to Butler's project. It is a strong reading that attempts to point up un-productive paradoxes and contradictions in Butler's position—suggesting that these indicate the need to go beyond her views. The book cover's claim that it will guide the reader through Butler's complex ideas in an introductory way is thus somewhat misleading. To my mind, the book is aimed at the reader who already has quite considerable familiarity with Butler's oeuvre and influences and as such I would hesitate to recommend it as a general introductory text for undergraduates. The book's tight focus restricts its general usefulness, for the central argument turns on issues that are critical to Kirby's own particular interests in the body or, more precisely, 'corporeality' rather than providing a more introductory, broad-minded, and up to date assessment of Butler's importance.

Kirby's book offers what ought to be a useful structure for assessing the virtues and limitations of Butler's thought, and some of this it indeed does well. Chapters organized around critical readings of Butler's major works up to 1997 foreground the contributions each make to areas in which she has been highly influential

in forming contemporary accounts of identity, the body, language and power. Each chapter then turns to consider the limitations of Butler's own way of conducting her project, throughout arguing that 'the radical drive in Butler's work to reconfigure the subject might, on its own cognizance, be taken further' (18). This makes way in Chapter Four for a critical presentation of Butler's account of materiality and signification that appeared in an earlier version in Kirby's 1997 book *Telling Flesh*. This chapter is one of the most substantial and interesting in the book, locating Butler in relation to Derridean and Lacanian theories of signification and pointing out limitations in Butler's conceptualization of materiality as a way of approaching *corporeality*.

Yet although this focus on the question of corporeality is important, it is hard not to feel that too much of the book's overall argument turns on Kirby's own claim to pursue the 'radical drive' of Butler's project more thoroughly than Butler herself. Moreover, Butler is throughout charged with falling back into problematic positions on the subject; in particular, Cartesianism, or mind/body dualism (83), and a version of constructivism that 'surreptitiously' reinstalls the opposition of nature and culture it claims to surpass (68). Very little attention is paid to Butler's post-1997 work, and this not only seems to date Kirby's engagement but fails to fully assess the extent to which Butler's work has taken new directions while developing old preoccupations. Although very brief reference is made in the penultimate chapter on *The Psychic Life of Power* to the more sophisticated account of normativity offered in *Undoing Gender* (2005), all reference to the themes elaborated around responsibility in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) are missing, even though versions of Butler's argument were already published in the *Diacritics* article of the same name from 2001 and, through a German publisher, in book length form in 2003. The essays of *Precarious Life* (2004) are also entirely absent. This suggests an intellectual engagement somewhat less 'live' than it might have been and a problematic lack of interest in specifying why Butler's intellectual trajectory has developed as it has. Kirby's conclusions about the limitations of Butler's work are certainly based upon a fairly selective reading of texts and ignore some of Butler's own developments of her ideas. More importantly, perhaps, Kirby arrives at her conclusions through reading strategies and argument evaluation that systematically downplay the ways in which these texts foreground the interest and importance of rhetorical strategy and posit paradox as a productive space.

Whereas I would argue that Butler's texts are attentive to the importance of the figurative aspects of language (such as metonymy, metalepsis and metaphor), Kirby's text is structured by a rather literal argumentative strategy. Kirby then pins Butler down to a commitment to positions which—if one looks across Butler's entire oeuvre—are rather more complex than Kirby states, since they engage rather than straightforwardly reject paradoxicality. This, for instance, is what allows Kirby to specify the ways in which Butler 'falls back' into positions

on the subject that she ought to have surpassed. Paradox in Butler's work is identified, and then specified as problematic and unproductive insofar as Kirby reads tensions between claims according to a quasi-foundationalist model that assumes that one set of claims *must* have priority over another. Accordingly, Kirby seeks to identify the *fundamental* theoretical commitments Butler is bound to sustain, even if elsewhere Butler would appear to qualify their force by admitting them to be in tension with other claims. For Kirby, this means that Butler typically tries to have things both ways, and to negotiate between irreconcilable positions (notably those derived from her theoretical debt to Foucault as opposed to the debt to Freud in her work). However, if we take seriously Butler's suspicion of foundationalism (see especially her contribution to *Feminist Contentions* (1995)) then we should not be surprised to find in her writing moves that are *by their nature* at odds with linear and axiomatic (foundational) reasoning. In short, if Kirby's strategy allows her—in typically intriguing ways—to set forward her own thesis concerning the relation between language, signification, materiality and 'fleshy' corporeality, this space is too often opened at the cost of allowing some rather dismissive gestures to replace the detailed critical reading she claims, in her preface, to espouse. Moreover, what is occluded in Butler's text by this reading strategy has an importance internal to the question of what a 'discursive materiality' might be.

I would now like to briefly respond to Kirby's central criticism of Butler, that she 'falls prey to the same naïve foundationalism that she criticizes' (34). In particular, Kirby builds much of her interpretation on the claim that Butler, despite her Foucauldian leanings, holds an account of power as juridical and repressive. This suggests that Butler remains committed to truths of identity and desire that lie behind the ruses of power (35, 41, 45, 62). Butler is, further, held to assume there is some pure 'outside' of language that exceeds our representations, an 'in itself' that in its very inaccessibility or 'absence' might bear the emancipatory political function of serving to call our 'constructions' into perpetual question (78, 80). The latter position carries obvious and well-known problems, negotiation with which has characterized a great deal of the German Idealist and post-Nietzschean tradition so important for Butler. Kirby reserves little discussion for this, but notes Butler's own careful gestures in attempting to distance herself from some of these difficulties; her way of following Nietzsche, for instance, by drawing attention to what constructionist claims *do* (their performativity) and how they reinforce nostalgia for lost origins. It is just this nostalgia, however, that, on Kirby's reading, proves inescapable for Butler; it permeates her work, and centrally appears in her frequent references to Freud's narrative of the formation of sexual identity as involving, for women, the repudiation of an 'originary' homosexual desire (desire for the mother).

Here, in Kirby's view, the psychoanalytical model stressing the prohibition of desire (the repression and incorporation of loss) becomes problematically

conjoined with a Foucauldian emphasis on the discursive production of the body to create a mish-mash of theoretical tensions. In effect, Kirby holds that Butler is unsuccessful in maintaining her distance from melancholia; she is charged with having an 'investment in original loss' (106) that causes her to fall back into all the old dualities organized around the opposition of mind to body, and culture to nature. Butler works to maintain a relationship to psychoanalytic theories of subject-constitution alongside Foucauldian ones. But on psychoanalytic accounts, power is repressive, not productive; and so, Kirby holds, Foucault's insights into the discursive operation of power (on which Butler's originality and importance as a theorist rest) are necessarily lost sight of. Hence, Kirby writes, in a very characteristic sentence: 'Butler consistently represents power, *first and foremost*, in terms of prohibition, injunction and repression. But … must power be possessed of an intention, a goal or desire at all, let alone one that is inherently normative and negative? Butler's own argument, at least in certain places would certainly contest this, and yet she consistently attributes power with design—"the injunction to reconsolidate naturalized identities"'(46).

It is not possible in the space available here to develop the full terms of my disagreement with this reading. However, as a starting point, I would suggest there is something overly forceful about Kirby's construction of 'what comes first' in Butler's argument, what its alleged 'foundationalism' amounts to. Indeed, I would ask whether this is not in fact at many crucial points being projected onto the text. Kirby refuses to allow the disruptive force of a play of tensions in Butler's text (through which, as I read it, Butler is always seeking to negotiate, evoke and elucidate the paradoxical capacity of power to issue 'injunctions' *without* being the work of a subject, and thereby giving a Foucauldian *reading* of Freud). Kirby seeks to pin Butler down to her '*first and foremost'* commitments and thence, to a 'nostalgic' emancipatory politics premised on recovering something *hidden*, something underlying power's deformations. Such a reading simply misses the importance of Butler's highly Nietzschean interest in the effects of what can be made to 'seem real' or 'compelling' as part of an order of appearance that *conjures* underlying realities in ways that make it seem as if it is necessary to *presuppose* them (in general it is problematic that Nietzsche's influence on Butler is almost entirely overlooked by Kirby, and especially his *rhetorical* analyses of the critical principle he advances that there is 'no "doer" behind the deed'—see *Twilight of the Idols*, 'Four Great Errors', as well as *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1: 13).

In a crucial chapter in which Kirby analyses the *Psychic Life of Power* (112-123), she overlooks how centrally Butler is concerned with articulating a space between Freud and Foucault that will depend upon developing sensitivities to the rhetorical strategies and structure of their texts, rather than simply taking literally their claims about power. Throughout *Psychic Life*, Butler is concerned

to foreground the problematic terms on which accounts of conscience in Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Foucault and Althusser elaborate the paradoxes of reflexivity, the 'turning back on oneself' that is here conceived as a vital aspect of the constitution of subjectivity through power. This centrally involves a meditative critical reading of the gestures and tone of selected key texts. It seems particularly extraordinary in the context of this project to charge that Butler has a 'foundational commitment to a juridical notion of power' (122). But if Kirby's reading is able to make it seem as if throughout her work Butler's orientation is rather crudely psychoanalytic and ultimately preoccupied with the aim of discerning an originary homosexuality beneath distorting socio-cultural overlays, this depends upon thoroughly down-playing the way in which Butler's work constantly *stages* the force of the temptation to fall back into culturally normative assumptions, just as it stages and seeks thereby to foreground the subtle theoretical lures and temptations of constructivist accounts of identity. In *Gender Trouble*, for example, it is clear that everything most original and 'Butleresque' about this work strives to expose sexual orientation as a conjured 'ground' of identity rather than falling back into agreeing that it is a real—even if absent and lost—foundation of being. In other words, what Butler offers is a critical-rhetorical analysis of the force and persistence of foundationalist thinking rather than a simple reiteration of its gestures.

Accordingly, it is necessary to be sensitive to the ways in which Butler *reads* the theorists she engages. She does not, as I think Kirby assumes, simply seek to blend their positive theoretical positions (which would *inevitably* produce a mish-mash of ideas). It is consequential, for instance, that Butler's writing is often framed by series of question-marks, by 'perhaps' and 'maybe', specifying the conjectural nature of her engagements. Kirby gives us no detailed reading on this level to support the claim that Butler remains wedded to the positions she ostensibly also opposes. This is telling in several ways, and not least because Butler's thought typically unfolds in whole paragraphs that, in Hegelian vein, pursue a twisting, turning path constructing a force field of meaning irreducible to its single parts. Such writing demands a more thoughtful approach to the problem of reading style and strategy as opposed to determining the strict content of claims. It is especially important within this that Butler is often working at once with and against narratives—for instance those Freud describes in his account of sexual development. These she treats not as canonical in the sense of providing us with foundational knowledge but rather, as she describes it in her interview with Kirby, as quasi-allegorical (146-7)[1] . To treat an account as allegorical, Butler suggests in the interview, is at once to suspend what might seem obvious about the temporal sequence within which a meaning unfolds and to highlight the normative elements of that narrative over the descriptive

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[1] See also Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 65, cited by Kirby 57, but with no comment on the term 'allegorical'.

function. It is ironic, then, that so many of the charges Kirby pins on Butler turn on the simplified reading she makes of Butler's frequent recurrence in her work to the significance of melancholia in the Freudian account of heterosexual identity formation. The reading Kirby gives of Butler's version of that—one in which a primary homosexuality is repressed through the imposition of a compulsory heterosexuality in a straightforward narrative sequence of development—are quite explicitly rejected by Butler in her interview (146-7) as indeed elsewhere in her work. Sadly in that interview Kirby's ensuing question to her subject in no way engages what might seem to be an important and revealing point of dispute between them.

