

Editors' Introduction

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Welcome to our May 2010 issue of *AHR*.

In this issue we are proud to present a special section, *Remembering Eve Sedgwick*, dedicated to a theorist who, especially since the publication of her influential book *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), has become, as one contributor aptly dubs her, the Queen of Queer Studies.

With the exception of Annamarie Jagose's tribute, these essays were originally presented at a seminar, 'Remembering Eve Sedgwick: The beginnings, present and future of queer theory' at the University of Sydney on 28 August 2009. The seminar was organised by the Gender and Modernity Group in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies and sponsored by the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry. Specifically designed to introduce early career researchers to Sedgwick's formative role in the development of queer studies, the seminar brought together leading specialists in the field with postgraduate students from all over Australia, whose attendance was supported by the ARC's Cultural Research Network. In addition to the contributors themselves, we would like to thank Dr Melissa Gregg, and her colleagues Professor Meaghan Morris, Associate Professor Catherine Driscoll, Dr Natalya Lusty, Dr Fiona Allon and Dr Anna-Hickey-Moody, who initiated and organised this stimulating and important occasion. The Gender and Modernity Group plays a vital role in fostering an intellectual environment where these debates can flourish, especially vital in a time when, as Melissa Gregg put it, 'young researchers are somewhat historically distant from the material and political conditions informing these theoretical interventions of previous decades'.

The essays here not only pay tribute to Sedgwick, they also take up her legacy in that they both reread and rewrite, deploy and depart from her work in new and important ways. For hers was a body of work that, in its inimitable gestures of 'style' as much as in its provocative propositional formulations, acted as a catalyst for the burgeoning and proliferation of Queer Theory and Gender and Sexuality Studies. To revisit Sedgwick's writing, as these essays do, is to articulate it anew and to respond to a structuring logic in her work. This logic can be seen in the last sentence of *Epistemology of the Closet*. Here Sedgwick dramatically looks back at the book's 'propulsive' ambition to occupy the 'cynosural space' (251) of the profaned mother that is the disavowed, fantasmatic centre of a homoerotically-charged regime of knowledge. It is this primal object, one who is repeatedly evoked as desired but never desiring in the

Oedipal drama, against whom the male author must defend his unacknowledged libidinal desires. Because she 'must know' (how could she not know?) this figure 'mustn't know' (how could she know?). Presiding, 'dumbly, or pseudo-dumbly', over male gender identity, this sign and signifier of homoerotic desire remains as *the* structuring secret of Western knowledge. Sedgwick wonders, aloud, in our hearing, whether the ambition to 'reach in and try to occupy' such a position would be defensible, 'a more innocuous process ... than the dangerous energising male-directed reading relations I have been discussing so far' (*so far*—a wonderful phrase to use in the second-last sentence of a book). 'Willy-nilly, however', Sedgwick ends by confessing,

I have of course been enacting that occupation as well, all along; the wrestling into motion *that* way of this propulsive textual world cannot perhaps in the present tense be my subject, as it has been my project.
(251)

In admitting, 'willy-nilly', that she has been 'enacting' an occupation that has not been formally articulated 'so far', Sedgwick retrospectively casts her work as the performance of a proposition that must remain unstated until this final, awkward, side-steppingly confessional moment. Sedgwick's admission that this has been the secret 'project' but not the 'subject' of her writing all along, propels, finally, a cryptic narrative that only the interested or, rather, and as all of the essays collected here attest, the loving reader will de-crypt.

The transformative belatedness of this gesture is repeated, then, by Annamarie Jagose's invocation of this sentence in a footnote to her own text, just as its repetition here both pre-empts and supplements Jagose's gesture. Eve Sedgwick's legacy, then, can be thought of, in Anna Gibbs's phrase, as a queer temporality, a kind of perverted *sorites*—('a series of propositions, in which the predicate of each is the subject of the next' (*OED*)—in which each succeeding subject strays unpredictably from the 'straight' line of the preceding predicate, tracing a tangle of paths whose perverse waywardness is, paradoxically, 'true' to the momentum of the Sedgwickian trajectory.

Jagose's wonderfully titled essay, 'Thinkiest' (a Sedgwick coinage), reminds us of the transformative potentials that Sedgwick's alchemical writing bequeaths to her readers. Jagose shows us how her work is an uncommon 'scene of transference' which both engages and enacts 'what it means to fall in love with a certain order of reading'. To fall in love, in Jagose's essay, is not to be suspended in a solipsistic fantasy about the other. Sedgwick's 'love', for Jagose, is transference itself: it is the replacement of an 'I see' (I understand/I classify) with an 'I know' (shared knowledge).