This leaves us with a very thin account of the political potentials that Butler is interested in discerning at the sites of failure of normative power, because Kirby seems to assume that at such points Butler thinks a more authentic reality appears. What is largely passed over or misread here are the strategies Butler uses to identify and counter the *specific* articulations of contemporary power that act in and through the constitution of abject bodies, or as Butler also puts it 'ungrievable' lives —bodies and lives that trace the unequal materialization of meaning. To put a point very briefly here, Butler does not, as I think Kirby assumes, focus on the critical salience of what cannot be represented—the unknown 'thing in itself'—as a simple reminder of contingency; but, rather, is interested in elucidating the rhetorical constitution of the 'de-materialized' or 'spectral' being or event; that which leaves its *trace* in the material world and, to this extent, evidences the failure of repression. Very often, what Butler is interested in eliciting from her rhetorical analysis of language is how threats of violence bound up with this spectral life of power are conjured, negotiated and distributed; and with how temporal narratives, such as those that involve the positing of 'foundations' and of what is 'first and foremost', constitute normative spaces. Intervention into such fields of meaning thus requires a nuanced understanding of the orders of force—physical, normative and symbolic—in which they are implicated. But this is a very different way of figuring the operation of discursive and normative power than that offered by the romantic imagination of ubiquitous cultural impositions deforming a more originary nature. Butler thus gives an account of the 'trouble' in gender (and at other critical sites of discursive force-fields) that does not turn on simply revealing 'contingency' or the failure of hegemonic norms in abstract ways; but rather, demands a persistent effort aimed at 'undoing' the violent potentials of normative life, something that Butler makes central to the meaning of a 'non-violent' ethics.[2] Indeed, the Foucauldian account of power as a form of relationality, and hence of the ethical potentials of modes of interpellation and address, has recently been extended in Butler's work; and this in directions that re-inflect her reliance on

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[2] For a fuller discussion, see Jenkins, 'Toward a Nonviolent Ethics'.

psychoanalytic theory (in *Giving an Account*, for instance, Jean Laplanche comes into proximity with Levinas). Kirby's version of Butler's thought would, however, make little sense of this development. And perhaps that is why there is no discussion of these topics offered here.

In conclusion, I think it may be worth saying that the editors have done Kirby's book no special favours. Much in it suggests a hurried project; for instance it is organized around already published work and is less than up-to-date. The book does include a very comprehensive and helpful bibliography of Butler's writings. However, in a work such as this, one might also have expected a fuller bibliographical coverage of the large existing critical literature which is only very scantily described. I also found myself frequently confused by ambiguously worded sentences and a range of typographical errors. I hope, nonetheless, I have understood enough of the book to find myself in serious but productive disagreement with it.

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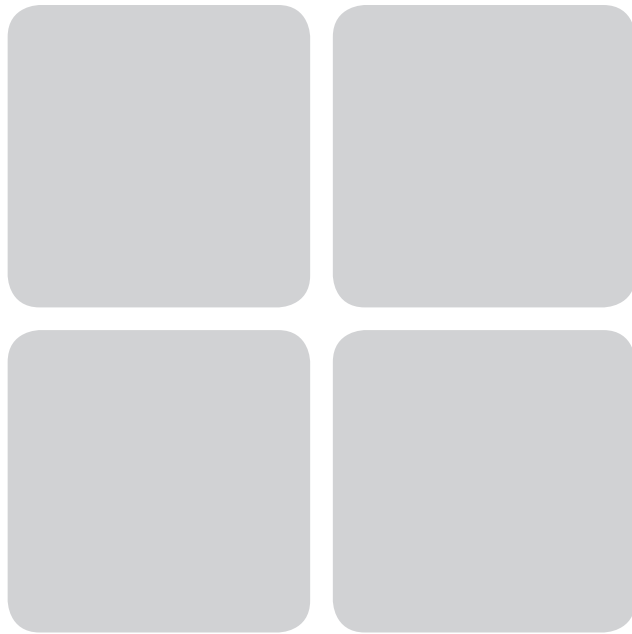
THE ECOLOGICAL HUMANITIES

Introduction

Deborah Rose

The mind-matter binary, itself a variant on the culture-nature binary, is increasingly understood to be an obstacle to meeting the challenges of the coming catastrophes triggered by global warming and related anthropogenic events. To step outside the binary is to enter a convivial world where a multiplicity of sentient beings interact. Jessica K. Weir invites us into dialogue with the Aboriginal people whose home country is within the Murray River catchment, and to consider the ecocide that is taking place in their country as they witness the death of their life-giving companion, the River Murray. Jinki Trevillian invites us to consider that an engagement with place must forever remain incomplete if it rules out the presence of beings who live outside of rationalist modernity. She tells stories that take us into dialogue with some of the Aboriginal people, and the crocodiles, history, and ghosts of Cape York. Both articles impress upon us the importance of connectivity as a way of being in the world that focuses on place and time in the mode of relationships, flows, and potentials.

Along with these two articles, we are delighted to publish Mary Graham's classic essay 'Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal World Views'. Ms Graham is herself an Indigenous philosopher; her essay speaks elegantly to the challenges of becoming human within multi-species communities. In explaining two fundamental and foundational laws of life on Earth, she invites readers into a worldview of conviviality and connectivity.

Connectivity

Jessica K. Weir[1]

The need for profound change in our intellectual traditions is a part of the current re-examination of water management in the Murray-Darling Basin. The language of water management has changed to recognise the 'environmental needs' of the river, described as environmental water allocations or environmental flows. But this language continues to position the rivers as just a consumer of water, instead of the source of river water, and is in denial of our dependency on fresh water ecologies for survival.

Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood has argued that we need to investigate how such conceptual frameworks have made invisible the crucial support that natural systems provide humanity (Plumwood). Vast extractions of water from the Murray River have only been achieved by water managers mobilising knowledge frameworks that narrowly perceive river water as a resource for human consumption. As part of the antidote, Plumwood encourages us to engage with knowledge frameworks that bring into the foreground our relationships with nature.

We need to push the current re-examination of water management further, and move the focus to our life-sustaining connections with rivers; this is what I am calling 'connectivity thinking'. Connectivity is a way of being in the world as described to me by traditional owners whose country is the southern part of the Murray-Darling Basin, although they refer to it as connectedness or being connected. Connectivity is also a term I have drawn from ecologists and environmental philosophers. It is intended as a conceptual framework that focuses on relationships, flows and connections.

Imagining an expanded ecology

In the academic literature, the concept of connectivity has its roots in the analytical work conducted by ecologists and focuses on relationships among all species and with their environment. Ecologists use connectivity to describe how animals and plants live in interconnected relationships, across multiple spatial and temporal scales. For the ecologists, connectivity is 'the ease with which

organisms, matter or energy traverse the ecotones between adjacent ecological units' (Ward et al, 129). The importance of the connection is emphasised rather than the substance of that which is connected. In landscape connectivity, spatial structures and habitat patches provide different species with different opportunities for movement. In floodplain river ecosystems, advancing and receding waters create a shifting mosaic of habitat patches. This 'hydrological connectivity' maintains a diversity of connected ecological zones over both time and space. This analytical work has critically countered narrow perceptions of water as an abstract resource for consumption, to focus on fresh water as a critical life force. However, this ecological connectivity is often represented as external, where humans are the only animals not included, much like 'wilderness' thinking. An expanded connectivity is needed to (re)position humans *within* a web of life sustaining relationships.

The conceptual habit of analytically removing humans from their environment is part of the nature/culture dualism—a way of thinking that hyper-separates people from the environment (see Strathern; Plumwood; Rose, *Reports*). In dualism two fundamental concepts exist in opposition to each other, forming binary pairs—for example, mind/body, male/female, rational/emotional, nature/culture, human/nonhuman, economy/ecology, tradition/change, subject/object. The problem with making distinctions such as nature/culture is not that distinctions are identified, but how the distinctions are organised into binaries, and then the binaries are hyper-extended into oppositional relationships. If humans are rational, then nature is mindless; if humans are active, then nature is passive (Rose, 'Connecting Nature and Culture'). The distinction is transformed into an insurmountable tension that cannot be resolved (Latour 58).

Plumwood has described this dualistic thinking as 'hyper-separation' (Plumwood 49) and philosopher Bruno Latour describes it as 'hyper-incommensurability' (Latour 61). The result is a highly flawed perspective that both increases human power to transform nature and limits human capacity to respond to ecological devastation. As Plumwood has argued:

> [When] we hyper-separate ourselves from nature and reduce it conceptually in order to justify domination, we not only lose the ability to empathise and to see the non-human sphere in ethical terms, but also get a false sense of our own character and location that includes an illusory sense of autonomy. (Plumwood 9)

This is also a structuring of hierarchical power relations, with humans assumed to be dominating nature. By characterising nature as lacking human attributes—that is, mind, rationality, spirit, or the outward expression of these in language and communication—we can more easily deny our dependency on this presumed subordinate or alien other (Plumwood 10, 41). In an expanded

connectivity, we can move beyond considerations of a separate, subordinate nature to consider living ethical engagements within a dynamic nature.

Crucially, ecologists theorise connectivity as a subjective experience for all species. Connectivity for one species will be different from another, as each species has a unique experience of living in and perceiving their ecological niche or *umwelt* (Allen Allen and Hoekstra 169; Hoffmeyer 54; Manning et al. 622-623).[2] Thus, there are as many understandings of the world as there are species. The notion of *umwelt* reinforces the perspective that there can be no single understanding of nature. This scientific work on subjectivity and agency brings sentience to these newly acknowledged actors, where sentience is the capacity to have feelings and/or to feel sensations.

Anthrozoologists have made persuasive arguments that animals have feelings and thus are sentient. These arguments are extended by ethnographer David Anderson, who has theorised the myriad solidarities and obligations between people and places and animals as a 'sentient ecology' (Anderson 116). This ecology brings us into communicative relationships with the ecological world and extends the concept of personhood to all ecological life, not just animals. Anthropologist Timothy Ingold discusses how these communicative relationships evoke feelings of care, love and attachment toward the environment as toward another person (Ingold, *Perception* 69, 76). This establishes an emotional and ethical context for our ecological relationships.

Understanding a sentient ecology is critical to reorienting our engagement with fresh water ecologies. According to anthropologist Gregory Bateson, our survival depends on our understanding that we are coupled to our conceptualisation of our ecological relationships, and our ways of thinking and acting on them (Harries-Jones 8). Humans lose water constantly—we are not water tight—and we need to replenish ourselves or die. This is a 'hydro-contract', an inescapable biospheric life support that we need to work with to maintain 'hydro-harmonies' (Warshall 42-43). However, the conceptualisation of water as an abstract unconnected resource denies these connections between water and human survival.

To deepen our understanding of an expanded connectivity, we should explore conceptual frameworks that are not entrenched in a history of dualism. The traditional owners of the Murray River have inherited Indigenous knowledge frameworks that have only recently been transforming through engagements with dualistic knowledge traditions. The traditional owners speak of a connectivity that encompasses, and goes beyond, food web dependencies to include stories, histories, feelings, shared responsibilities and respect.

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[2] *Umwelt* was originally articulated by Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll.

Water connections: complexity and the ecology of life

In their interviews with me, the Elders reminisced about times past when their lives were connected to the rivers through the essential act of drinking the water and eating the plants and animals that also lived by the river. Ngarrindjeri Elder Agnes Rigney grew up in what she called a 'semi-traditional' lifestyle next to the Murray River at the Swan Reach mission. Here, the Murray supplemented mission food with fresh water, fish, yabbies and waterbirds. This subsistence economy was mixed with the welfare economy provided by the missions, as well as the traditional owners' involvement with the market economy. As Agnes talked about her experiences, she expanded connectivity to include a merging of the river with her own body. Agnes continues to live near the Murray today:

> I don't think I can be far away from the river because the river I believe it is in my blood. It is a part of me. I was born on the river. I have lived on the river all of my life and I am an Elder now. I wouldn't be happy too far away from the river … We are all part of the food chain, and that's why I say I feel a part of it—well I am … The river gave us life, the river fed us.

Agnes is expressing connectivity as an embodied experience. This relationship includes her daily lived experience next to the river, full of sensory encounters such as sight, smell and touch, as part of her intimacy with the river. Such comments can also be heard from settler Australians who have long and intense relationships with a specific environment. They talk about the way the place gets into their bones or into their blood (Rose, 'Fresh Water').

Agnes places herself *within* a relationship of connectivity with the Murray River. This is a perspective that moves beyond an understanding of the world as separated into spheres of human and natural, to an understanding of a world in which our being and the environment are bound together. This is not taking a view of the world, but is 'taking a view *in* it' (Ingold, *Perception* 42; emphasis in original). This relationship with the environment is a dynamic experience of life and survival. It is not a simple addition of our being to the environment, rather it is an acknowledgement that 'we' affect the environment just as the environment affects 'us'. We do not simply live together, side by side, as a matter of coincidence, but our form and being are interconnected. Our being and the environment are active, alive, and respond to each other through multiple fields of relations, and these interactions influence the form of the relations (Ingold, *Perception* 19).

This experience is not exclusively human; it is an experience shared by all life forms. Different species have developed close symbiotic relationships in which they are co-dependent for survival. For example, lichen is not a single organism, but a combination of fungus and algae growing together in symbiosis—a mutually

beneficial connectivity. Other connectivities may be beneficial in primarily one direction, as when insects lay their eggs on eucalyptus leaves. Such seemingly small connectivities can be expressed on much larger scales, as their lives encounter innumerable links with other lives, including the exchange of energy in food webs. Environment and living things make exchanges through webs, clusters, knots, loops, ripples, waves and curves. Gaps in these interactions permit the creation of distinctions and differences (Harries-Jones 14). For example, the furthest reach of the floodwaters creates a distinct ecological boundary. Acknowledgement of these holistic and diversely interconnected relationships is an approach to ecology which Ingold has summarised as 'the-whole-organism-in-its-environment'. Ingold calls this 'the ecology of life' (Ingold, *Perception* 18-19).

Connectivity not only ensures that life benefits ramify, but can also become a conduit for damage. This has happened with the 'white death' that is salination, which occurs through the rupturing of certain connectivities while other connectivities remain. Salinisation is a process wherein agricultural land becomes so salty that it cannot support life. The salt occurs naturally in the landscape and it is dissolved and brought to the surface when the water table rises. The water table is rising on farm lands often due to excess irrigation water being added to existing groundwater and/or the clearing of deep-rooted vegetation which previously regulated the water table by drawing down the ground water. When the water that rises from below evaporates from the surface, the salt that is carried with it is left behind.

Agnes brings us into this world of salt and water by talking about the river flowing through her veins. Agnes's world view reveals to us what Bateson meant when he said that an organism that destroys its own environment is committing suicide (cited in Rose, 'Connecting with Ecological Futures' 3). Agnes places her life within her relationship with the river.

Sentient beings, sentient ecology

When Agnes explains that, 'the river gave us life, the river fed us,' she is describing that relationship as a caring and giving one. It is an appreciation of the river as sentient, bringing agency into focus. Indeed, many of the traditional owners attribute the capacity of the river to sustain life to a life force that is the river itself. This capacity for feelings can be extended to all things and, in the broadest sense, country is appreciated as being alive and having the capacity to act. Rose describes Aboriginal understandings of country as a 'nourishing terrain', which both gives and receives life, and is lived in and lived with (Rose, *Nourishing* 7).

Being responsive to extra-human agency is something Yorta Yorta man Lee Joachim talked to me about at length. Lee Joachim's country is centred around

the Barmah-Millewa Forest, which is a large river red gum forest on the Murray. Lee understands his relationship with the Murray River as a relationship held between sentient beings:

> The importance of the river is to ensure that it is seen as a continuing living being. That it is respected like any other person should be respected. It has got the ability to cleanse itself. It has got the ability to nurture itself. And it has got the ability to ensure that the life that it touches upon also has an ongoing process …

Lee brings the river into the foreground. This perspective moves away from a world where humans transcend nature. By extending the recognition of power and agency to all living things, Lee grasps a dynamic world in which humans and other beings participate.

The importance of extra-human actors in the world was something I was introduced to by the traditional owners. Early on in my research in Murray River country, Yorta Yorta woman Monica Morgan critiqued the United Nations' approach to protecting a human right to water, by saying that such approaches went 'too much the other way'.[3] Monica explained that the UN approach misses the point about respecting country by recognising the importance of water bodies only in terms of human needs (UN). Monica critiqued this analysis that denies the agency of living beings other than humans. To extend her idea: if nature is just matter, then nature is neither hostile nor friendly but rather indifferent to our interests; it is thus possible to exploit nature without regard for its agency or interests (Matthews 14, 32). Such perspectives enable people to transform nature without considering the ethical consequences.

Lee Joachim linked his argument that the river has its own agency to his other argument that this agency demands its own respect. By appreciating the river as alive, as a sentient being, as a person, Lee wishes to inspire in other people feelings of empathy, care and respect towards the river. Lee has argued that this understanding is critical to transforming the way the river is appreciated in Australia. As Lee says:

> They must see that there is a connection to everyone's life through the rivers and through the environment attached, that is an ongoing care and recycling of themselves and a continuation of life within that. But they just don't seem to be open to the fact that the river can speak for itself, and the country can speak for itself.

This is a communicative relationship: the river and country not only have agency, but they communicate this agency to us. Lee brings all people, Indigenous and

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[3] Comment in a meeting of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations at Swan Hill in September 2003.

settlers, into this relationship. Our survival depends on our ability to respond to this communication. Such comments describe the inland rivers not as passive instruments or neutral surfaces for human activity, separate to human existence, but alive with the agency of many other beings, innately connected to our own human life.

I asked Lee what he meant by the river and the country being able to speak, and Lee explained that the crickets and the frogs did not make as much noise anymore, 'those noises that tell you that they are alive and well', and the animals and the fish had disappeared. Their absence is now communicated by silence. Lee described a sentient ecology where listening is part of being connected. These communicative relationships are critical to informing our responses to ecological devastation. As outlined by Rose:

> … to listen is to be drawn into a world of ethical encounter: to hear is to witness; to witness is to become entangled. (Rose, *Reports* 213)

For Lee, country is speaking loudly to him about connectivity and loss, and Lee is ethically compelled to respond.

When nature/culture meets ancestral creators

One of the most significant aspects of connectivity is that it offers an alternative to knowledge frameworks that hyper-separate nature and culture. Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern has described how the nature/culture distinction is part of the modern habit of engaging with concepts as oppositional relationships (Strathern 186, 179, 190). Strathern points to the lack of consistency in the images of nature and culture in western constructs, as evidence of how the distinction is struggled with in western thought:

> There is no such thing as nature or culture. Each is a highly relativised concept whose ultimate signification must be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics. No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in western thought; there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts. (Strathern 177)

Seeing the world as connectivity addresses the separation of culture and nature because connectivity places people (and their culture) *within* relationships with the environment (or natural world). Our minds are not suspended from a reality that we then must try to understand externally, but our whole selves experience and apprehend the world as a part of living in it. This is not to say that we cannot objectify the world. As Sillitoe has argued:

> All humans are capable of abstract thought and have notions of causality, that they can suspend prior beliefs and will revise these if evidence suggests that they are wrong, even if counter-intuitive … All cultures accumulate and interpret knowledge rationally according to their value

codes, although until we appreciate these latter it may seem otherwise. (Sillitoe 3)

What connectivity thinking additionally acknowledges are our sensory experiences: connectivity breaks from abstract thought to acknowledge the palpable links that exist between mind and body. The intellect is inseparable from our feelings and experiences of living in a sensory world (Harries-Jones 5).

Some anthropologists argue that the world is socially constructed by humans, and as humans we can only know our perceptions; and that we can never know the world as it is. As anthropologist Roland Littlewood has argued:

> We determine only in part what we call our environment, but we determine our experience of it, our human world. 'It' determines us, we 'are' it, but this 'it' is only an 'it' through human procedures, shared with our fellows. (Littlewood 122-23)

Not all anthropologists agree with Littlewood on the nature/culture divide, and this is actively debated in anthropology (Ingold, *Key Debates*). Ingold has argued that the world is not 'free-floating' and separate from us, but is 'coming into being through the activities of *all* living agencies.' (Ingold, 'Human worlds' 139, 141; emphasis in original).

When Matt Rigney looks out in Ngarrindjeri country at the Murray River in South Australia he can see where his ancestral creator Ngurunderi chased the giant pondee down the small stream that was the Murray River back then. Matt's country is down at the Coorong, where the Murray River pours into the Southern Ocean. Matt connects the Ngurunderi creation story to the ecological life of country, his position within this life, and to his rights and responsibilities to look after country:

> [This story] tells us how our country was created and what was the purpose of the creation—it was to sustain life, to give life, and to create an environment that sustains us in that way. Like the bird life, the animal life, the plant life. So I have an inherent right, a cultural right, and a responsibility to make sure that those things are maintained and continue to survive and live for the duration of time. It makes me who I am. Ngarrindjeri man. It is my responsibility as a Ngarrindjeri man to make sure these things happen, and that our culture and spirituality is not disconnected from the river and the waterways.

For Matt this is not just knowledge held in his mind, but knowledge held in country and experienced through the senses, as part of long held sensitivities and orientations of living within an environment (Ingold, *Perception* 25).

Alternatively, this Ngarrindjeri creation story could be described as a cultural perspective, which comes from a culturally constructed discursive world, and is projected onto the natural world. That is, the creation story has its origins in discussions held in Ngarrindjeri cultural life and is a Ngarrindjeri-constructed interpretation of the natural world. In this view, the connections that Matt observes are romantic or religious, but they are not 'real' or scientific.