Elizabeth McMahon, similarly, argues for the centrality of the 'relational' in Sedgwick's oeuvre when she elucidates Sedgwick's 'trickster-like' performance of her own argument. In 'The Proximate Pleasure of Eve Sedgwick: a Legacy of Intimate Reading', McMahon shows that Sedgwick's is a 'relational analytic, affect, aesthetic and politics' that invites the reader to 'enter into the processes of contingent thought and analysis in a temporality of the present'. The power of this project is in the way it writes against naturalised assumptions, canonical authority and historical prescription to open up new spaces of inquiry. Most importantly, McMahon's essay shows us how Sedgwick's work can help us to 'burn out the fear response' through an acceptance of a kind of 'unashamed shame' that neither annihilates or concludes, but, rather, teaches us 'how to live a reading, writing life'.

Elizabeth Stephens begins her essay, 'Queer Memoir: Public Confession and/ or Sexual Practice in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love*', with a cheeky analysis of Derrida's refusal to discuss his *own* sex life while confessing his fascination with the sex lives of other philosophers. Stephens contrasts this refusal with the reckless vulnerability of Sedgwick's own memoir, 'which reads like the result of having said "yes" to the question [that] Derrida both posed and refused to answer'. For Stephens this gesture commits Sedgwick to an impossible project, that of writing one's sexuality into a text that is in any case already saturated with sexual and affective attachments; characteristically, Sedgwick ends her memoir by progressively delivering it over to the words of her therapist, a stunning instantiation of the transference that is Sedgwick's readerly and writerly legacy.

Anna Gibbs's 'At the Time of Writing: Sedgwick's Queer Temporalities' involves a characteristically perverse Sedgwickian gesture: Gibbs sets out to use the queering potentialities of Sedgwick's analysis of the affects of shame and disgust, not to disclose or discover the unacknowledged and disavowed investments of a supposedly straight or canonical text, but as a means of reading a self-acknowledged and avowedly queer text, Jane DeLynn's sado-masochistic lesbian short story 'Butch'. In seeking to trace 'the trajectories by which shame increases and becomes mobile and by which it seeks concealment', Gibbs's essay shows how the affective intensity not just of disgust and abjection, but also of masochistic humour, continues to inform the complex, punishing and pleasurable relation between shame and queer sexuality.

Enacting the metaphorical perversity of Sedgwickian logic is the final essay in this section, Melissa Hardie's 'The Closet Remediated: Inside Lindsay Lohan', which examines the 'closet epistemologies that have been remediated into the present tense by the emergence of new social media'. Hardie draws on two Sedgwickian tropes, periphrasis and preterition, to analyse how Hollywood actress and pop-icon Lindsay Lohan operates in contemporary social media as a figure for a

closet epistemology. Hardie argues that—two decades after Sedgwick and with the advent of widespread social media that have affected public knowledge of private lives—significations of the closet have shifted. The closet, as she sees it, is purposefully, even obsessively, cited and rehearsed. In illuminating this argument through the case of Lindsay Lohan, Hardie emphasises the role of gossip, ‘real-time’ access, and ‘happenstance’ community in social media’s production of celebrity lives, but also its reliance on a cinematic model that, itself, rehearses the spectacle of sexuality as a folding back of the present into the past, the cloaking of an absent truth.

The Ecological Humanities section begins with Terry Gifford’s elegant meditation on Judith Wright’s complex and ambivalent wrestling with the ecological politics of what he terms the post-pastoral. This is followed by three essays concerned with the human and more-than-human ecology of rivers and river systems. Emily O’Gorman examines the political consequences of floods on the Murray River, and changing public perceptions of the costs of human intervention into complex river systems. Kerry Little’s paper takes us to the northeast of India and contemporary local resistance to the building of hydroelectric dams. Finally, an extract from Jessica Weir’s recent book *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners* discusses the concept of ‘cultural flows’ and the need to broaden the concept of riverine ecologies to embrace historical and cultural questions.

Our book reviews section begins with Rachael Weaver’s lucid reviews of two ‘criminal case studies’ that provide windows onto the social and historical contexts in which they were written: Nathan Garvey’s *The Celebrated George Barrington* and Kirsten McKenzie’s *A Swindler’s Progress*. This is followed by Christine McPaul’s review of N.J.B. Plomley’s new edition of the papers of George Augustus Robinson, *Friendly Mission*, together with a companion volume of Indigenous and non-Indigenous responses to Robinson’s writings, *Reading Robinson*, edited by Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls. Finally, Jennifer Hamilton’s timely reading of *Queering the Non/Human* (edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird) adds another dimension to the humanities-focused section on Eve Sedgwick. This is a collection that engages a range of disciplines—including postcolonialism, environmental and science studies—where queer theory has had far less prominence.

As always, we welcome submissions to AHR from writers and scholars across the humanities. Please see <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/about.html#submission>> for our submission guidelines.