In order to place this cultural perspective onto the real or objective world, Matt would have to be able to step outside of the environment within which he lives. For an observer then to observe that this creation story is a cultural perspective and not part of the environment, the observer would have to be able to take an additional step outside of both Matt and the environment (Ingold, *Perception* 14). Matt, however, is not taking any such steps and instead is embedding himself in relationships with the natural world and identifying the causal and connective relationships:

> We are of these waters, and the River Murray and the Darling and all of its estuaries are the veins within our body. You want to plug one up, we become sick. And we are getting sick as human beings because our waterways are not clean. So it is not sustaining us as it was meant to by the creators of our world.

Dreaming stories are the epitome of a sentient ecology. They describe country not as inert resources, but as a lively narrative with immanent ancestral beings. This is a way of understanding country as part of cosmic energy, within which the traditional owners have certain responsibilities. This connectivity brings to the forefront the life-sustaining co-dependences held between all living agencies, and the traditional owners look to country to tell them about their own lives. A healthy country tells the traditional owners that the ancestors are happy and that they are managing their rights and responsibilities. But if country is sick, then so are the traditional owners—sick with the diminishment of life.

Death and dying are parts of the recycling of life by the rivers, but this is a death that breaks down the life-supporting connectivities. In this death there is no connection to the re-generation of life.

Everywhen, everywhere

In South Australia, Ngarrindjeri Elder Richard Hunter told me that he could see beyond the loss that is the damaged landscape to the beauty of the Murray River:

> Well I have got a good dream of what they done back there. But I know I'll never get to show it to you today out there. But I still sit there with the beauty that I know is there, and I'm never going to lose that … That is the beauty of the land. We can see the beauty, what the rivers were before, and the tall trees. They talk about the damage that has happened

> now, but we were still taught how to have the skill to see the beauty
> that is there. Even though it is not there physically, but it is, because
> you know what it was like before. Before Europeans come here.

Richard, it seems, is saying that connectivity of life is still there, in contradiction
to the view that we are heading towards the death of connectivity. This life has
an enduring presence that is more than physicality; it is a presence that cannot
be killed or destroyed. Richard can go there in his mind's eye, seeing through
today's salty silted Murray River to the beauty of a living enduring river. The
power of the river is a force of life beyond physical manifestations. Perhaps this
is a reference to the Dreaming, although Richard did not say so to me. The
Dreaming is the time of creation, but this sacred time is not situated in the past,
it is ongoing, it is 'everywhen' (Stanner 228). Or, perhaps this is a vision of what
can be—neither the past nor future—a potential.

This is the vision of one man about the resilience of the river country. Such
visions sustain people in the work of restoring the river country. Agnes, Lee,
Monica, Matt and Richard together with many other traditional owners have
lobbied the government for the return of water to country.[4] In their work to
respond to ecological crisis the traditional owners reveal their resilience,
interconnected with their belief in the resilience of the river country. The
traditional owners are open to the importance of these relationships, and the
power of the river as the key agency in river restoration.

It is easy to characterise, and then dismiss, the connected perspectives of
Indigenous peoples as a chaotic or undifferentiated view of a world that cannot
be read or quantified. Instead, as Debbie Rose has argued, Indigenous peoples'
philosophies are not simply the view that 'everything is connected to everything',
but rather, that everything is connected to something, and there are patterns of
connections: healthy, torn, patchy and intricate (Rose, 'Connecting Nature and
Culture'). It is possible to follow connections and to make distinctions; to
differentiate so as to analyse, understand, respect and objectify the world.
Moreover, once we can understand that our lives are held in the hands of other
beings, and vice versa, we have the groundwork for building ethical obligations
between species, and between all sorts of life forms (Rose, 'Indigenous ecologies'
175).

We need to broaden the conceptual frameworks that dominate today's water
management regimes, so that we can respond to these important relationships
when they are threatened. Rather than elevating consumptive water use as the
pre-eminent or sole relationship with water, we can reposition this water use
within the connectivity of life. Crucially, water is not just another participant
in connectivity, but is a key connecting life force because all living things need

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[4] See further www.mldrin.org.au, and Weir and Ross 2007; Morgan et al. 2006.

water to survive. The life supported by water is not through weak or distant networks, but strong life-giving connections. By denying this, current water management has led to the destruction of many life-giving relationships sustained by fresh water ecologies. 'Connectivity thinking' makes visible this dependency and is fundamental to building an ethic of and commitment to river restoration.

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Talking with Ghosts: A Meeting with Old Man Crocodile on Cape York Peninsula

Jinki Trevillian

Introduction

Here I address two subjects that speak to an experience of place that is richly dialogical: our relationships with ghosts and a meeting with a character called Old Man Crocodile, who—like ghosts and spirits—inhabits place, but who is both 'here' and 'not-here', 'seen' and 'not-seen'. Most of the material focuses on the Edward and Holroyd River regions of the Pormpuraaw community at the south-west base of the Cape York Peninsula, though my discussion draws on research throughout the Peninsula region.

My project to collect oral histories from elderly residents of Cape York Peninsula was a deliberate attempt to engage with the history of people through their own stories, and to supplement and challenge the written record. This process of engagement, through field research on the Cape in 1999 and 2000, involved a deep inter-personal exchange and the people themselves, the land itself, and the stories they have told me have not only informed me but affected me profoundly.

Ghosts and supernatural beings have been excluded from modern western history as causes because they cannot be 'known'. Forces that are 'unknown' nonetheless act upon us and within us. This work is engaged with what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) describes as translating life-worlds, what Richard Rorty (1989) and Homi Bhabha (1998) call bringing newness into the world; I focus on images, chase metaphors, respond to language and look for ways to relate the stories I was told to other stories so that I might understand them better.

The Place of Ghosts; Familiar Hauntings

I have spent a lot of time talking with ghosts, engaged in conversations with my own ancestors and with those of other people. Communicating between worlds is both a personal and a cross-cultural project. Interrogations of the past are a way of connecting the Europe of my forbears with the country of my birth.

In 1999, the first year of my academic research into oral histories of Cape York Peninsula and the year my father died, I had a dream about the 'work I had to do':

I had to write letters to the people who couldn't be there. I had to write really heartfelt, soulful letters and put them in a lacquered box and that was 'sending them'. I realised somehow that these were dead people—people who physically could not be with us—and somehow I was responsible for making them stay with their presence in the sky. That was my job. (Private journal entry, 16 September 1999)

Along with other supernatural phenomena, ghosts have been excluded as agents and actors from western academic history and modern life. This exclusion has banished them from our daily life and the places where we live. Dipesh Chakrabarty gives a memorable example of incommensurable differences in relation to non-western histories and other cultures (see *Provincializing Europe*). But what is history if not a way of dealing with our ghosts and ancestors?

In 'Jesus and the Dingo', Deborah Bird Rose describes an Aboriginal spiritual connection with place and with the past as communication between the dead and the living, across time and space (372). I wrote of my own experience of conducting oral history interviews with Aboriginal people:

The people I talk with, my old people, talk about their 'old people'.

It is not only an unfolding of generations …

The passing of time is embodied in them. The dialogue between past and present is alive in them. The conversations I have with them go further back to the conversations they had with their old people and reach my own present.

I am talking to the dead.

I am used to conversations with the dead.

I read.

I come from a literary culture, which builds its dialogue in paper and ink.

There are other ways of talking with the dead; through memory, through spirits, through objects, through places. The land is populated by ghosts.

(Trevillian)

We are, as Chakrabarty describes it, straining against language to translate life-worlds into history (77-83). I have found the pursuit of metaphors most rewarding; these metaphors are not 'stand-ins' for meaning but are embodiments of meaning. As such, they are especially suited to the multiple and dense meanings that inhere in place.

In *An Intimate History of Humanity,* Theodore Zeldin writes: 'Our imaginations are inhabited by ghosts'; he introduces his 'investigations of the familiar ghosts which reassure, the lazy ones which make us obstinate and, above all, the

frightening ones which discourage' (vii). James Hillman writes of old age as a time which puts people in closer contact with ghosts; we start talking to them, receiving 'an instruction from the "dead" (that is, from what has gone before, become invisible, yet continues to vivify our lives with its influences)' (70). Some of my ghosts are far more literal than Zeldin's or Hillman's, they are not only ghosts of the mind, but I agree on the importance of talking to and becoming familiar with that which haunts us.

Ghosts haunt places, they also act in stories and they tell us things.

> My father/uncle found all these skulls, big pile in the roots of the tree.
>
> He get my grandfather, grandfather sing out—'I know you there, I'll bury you'. They not there then, but he say 'I know you here now, we won't forget you'.
>
> (Margaret Cottis, interview, 6 September 2000)

The skulls of Maggie's ancestors told her grandfather where they had been put, without proper burial. They tell her of a massacre. They talk through their appearance of things that were only heard of in stories.

Ghosts offer a point of contact not only between past and present, but between different views of the past and of place. The ghosts of colonisers haunt both their own heirs and the disinherited. One of the activities of European settlement of Australia has been to populate the land with new ghosts. The identification with the land through the ghosts of explorers and settlers is strong, the folk story of a Jolly Swagman's ghost more popular than the official national anthem.

Indigenous ghosts are far from silent, even if European preoccupation with them has often involved a denial of the living (Read). Australian literature that sympathetically talks of the ghosts of dead Aboriginal warriors softens the violent past which people lived and witnessed. Europeans have also looked on Aboriginal people as ghosts, relics of the past, already dead and dying. In melancholy images of the past Aboriginal people are shown as already faded memories (for example, Henry Kendall's 'The Last of His Tribe').

We are reluctant to believe that ghosts have power over us. Ghosts continue to inhabit our landscapes whether we credit them with an external, physical existence or not.[1] Despite our denial of their ability to intrude on our lives, they haunt us.

In his ethnography of Pormpuraaw, John Taylor explains that the presence of ghosts was emphasised in storytelling because they 'directly bore on everyday activities' (Taylor 237). One would encounter ghosts in daily life, whether the malevolent kind or one's own 'old People' who might be cantankerous as well

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[1] For an example of a discussion on the importance of the 'supernatural' as an element of historical experience, of both Europeans and Indigenous people, see Hanlon.

as knowledgeable and helpful. The ghosts of the old people might be asked for food from their land, or they might appear in dreams and teach a new dance (Taylor 239). Ghosts seem to come from another world but they are connected to place, they inhabit a location. Ghosts, like the old people, can be present and not present. Many Aboriginal people describe the experience of returning to the land from which their people were removed as a simultaneous awareness of both the absence and presence of their ancestors. Ghosts connect people to place and to the past.

It is commonly stated that many Aboriginal people identified European colonisers as ghosts. This perception of white people is often presented as a misconception rather than part of an important ongoing process of identification. Europeans came to intrude more frequently into the lives of Aboriginal people and became something they might encounter in daily life but not necessarily understand. The relationship between Europeans and the spirits of the dead was a complex one. Lauriston Sharp wrote of his time spent with Thyorre and Yir Yoront people between 1933 and 1935, that 'European foodstuffs had acquired such a value that the abodes of the spirits of the dead overflowed with tea, sugar, flour and beef as well as traditional foodstuffs' (330). Aboriginal clans are each responsible for particular plants and animals and also for made objects. In Pormpuraaw European goods, such as steel axes, belonged to the 'ghost-clan' meaning the white people (335). Like the ghosts of the old people, white people could be asked for food and they taught new ways of doing things; they were also capable of malevolent violence.

On the Cape one encounters many ghosts, and amongst the warriors and the adventurers are the officials. The ghost of Frank Jardine embodies all three. It is not just for those who believe he haunts Somerset but the way he haunts the imagination and inhabits stories of the Peninsula. The Jardine family founded the first cattle station at Somerset on the most northerly point of the Cape in 1863. Frank Jardine became magistrate and Police protector for the region in 1868 (after his father). The residence at Somerset was maintained by the family until after the Second World War, but Frank Jardine died and was buried at Somerset in 1919.[2]

While he was alive Jardine played the ghost; stories have him riding helter-skelter with a smoking beard through the Aboriginal camp. Like the explorer Kennedy and others it has often been said that he was buried standing up, indicating that these fierce colonial men will never rest. Jeannie George well remembered her time at Somerset in the 1960s when she and her husband were caretakers of the old homestead (since demolished). Jeannie awoke in the middle of the night to see the ghost of Jardine in her bed room. While she scared him away her husband

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[2] For varying accounts of the Jardine family history see Davis, Hall, Sharpe and Toohey.

was convinced that the ghost was going to tell him where to find hidden treasure (Jeannie George, interview, 2 August 2000).

Maggie Cottis agrees that Somerset is haunted but she is not afraid of Jardine. Her grandparents lived and worked at Somerset and the skulls there belong to her ancestors.

> I like to live at Somerset because I used to the place.
>
> Doesn't matter old Jardine torment me (laugh).
>
> [JT: You think you're big enough for him?]
>
> I big enough to chase him too, tell him to get!
>
> No, I don't frighten from ghost this time … I'm really brave now.
>
> I don't know why them things don't worry me,
>
> You just frighten for nothing, you know.
>
> When you fear you got fear for nothing.
>
> You got to [be] brave, you got to have faith in God to chuck all these things out.
>
> And if anything like that you just ignore them, because I think they got to be there too somehow.
>
> (Margaret Cottis, interview, 2 September 2000)

While Maggie talks of not being touched by the ghosts, she also recognises their need to exist somewhere. For Maggie, Jardine is a tormented soul in limbo.

> I don't think Jardine hurt you, you know, he might frighten you, because, you see his spirit not going anywhere. His spirit not going anywhere because his spirit it bin do bad thing, and he got no road to go to heaven.
>
> [JT: So he has to stay there?]
>
> He got to stay there and wait until the great Judgement Day.
>
> Poor thing—he could have been a good person here on this Cape.
>
> People, you know, people think he's good because he got everything organised and things like that; he got his base there at Somerset, boat slip and they build up boat and everything—even he survey that area.
>
> But he was a bad man, he killed a lot of people.
>
> (Margaret Cottis, interview, 2 September 2000)

Those who admire Jardine will say he had little choice but to kill the people who attacked him because of his intrusion on their land (and like many arguments on the invasion of Australia there are fierce differences over the numbers

involved). Whether seen from the perspective of coloniser or colonised, Jardine represented and enacted the European occupation of the country and continues to do so through his haunting of the remote northern outpost.

Why Officials are like Ghosts

Ghosts and officials are human but they are something else as well. Government officials also inhabit another world; they do not live the same life but their appearances and messages have important bearing on life as it is lived. Officials of the Cape inhabited the place and embodied state power while maintaining their source of authority elsewhere. These representatives of officialdom were responsible for an administration that was on the one hand removed, absent, impersonal and on the other deeply intrusive, ever-present and very personal.

The Department of Native Affairs was in control of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders through its official representatives and under the authority of an 1897 Protection Act. Missionaries and Police were the authorities responsible for Aboriginal people and they had control over everything from where they lived, what they wore, what they ate, what work they did, to who they could marry and whether they could keep their children.[3]

In the Queensland Government archives, I read past conversations between people living and dead. The systems of control and bureaucracy are obvious, though labyrinthine (see Kidd), but I found signs of individuality and humanity in these documents; the ghost in the machine. Largely absent from the daily life of the people over whom they had control, the Chief Protectors did have personal encounters: hand-written letters detail requests, demands and injustices—asking for money, to buy something, or to visit relatives—in attempts to broach an alienating system and an alien world through personal contact.

Against the general activities of removal and administration the exceptions stand out. One time when Chief Protector Bleakley visited a community on the Cape, a man approached him and asked for news of his wife who had been sent to Fantome Island. Bleakley was moved by the man's request to send word of his wife in a note. Because it was irregular, and in the nature of a personal correspondence, Bleakley asked for the letter to be destroyed but his own department kept a copy of it.[4] The Kafkaesque system of control is transformed into something like Vaclav Havel's façade of bureaucracy where it is the masks that people wear that ensures the smooth running of the machine (see Havel). The mask slips when people, like Bleakley, act in an effort to maintain their own humanity. The letters and personal approaches did have an effect, they provoked responses and disrupted the smooth running of the department.

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[3] Aboriginal people did not receive basic citizenship rights until after the 1967 referendum.
[4] J.W. Bleakley 30/11/33, Director of Native Affairs Correspondence, Queensland State Archives A/58918.

Richard Davis, in his paper 'Enchanting the state: Benjamin in Indigenous Australia', describes how sorcerers of the Torres Strait Islands use letters and personal correspondence to 'penetrate' the bureaucracy of the state. The interpersonal communication creates a direct relationship, the psychic and emotional reality of which involves penetration of the powerful government/official or representative body. This infiltration by sorcery is a subversive act, which challenges the power of the governing body.

Emotion was described by psychologists in the mid-twentieth century, who wanted to deny its power to cause, as the 'ghost in the machine' and the 'hypogriff, the demon and the entelechy' (Ryle and Dunlop, quoted in Hillman 36). Hillman summarises: 'The argument here has been: since emotions cannot be touched, pointed to, cut up, they are not real, but are immaterial and immaterial events are ghosts which cannot cause'. The denial of emotion is related by Hillman to a denial of psychic, or psychological reality ('where hippogriffs and demons are real'); 'since a denial of emotion is also a denial of that ghost in the machine which has for quite some time been called the psyche' (Hillman 37).

By relating supernatural ghosts to the ghosts of the mind I do not intend to reduce one to the other: demons are not simply emotions, nor emotions demons. I see this as a process of cultural translation through metaphor, much like Chakrabarty's example of the identification of Hindi and Moslem deities through characteristics and attributes (Chakrabarty 84-85). More than this though I do not assume the separation of mind and world prevalent in the west. I am inspired in part by a Buddhist teacher, Pema Chödrön, who talks of 'facing our demons' or sitting with that which frightens us—she also advocates the Tibetan Buddhist practices of visiting charnel houses and graveyards—but who does not distinguish between the demons that exist within us, which visit us in our dreams or the external terrors which confront us.

Jardine is more than a ghost and an enemy to Maggie, he is a part of Somerset. Her family's history and his are intertwined, for better or worse.

> You know Jardine go and shoot all the natives around,
>
> shooting down all the natives and he saw my grandmother.
>
> My grandmother was a little girl, he said;
>
> 'That'll do me, for my wife, you know, my wife's maid'.
>
> So he took her and they rear her up.
>
> (Margaret Cottis, interview, 2 September 2000)

Ghosts connect people to place and to the past. If we don't have a relationship with our ghosts then we can't ask them things; we can't interrogate them or demand favours. Establishing relationships with our ghosts brings us closer to

both the living and the dead. In the process some ghosts might become less demonic and more human, though not all will lose their terror.

In Cape York Peninsula, Frank Jardine, as both a malevolent and familiar haunting, maintains a connection to historical events and is a participant in other 'psychic' or spiritual realities. My most powerful encounter, though, was not with a ghost but with another character, both material and mythic, who inhabits Cape York Peninsula. My meeting with Old Man Crocodile was not a singular event but consisted of a growing awareness of his presence and significance through stories and experiences.

A Personal Connection

My research has never been clearly separated from the rest of my life. Because I see life itself in the nature of a spiritual journey the division of secular and sacred has always appeared to me as suspect. My 'new-age alternative' upbringing involved several related beliefs; that cause and effect relate to spiritual and not merely material events, that spiritual and psychic realities are of the utmost importance, that individual experiences are respected and different interpretations accepted (a kind of pluralistic spirituality).

<div align="center">*</div>

I am a child of Aquarius.[5] I was conceived on a boat in Trinity Inlet, Cairns. I have since heard that the inlet is known to Indigenous people as a big baby-spirit place. Certainly on this occasion a baby-spirit saw an opportunity, and my mother named me for an Aboriginal word meaning 'spirit' before I was even born.

My parents were neither married nor in a stable relationship. In fact my mother told me she went to see my father to have a fight with him. As one might expect from volatile relationships, the passion that drove my mother to anger got them in bed together, on the top bunk of a tugboat berth. My mother left thinking that was the end of the affair only to discover a couple of months later that she was pregnant. My father, a bohemian, Polish mariner and artist continued his life apart.

My mother went with friends down south to work on the Aquarius Festival at Nimbin. She was involved in the early stages of preparation and by the time the festival started she was very pregnant with me. I was nearly the first 'hippie' home-birth at Nimbin, but after 30 hours of labour they threw the I-ching, read 'lack of confidence / no blame' and trundled into town. I was born at Lismore Base Hospital on the 8th of June, 1973. The cold of a Lismore winter (mild by

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[5] The dawning of the Age of Aquarius was celebrated in Australia in the early 1970s, and in the US and UK, as a focus for the aspirations of disaffected or 'hippie' youth (see *Hair* the musical). By coincidence my father was born under the sign of Aquarius and his last boat was named for the water-bearer constellation.

many standards) was in my mother's opinion an obstacle to breast-feeding and general well-being so we promptly returned to North Queensland a couple of weeks later. We later moved back to Northern NSW, via Brisbane.

<div align="center">*</div>

The early seeds of my interest in the history of far North Queensland first took root with a journey to Cairns and Cooktown resultant from a new friendship, with an Aboriginal elder Peter Costello from Hopevale, and a reengagement with my estranged father. I have found myself piecing together my father's history even while I have been researching other histories. When I started my doctoral research into the history of Cape York, my father died. His was a sudden and accidental death by drowning.

The connections between my own life history and the history of Cape York have been numerous. One time when I was talking with my mother about crocodiles, she reminded me that when she first met my father in far North Queensland he had been crocodile hunting. They used to say, when he went off by himself in one of his moods, that 'that old man crocodile spirit' had got him.

Meetings with Old Man Crocodile

Crocodiles are a powerful presence on the Cape. They have a presence both seen and unseen. Undeniably impressive in their physical form, it is the awareness of their existence when not witnessed that is most pervasive. I first remember encountering crocodiles in their natural environment on the Bloomfield River when I was 12 and I visited my father there. They became more familiar to me later, in my travels through Cape York doing research. But then that old man crocodile followed me back down south; he started coming into my dreams as I was leaving the Cape in 2000, and he hasn't stopped since. I was told some of the most evocative crocodile stories at Pormpuraaw.

John Coleman gave me the story of his own father being taken by a crocodile. We were visiting John's traditional land when he told me this story.

> This river where we fish
>
> My wife and daughters fish here, I go over the other side there
>
> One story I want to tell you
>
> My father got taken by crocodile.
>
> (John Coleman, interview, 17 October 2000)

The family were away from home when John's father was attacked and wounded, they had been visiting people to the south.

> We went fishing,
>
> My dad, me and my brother.

> That crocodile come take him,
>
> Me and my brother drag my father away from the water,
>
> We drag him far as that corner of scrub [50m].
>
> That crocodile he follow that blood,
>
> Me and my brother trying to stop him …
>
> We poking him with sticks
>
> But he turn on us then because we hurt him too much
>
> He take my father, put him down in his mouth
>
> Then lock the front teeth like that
>
> He couldn't let go my father then
>
> My brother take that rod, got sharp end
>
> Poke him in the eye
>
> He can't let go my father.
>
> (John Coleman, interview, 17 October 2000)

The boys tried to stop the crocodile from going after their wounded father but he was too big for them. Even though the boys fought on, the crocodile would not release their father. The boys returned to camp upset and angry.

> We calling out for help all the time
>
> When we get back we mad with them, they not come and help us
>
> We take those old men, show them where it happen
>
> Tell my mother, father gone
>
> Bad because it not his place too.
>
> That place where my father used to fish
>
> I never go fish there.
>
> (John Coleman, interview, 17 October 2000)

It is significant that the tragedy occurred on someone else's country, as this would have implications for 'payback'. Although John's father was killed in other country, respect for the death means John does not fish at his father's customary fishing place.

Robert Holroyd told me of the fighting that started when his mother's first husband was attacked by a crocodile. 'You see when that crocodile come, someone must have sent him; Payback. Three tribes were involved in the fighting over that dead man' (Robert Holroyd, interview, 5 July 2000). As indicated by Robert Holroyd's story, the question of 'who sent the crocodile?' was/is of great

importance. The use of crocodiles as agents of shamans was/is a commonly recognised form of sorcery or *purri purri*. If a crocodile kills a human being it implicates other humans: as with all untimely deaths this meant 'payback' (Taylor 513).

In the myths collected by Ursula McConnel in the Holroyd River region in the 1920s and 1930s, the old man crocodile is 'the enemy of law and order'; breaking sexual taboos and sleeping with every woman (McConnel 99-100). The crocodile is the transgressor of human laws, but he has his own law. People who establish a relationship with the crocodile can ask him to act for them; the sorcery used to control the crocodile is described as making him a 'son' to the shaman (McConnel 10).

The old man crocodile plays a significant role in my discussion of the violence and warfare that occurred in the north-west and central Cape in the 1930s and 40s. The main sources of conflict between Aboriginal groups, which obviously involved the presence of white people, are identified by oral historians and documented sources as 'jealous business': land and women. The form of the conflict often involved *purri-purri* and payback in cycles of violence. This violence erupted frequently into the childhood lives of the people I interviewed.

Rowan Pootchemunka from Aurukun, after telling me how the old people used to eat crocodile, indicates that despite new laws against crocodile hunting, the crocodile still follows his old ways.

> Maybe you putting that law, not that crocodile!
>
> Crocodile he got no friend, to no-one
>
> … if he want to attack you he attack you any time.
>
> (Rowan Pootchemunka, interview, 21 August 2000).

Rather than a simple binary of animal/human law, I see the crocodile as having a predatory and primal energy that is shared by humans. The crocodile is outside of human relations, he is the alpha predator to which humans become prey. The crocodile embodies the reptilian motivations of aggression; lust and greed. When humans turn against other humans, they become predators. Thus both crocodiles and predatory humans display an aggression that, when it erupts into the human world, has the potential to tear the bonds of human law and relationships.

The phrase 'no friend' caught my attention in another account from Aurukun where it was used to describe the violence of the old people (Sutton 103), before the missionary 'quietened them down' (Sutton 85). It was not the absence of law but the pursuance of traditional/Aboriginal law and justice which resulted in violence. The European colonial response was to 'control' the situation and the people through repressive violent force; they were killing the 'beast',

exterminating the 'brutes', civilising the world, by proving themselves to be the 'stronger' animal.

Violence does not assume an absence of all law, but the presence of different and conflicting laws; your law, their law. Victoria Burbank in her introduction to *Fighting Women: Anger and Aggression in Aboriginal Australia* (1994), points to the pervasive perception in Western discourse that social control and repression are the only effective solutions to 'bestial' anger. She suggests that some forms of 'acting-out' anger, rather than weakening relationships, are socially and culturally affirming (Burbank 4, 94). Violent acts may in fact denote relationships of passion, loyalty, honour and moral right—as they often have in European history.

I have pursued the old man crocodile even as he pursued me. I have gone to his home and hunted in his rivers. Like ghosts, the animal spirits have got to live somewhere. We also might learn something from them and the world they inhabit.

I follow stories, like the models of translation Chakrabarty describes in the identification of Hindi gods with Muslim deities; using image, metaphor, alliteration rather than reason and argument (Chakrabarty 84-85). Metaphors may (as Victoria Burbank describes it), make the abstract concrete (Burbank 49), but as Richard Rorty argues they are not merely vehicles for meaning but acts more akin to a slap in the face or a kiss (Rorty 18). I'm not sure if it is foolish or brave, but I want to bring a new understanding of the world, and for me this means paying attention to a multiplicity of worlds and a poetics of language.

The crocodile is not an easy presence to live with, and yet I would not wish him gone. There is something beyond reason and sentiment to be understood by the crocodile: just as he is seen and not seen, he is known and unknown. Putting the beast in the cage fails to recognise that it lives by its own laws. The crocodile erupts into consciousness as suddenly as he launches into view. Like the ghosts, old man crocodile has something to teach us about the past, which is also present.

Reflections

Way back when my friendship with Peter and his family first began, when I was first told histories of the old people at Hopevale, I wrote of my deep attachment: 'It's like I've pegged my heart down and am slowly stretching away from the point to which it is pinned, stretching this bloody tissue like skin, pulled, twisted and dragged like a surrealist painting' (Private journal entry, 28 June 1996).

When describing to a friend my feeling of being positioned somewhat precariously on the edge of the discipline of history (some might say 'beyond the pale'), I jokingly referred to the 'cutting edge'. My friend smartly rejoined with 'sounds more like the bleeding edge'. I took these words to heart. Not only

does this image capture the ancient symbols of the mental acuity of the mind's sword cutting through the fleshy emotions of the heart, but it opens the question of which 'side' of the blade one identifies with. My empathic engagement with the personal histories I had collected demanded that I opened my heart rather than closing it. To understand the suffering of others I had to develop my capacity for compassion, I had to stretch my heart. It seems to me that if we are to approach real understanding and reconciliation with other human beings then we have to be willing not only to change our position through ideas but be prepared to inhabit different worlds and to be internally altered.

Violence and death, ghosts and crocodiles, are things which we all have—in one way or another—to deal with. It may be of some benefit if we see the forces that act within and without us as having a power and character which is sometimes, though not always, beyond our control, as well as challenging the limits of our understanding. Talking to ghosts is painful. Our fear of chaos, of uncontrolled energy, of death, reveals our ignorance of all these things. Pema Chödrön talks of leaning into that which hurts us and facing our demons as essential to the development of loving kindness for all beings. This to me is what it is to be human. The exclusion of spiritual (and emotional) concerns, as our motivation and inspiration, would appear to me to be weak-hearted.

Jinki Trevillian is an historian and writer who completed her PhD at The Australian National University in 2003. The research for her doctoral thesis, Talking With The Old People; Histories of Cape York Peninsula, 1930s-1950s, *took Jinki from the government archives of southern cities to far north Queensland. Through her research and working on community cultural events, Jinki has developed her passions for research and writing, education, intangible heritage and community.*

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Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews

Mary Graham[1]

Western: What's the meaning of life?

Aboriginal: What is it that wants to know?

'The white man's law is always changing, but Aboriginal Law never changes, and is valid for all people.'

<div align="right">Mr. Bill Neidjie, 'Kakadu Man'</div>

Basic Precepts of the Aboriginal World View

* The Land is the Law

* You are not alone in the world

Aboriginal people's culture is ancient, and certain observations have been made over many millennia about the nature of nature, spirit and being human. The most basic questions for any human group, despite advances in technology, have not changed much over time; they include:

- how do we live together (in a particular area, nation, or on earth), without killing each other off?
- how do we live without substantially damaging the environment?
- why do we live ? We need to find the answer to this question in a way that does not make people feel alienated, lonely or murderous.

A Brief Description of the Two Axioms

The Land is the Law

The land is a sacred entity, not property or real estate; it is the great mother of all humanity. The Dreaming is a combination of meaning (about life and all reality), and an action guide to living. The two most important kinds of relationship in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second being always contingent upon the

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[1] The overall perspectives of this paper are based on courses delivered by Mary Graham and Lilla Watson at University of Queensland during 1980s.

first. The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our human-ness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relation between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations. Therefore all meaning comes from land.

You are not alone in the world

Aboriginal people have a kinship system which extends into land; this system was and still is organised into clans. One's first loyalty is to one's own clan group. It does not matter how Western and urbanised Aboriginal people have become, this kinship system never changes. (It has been damaged by, for example, cultural genocide/Stolen Children/westernisation etc, but has not been altered substantially.) Every clan group has its own Dreaming or explanation of existence. We believe that a person finds their individuality within the group. To behave as if you are a discrete entity or a conscious isolate is to limit yourself to being an observer in an observed world.

Land

Aboriginal People's Relationship to Land

Every different clan group has stories about their beginnings. Stories are like our archives, detailing how Creator Beings from under the earth arose to shape the land and to create the landscape. There are myriad variations of the story, but the theme stays the same.

The whole surface of the earth was like a moonscape, no features, no flora and fauna, just bare open plain. But there were Creator Beings sleeping in a state of potentiality just under the surface. At a certain time they were disturbed, whereupon their potentiality transformed into actuality and they arose out of the ground. When they finally emerged, they were very big and tall. These beings were spirit ancestors of many of the varieties of flora and fauna, especially large animals, in Australia. When this emergence was completed, the spirit ancestors started to interact with one another, fighting, dancing, running about, making love, killing. All of this activity shaped the Australian landscape as we know it today.

Throughout this period humans remained asleep in various embryonic forms, in a state like a kind of proto-humanity. They were awakened by all the activity above; the Creator Beings helped these proto-humans to become fully human, teaching them the Laws of custodianship of land, the Laws of kinship, of marriage, of correct ceremonies—they gave them every kind of knowledge they needed to look after the land and to have a stable society.

When this work was finished, the Creator Beings went back into the land, where they all still remain in the same eternal sleep from which they awakened at the

beginning of time. The locations to which they returned have always been and are still today regarded as very important sacred sites.

Wherever the Creator Beings travelled, they left tracks or some kind of evidence of themselves. These traces determined the identity of the people. In other words, every Aboriginal person has a part of the essence of one of the original creative spirits who formed the Australian landscape. Therefore each person has a charter of custodianship empowering them and making them responsible for renewing that part of the flora and its fauna. The details of this metaphysics varied widely across the land with the physical environment, but the spiritual basis—the understanding that what separates humans from animals is the fact that each human bears a creative and spiritual identity which still resides in land itself—provided and still provides in many places the religious, social, political and economic force throughout Aboriginal Australia.

Land in Modern Australia: the Long-term View:

Aboriginal society is accustomed to looking to the long term, and thinking strategically. A society which has a custodial ethic has to do this. From this perspective, short-term tactics are of less consequence; it is important to keep the big picture in mind.

Many White Australians are concerned to be involved in the maturation process of Australian society, through support for Aboriginal people/Reconciliation; they are searching for a new identity—politically or sociologically. The best way of achieving these ends is to start establishing very close ties with land, not necessarily via ownership of property but via locally-based, inclusive, non-political, strategy-based frameworks, with a very long term aim of simply looking after land.

How can such long-term views and goals be developed and maintained? Certainly not by having theoretical blueprints. From an Aboriginal perspective, *the goal must not be seen as a high moral ideal or 'holy grail'*. The custodial ethic is achieved through repetitive action, such that gradually, over time, the ethic becomes the 'norm'. For Aboriginal people, the land is *the* great teacher; it not only teaches us how to relate to it, but to each other; it suggests a notion of caring for something outside ourselves, something that is in and of nature and that will exist for all time. Every Aboriginal person had a place at some intersection within the kinship network which extended over the whole of Australia, and every intersection within that grid was anchored, eternally, to some point on the landscape by the relationship to Creator Being ancestors.

Outlined below are some ideas regarding how Australians might (together) manage the development of a collective spiritual identity, *one which is based in land—especially in the sacredness of land*.

Strategies for Achieving a Collective Spiritual Identity[2]

(a) Accommodation within the education system of programs with activities through which this identity is grown in children, activities such as groups caring for particular chosen tracts of land, not only via gardening, but tending, having recreational and ceremonial activities there, creating stories about and artistic expressions of the relevant sites, protecting them from damage, and maintaining continuity with them throughout the formative years of childhood and on into adulthood.

(b) Teaching philosophy in schools—teaching children not so much what to think but how to think. This has never been more important than now with the growth of computer use in education and play, and the gradual 'removal' of children from the social landscape. Indigenous philosophies as well as general Western ideas should be taught, especially the notion of the 'reflective motive', which would help young people to be more contemplative.

The reflective motive is a group process of meditating upon our collective actions and experiential learning; it is not a matter of individuals reflecting in a random way but of the collectivity reflecting on why and how we as a group act and experience events. This process is encouraged, via acts of sharing and communal living, in as natural a way as possible (i.e., not solely as an intellectual exercise). The result is that the process becomes habitual and, at the same time, non-egocentric.

The reflective and questing Aboriginal mind is always aligned with what everyone in the group wants, and what everyone wants is to understand ourselves in order to have and maintain harmonious relationships. The activity of philosophical speculation should not be engaged in alone, nor in a competitive, adversarial debate, but with others in a sharing environment, so that reflective thought is always associated with the 'other'.

(c) Two mutually opposing drives—one towards social stability and certainty, the other towards creativity and (especially technological) development—seem to be fundamental to the Western cultural psyche. Technological development creates ever more material goods to be acquired so that creativity itself now seems to be inextricably tied to consumerism, which in turn leads to increased tension and social alienation within and between classes and groups in many Western societies. Maybe 'smart' campaigns could be started by appropriate community groups to warn society about the dangers to health overall of incessant acquisition of unnecessary goods—campaigns like those of the anti-smoking, -drinking and -speeding lobbies. These campaigns would have to be conducted in a very clever, humorous way, without preaching.

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[2] Some of these ideas are based on Graham et al, 1993.

(d) Identification of the metaphysical meaning of money (economics). Despite all the wonderful advances that science and economics have brought, it cannot be denied that a by-product has been a world devoid of value, meaning and spirit. Such a world is the inevitable outcome of any ontology which lacks a dimension of spirit or the sacred.

From an Aboriginal perspective, spirit or the sacred has been reified by Westerners as 'money': Western behaviour, as we have observed it over the last two hundred years, is consistent with that of a community for whom money is sacred. (In Aboriginal society, money has the same status as other useful resources, like food, clothing, transport and housing. These resources are there for the use and benefit of the family group firstly, and after that for the community. Money is therefore subject to the same sort of treatment as other resources—it is to be shared, not for idealistic or virtuous reasons, but for practical reasons and to prompt the reflective motive.)

Given the spiritual significance of money, there is almost an invisible contract for consumers to engage in what economists call a 'disutility', the pain necessary to earn the pleasures of money and leisure; the acceptance of the necessity of this disutility can do and has done serious damage to people's souls.

(e) Initiating a modern Rites of Passage program appropriate for modern, urban young people. This would include the following: physical challenges, artistic expression, self-defence, learning about sexuality, sports, cultural activities, the establishment and ritualisation of sacred relationship with land, community caring and celebration.

A View of the West from an Aboriginal Perspective

There never was and there never will be a paradise—neither an Indigenous one, a religious or moral one, a worker's, futuristic, technological or even a physical one. This is important to understand, because the hierarchical structure of many societies gives the impression that one is always on the way to some *destination*, to a better position, life or world. Although this is an illusion, Western people were (and still are) habituated to the notion of 'travelling', metaphorically, toward some great unknown where they hope that what might be waiting for them is, if not Heaven, then maybe, Happiness, Love, Security, a Theory Explaining Everything.

Throughout the whole historical period, from the birth of the state to the transformation of people into citizens of nations and members of ever-changing class systems, social relations became ever more disconnected, alienated and strained. This development was softened to some extent, and at the same time camouflaged, by economic materialism, which ensured that people sought spiritual and psychological security through an identity based on ownership. Throughout their history, the behaviour of Westerners has been consistent with

that of a people who believe that they are quite alone in existence—that the individual is, metaphysically speaking, totally alone. This is also why the notion of spirit and the sacred gradually disappear from their intellectual discourse (though not from their writing and poetry).

If a society makes the sacred simply a matter of personal choice or private concern for individuals, then the next logical step is for these metaphysical isolates to extend themselves physically (which is in reality an unacknowledged search for meaning), and ownership is physical extension by accretion.

But what is the sacred, this domain of spirit that has been lost to Western society? What does it consist of? Where does it reside? From an Aboriginal perspective, it resides in the relationship between the human spirit and the natural life force. When there is a breach between the two, or rather, when the link between the two is weakened, then a human being becomes a totally individuated self, a discrete entity whirling in space, completely free. Its freedom is a fearful freedom however, because a sense of deepest spiritual loneliness and alienation envelopes the individual. The result is then that whatever form the environment or landscape takes, it becomes and remains a hostile place. The discrete individual then has to arm itself not just literally against other discrete individuals, but against its environment—which is why land is always something to be conquered and owned. Indeed the individual has to arm itself against loneliness and against nature itself—though not against ideas. It arms itself with materialism, ownership, possessiveness (not just vulgar materialism).

This is why economics generally has meant survival in Western society, not only in the practical sense, but in the moral, psychological and spiritual senses too. Enter economic rationalism, with its 'law of the jungle' approach to the market dictatorship of societies, which has compounded the already existing global sociopolitical crises. These crises, and the inadequacy of economism as a defence against meaninglessness, has ushered in a new search/struggle in the Western world for the true definition of identity or meaning—for the definition of *human* identity, that is, not political/nationalist identity. This raises again all those questions which many people thought had been answered: Why are we here? Why am I doing this job? Where am I going? What does this global crisis mean? What can I do about anything?

These questions and many more are currently being asked by many Australians of themselves and of their own society. I firmly believe that the developments of the last decade with regard to Aboriginal land rights/Native Title have highlighted the ambivalent relationship Australians have with land in this country, and their uncomfortable relationship with Aboriginal people. Many Australians, however, have seen this period as a chance to understand themselves and their country and the kind of society they want in the future for their children.

Part of the problem for Aboriginal people in modern Australia is working out ways in which we can continue carrying out custodial responsibilities to land and, at the same time, try to obtain control over the economic development of our communities without falling prey to the seductions of individualism. At the same time we are trying to deal with issues of Native Title, Stolen Generations, Apologies and Reconciliation, or what's left of it.

Society

The Western question, 'what's the meaning of life?' is answered by the Aboriginal question, 'what is it that wants to know?'

The Aboriginal cultural praxis maintains that one does not need work, money or possessions to justify one's existence; in fact there is no notion of having to justify one's existence at all.

There is an interesting story that illustrates this view. In NSW, during the 1800s, a Scottish farmer named Ogilvie found, after carrying out a survey comparing White Australian and Aboriginal work styles, that Aboriginals were quite different to White people: they hunted, they looked after their ancestral lands, they carried out their traditions, they observed their family obligations, and they attended to the sacred. They were, as he put it, gentlemen, and gentlemen do not work.

Over vast periods of time, Aboriginal people invested most of their creative energy in trying to understand what makes it possible for people to act purposively, or to put it another way, *what is it exactly that makes us human?* What Aboriginal people have done is to map the great repertoire of human feeling to such an extent that its continuities with the psychic life of the wider world become apparent; Aboriginal Law is grounded in the perception of a psychic level of natural behaviour, the behaviour of natural entities. Aboriginal people maintain that humans are not alone. They are connected and made by way of relationships with a wide range of beings, and it is thus of prime importance to maintain and strengthen these relationships.

Custodial Ethic toward Land

Although Indigenous people everywhere are westernised to different degrees, Aboriginal people's identity is essentially always embedded in land and defined by their relationships to it and to other people. The sacred web of connections includes not only kinship relations and relations to the land, but also relations to nature and all living things. When a controlling ethic, lacking such a collective spiritual basis prevails or is chosen, then the sacred becomes constrained by religious and political imperatives, and the voyage to societal and spiritual hierarchies begins. The logical end point of such a system is a narrow survivalist mentality and perspective on life and on existence itself. This is because such

systems incorporate strong reward/punishment systems; they provide clear direction for people's fears, dreams, ambitions and ultimately status. In fact this mentality becomes both the reason and the impelling force for constant action, change and even belief without reflection. People become habituated to such systems if rewards are, not necessarily large or rich, but at least constant and established. Collective self knowledge is then seen as not very important; it could even be viewed as a chore or burden best avoided.

Old Aboriginal people have often stated that White Australians 'have no Dreaming', that is, they have no collective spiritual identity, together with no true understanding of having a correct or 'proper' relationship with land/reality. Many White Australians recognise this themselves and are working, planning and creating, quite often with Aboriginal people, to change this situation.

Reflective Motive

The non-ego based nature of Aboriginal society was grounded in an understanding of the human psyche. The Aboriginal understanding posits that the tendency to possess is more deeply embedded in the human psyche than is the tendency to share. In other words, possessiveness is a more 'primitive' mode of behaviour than sharing or altruism; possessiveness precedes altruism and it therefore takes a higher order of abilities to maintain 'sharing' behaviour than it takes to demonstrate possessive behaviour. Possessive behaviour is asserted or exhibited spontaneously and unreflectively. Sharing behaviour has to be inculcated in the first place and then 'maintained'. It involves such abstract concepts as 'reciprocity', 'strategy' and above all *'community'*.

When the Aboriginal child learns to share, he or she is given food and then invited to give it back; social obligations are pointed out and possessiveness gently discouraged, as in the following child's lullaby:

> Give to me, Baby,
> Give to her, Baby,
> Give to him, Baby,
> Give to one, Baby,
> Give to all, Baby.

It must be said, however, that a collective responsibility to land is vital if people are even to attempt to transcend ego and possessiveness; the point is that land always comes before ego and possessions. These things tend to present a barrier to upholding obligations to look after land.

The effect of this transcendence of ego is to inculcate a sense of communal, rather than individuated, identity, and, most importantly, *to encourage reflective engagement in all activities*. Such a reflective effort, which in Western culture issued in science, resulted, in Aboriginal culture, in the thorough examination

of what it means to be human. Therefore for Westerners, possessiveness—which emerges from within the smouldering ember of the *unreflective motive* found within the cult of individualism—is what makes modern Western economic activity possible and money valuable.

Logic

Aboriginal logic is very different to Western logic. Western logic rests on the division between the self and the not-self, the external and the internal. This means that it is the viewpoint of the human individual that is taken to be the window between the external world of fact and the internal world of beliefs. Within the terms of such a division, and the 'viewpoint' which it produces, things can only ever appear as either true or false if they are to appear to 'be' at all; this is the law of the Excluded Middle.

Aboriginal logic maintains that there is no division between the observing mind and anything else: there is no 'external world' to inhabit. There are distinctions between the physical and the spiritual, but these aspects of existence continually interpenetrate each other. All perspectives are thus valid and reasonable: there is no one way or meaning of life. There is never a barrier between the mind and the Creative; the whole repertoire of what is possible continually presents or is expressed as an infinite range of Dreamings. What is possible is the *transformative dynamic of growth*.

If one true way is posited, sooner or later individuals or groups are inclined to ideologise it; rigid thinking then follows (or vice versa), and the formation of groups of 'true believers', chosen people, sects, religions, parties etc cannot be far behind.

Historically, different groups/individuals have assumed that there is only one absolute answer to the question of existence, usually their own. If this assumption is accepted, then logically there must be thousands, if not millions, of potential absolute answers to this age-old question. Aboriginal people however approached this dilemma differently: the only constant in the lives of human beings was, according to them, land/nature. Ideas are myriad and ever changing. This is why the custodial ethic, based on and expressed through Aboriginal Law, is so essential not only to Aboriginal society but to any society that intends to continue for millennia and wants to regard itself as mature.

Aboriginal law is valid for all people only in the sense that all people are placed on land wherever they happen to be, so that the custodial ethic, which is primarily an obligatory system, may be acted on by anyone who is interested in looking after or caring for land. It most certainly is not itself a 'true' way—there are no ideas surrounding it as to the right method, correct rules etc; there are no small, powerful groups that are the 'only exponents'; there is no hard, soft, liberal, or orthodox approach to this ethic.

The custodial ethic/Aboriginal Law thus cannot be idealogised: it is a locus of identity for human beings, not a focus of identity: we can achieve the fullest expression of our human identity in a location in land. This identity emerges out of a place in the landscape with meaning intact. Ideology, in contrast, provides a sharp focus for ideas and a definition of the human individual, where this in turn places the individual, as human, against land, as mere backdrop. Meaning is then moulded to fit this framework (rather than emerging intact from a place in the landscape).

Land and Aboriginal Law

Natural and Positive Law

Mr Neidjie's statement at the beginning of this paper is an observation which reveals one difference between positive and natural kinds of law. A system of natural law is one which is based on the way the real world is perceived to behave. For instance, the laws of physics describe how objects in the real world interact, so that physics can be seen to be a system of natural, physical law which never changes. If the laws of physical motion did change, we could expect to see the universe begin to fall apart before our eyes.

But just as it is possible to describe some of the ways in which the world seems to behave at a physical level, it may also be possible to describe some of the ways in which the world behaves at a non-physical, or 'spiritual', level. Aboriginal Law is grounded in a perception of this psychic level of natural behaviour. On that view, Aboriginal Law 'never changes and is valid for all people', because it implicitly describes the wider emotional, psychological and perhaps cognitive states of the world to which all human beings are subject, which means that Aboriginal Law is as natural (and as scientific) a system of law as physics. On this basis alone, Aboriginal Law is a very important system to understand.

Aboriginal Law refers to a complex relationship between humanity and land which extends to cover every aspect of life; to that extent it is what theorists call a 'complex system', in that it explains both the observer and the observed. In that sense the Law is both a science and a religion, in Western terms. It is a religion in that it explains both the origins and meaning of the cosmos (including the observer), and it is a science in that it does so rationally, and with empirical support. To this extent, Aboriginal Law differs from modern Western ideas of 'positive law'.

Western philosophy of law can be divided into 'natural' and 'positive' categories. Historically, the Western definition of natural law is 'that which nature, that is God himself, taught all living things' (Bracton). By the 19th century Darwin had driven a wedge between humanity and the last vestiges of useful religion, and this seems to have triggered a wealth of theories about practically everything

that moves. One of those theories (by John Austin) was the first positive theory of law.

According to Austin, law is not God-given but human-made, and it is effectively made by a legal sovereign, whoever or whatever that may turn out to be (Austin). The major differences between Austin's positive law and the old, natural theories of law is that positive law is capable of being legislated, amended and repealed by human agency, while natural law is not. In fact, legal positivists believe that there is no 'natural law' at all.

The Land is the Law

On those Western theoretical criteria, Aboriginal Law is natural law, in that if it was legislated at all, this was done not by humans, but by the spiritual ancestors of the Dreaming, so that Aboriginal Law is incapable of being added to, amended or repealed by any human agency. What this means is that Aboriginal Law is like a cognitive science or applied psychology—it doesn't deal with the actions of humans or the events which befall them, but *with what makes it possible for people to act purposively, and experience 'events'*. That is to say, the perfectability of human beings was never a concern for Aboriginal Law; rather this Law was/is always an attempt to understand what it is that makes us human. It was/is concerned with why and how it is that we act with purpose: where does this will come from? Why and how do we experience the events that occur in our lives? Why is the experience of one person different from that of another? Over millennia this understanding of the human experience in Australia has given rise to a form of law which Justice Blackburn, in a Northern Territory Land Rights case, described as

> a subtle and elaborate system highly adapted to the country in which the people lead their lives, which provided a stable order of society and was remarkably free from the vagaries of personal whim or influence. If ever a system could be called 'a government of laws, and not of men', it is that shown in the evidence before me. (Blackburn)

In this sense Aboriginal Law could be said to be both an action guide to living and a guide to understanding reality itself, especially in relation to land as the basis for all meaning.

At this level of conception, Aboriginal Law is comparable to Buddhism, which is also a psychology of life. There is however a major difference: Buddhism seeks an *escape* from normal, waking consciousness, on the grounds that no matter how richly endowed, waking existence is an endless wheel of birth, suffering and death. By contrast, Aboriginal Law, which is located in land, *celebrates* life in all its ups and downs, using the 'downs' to point to moral formulae.

Exemplars

People's level of knowledge was (and still is) judged by objectively observable canons of behavioural excellence. When a person's level of knowledge can be objectively gauged by his or her perceived behaviour, then this is sufficient for any community to determine whose opinion should be listened to and whose should not, and to what extent. In such a system, those whose opinions are backed by consistently wise public behaviour will end up being listened to, and this will determine much of what that community considers to be 'correct' or 'lawful'.

This could not happen if those who were knowledgeable started to tell others in advance what they should or should not do. To do that would be to embark on a voyage of monarchy, with all that that entails. This is why knowledgeable Aboriginal people let others find things out for themselves. It is also why Aboriginal child-rearing methods allow such freedom to children, why Aboriginal people everywhere insist upon personal autonomy, why they never enslaved each other or instituted class or caste systems, why the community never needed an institutionalised judiciary. And it is what 'custodianship' means. *To allow this natural wisdom to assert itself within the limits of accumulated community experience and knowledge is what custodianship consists in*. Custodianship is thus a philosophy, not just a green solution to environmental degradation. In a sense, Aboriginal Law is 'grown' not 'made'—and this is also what makes it a system of *natural* law. The outcome of this approach to knowledge is that absolutely everyone in the traditional Aboriginal community was acknowledged to have something unique to offer, because of his or her spiritual identity and personal experience of life. Essential to this system is the fact that Aboriginal personal identity extends directly into land itself; this helps to explain why knowledgeable members of the Aboriginal community continue to assert that, *'the land is the Law'*.

What Westerners seem to have been unable to do so far is to recognise Aboriginal Law as a system of natural moral law which establishes an extended, spiritual identity between land and person. One reason for this is that jurists lack reliable evidence to show that there can be a system of natural law which is grounded at a non-physical level, yet which is as valid, and as universally binding, as physical theory. Although considerable efforts have been made to resolve this problem (the Australian Law Reform Commission Report No 31), an answer cannot come from within the framework of legal positivism itself (see Appendix).

What is needed therefore is an on-going consensus involving White Australian and Aboriginal jurists, custodians, philosophers, theologians and others sitting down together in order to discover how each of these logically opposing systems can nonetheless accommodate each other.

Conclusion

The world is immediate, not external, and we are all its custodians, as well as its observers. A culture which holds the immediate world at bay by objectifying it as the Observed System, thereby leaving it to the blinkered forces of the market place, will also be blind to the effects of doing so until those effects become quantifiable as, for example, acid rain, holes in the ozone layer and global economic recession. All the social forces which have led to this planetary crisis could have been anticipated in principle, but this would have required a richer metaphysics.

Aboriginal people are not against money, economics or private ownership, but they ask that there be a recognition that *ownership is a social act and therefore a spiritual act*. As such, it produces effects in the immediate world which show up sooner or later in the 'external' world. What will eventually emerge in a natural, habituated way is the embryonic form of an intact, collective spiritual identity for all Australians, which will inform and support our daily lives, our aspirations and our creative genius.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix

Extract from Australian Law Reform Commission—Report No 31.

Report No 31 stated that Aboriginal customary laws did not reduce to a set of rules (p.202), that there existed no systematic account of customary law (p.99), and that Australian courts lacked organs with which to know and to deal with Aboriginal customary law (p. 631). The Commission issued a number of discussion papers during the course of its investigations and an extract from Discussion Paper No 17, issued in 1980, shows the direction already being taken by legal thinkers, concerning Aboriginal law:

> For traditional Aboriginals, the law had no separate identity but was woven into the whole social fabric. There was no legal system in the European sense of separately identifiable institutions … Aboriginal law does not have a separate system of legal rules. The question is not so much 'what is Aboriginal customary law?' as 'how do Aboriginals maintain order in their community?' or 'by what means are quarrels dealt with in Aboriginal communities?'

> (Summary of A.L.R.C. discussion paper No 17:2.)

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